Phoenicia, Philistia, and Judah as Seen Through the Assyrian Lens: A Commentary on Sennacherib’s Account of His Third Military Campaign with Special Emphasis on the Various Political Entities He Encounters in the Levant

Thesis

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in the Graduate School of the Ohio State University

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2015

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Abstract

In this thesis I examine the writings and material artifacts relevant to Sennacherib’s third military campaign into the regions of Phoenicia, Philistia, and Judah. The intent of this examination is to investigate the political, ethnic, and religious entities of the ancient Levant from an exclusively Assyrian perspective that is contemporary with the events recorded. The focus is to analyze the Assyrian account on its own terms, in particular what we discover about various regions Sennacherib confronts on his third campaign. I do employ sources from later periods and from foreign perspectives, but only for the purpose of presenting a historical background to Sennacherib’s invasion of each of the abovementioned regions. Part of this examination will include an analysis of the structural breakdown of Sennacherib’s annals (the most complete account of the third campaign) to see what the structure of the narrative can tell us about the places the Assyrians describe. Also, I provide an analysis of each phase of the campaign from these primary writings and material remains. The goal is to produce a selective commentary on the annals and inscriptions of this Assyrian monarch with a special emphasis on the political situation of the peoples he encounters.
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Introduction

In the 1830’s a handful of British and French explorers began excavating ancient cities all across what is now northern Iraq. In the course of these excavations, one such explorer, Sir Austen Henry Layard, unearthed the palatial ruins of the Assyrian King Sennacherib in Nineveh. As a result of this discovery, ancient Near Eastern studies rapidly advanced. Prior to Layard’s undertaking, scholarly knowledge of ancient Near Eastern empires was limited to a select witness in the Hebrew Bible and a handful of Greek historians. These sources, while valuable, were all written well after these empires had declined. Consequently, we had no direct sources informing us what these ancient peoples thought of themselves or how they saw other contemporary political/ethnic entities who would in time come to define them. Layard expresses the problem succinctly when he writes, “A deep mystery hangs over Assyria, Babylonia, and Chaldea. With these names are linked great nations and great cities dimly shadowed forth in history.”\(^1\) In his day there were no windows into the worlds of these ancient peoples that were not colored by the lenses of later cultures.

What Layard pulled out of the sands of the Ottoman Middle East changed all this. Prisms, libraries, sculptures, and reliefs all now grace the galleries of the British Museum in London, where historians and scholars can view what remains of the cultures of antiquity and the texts that convey how they saw themselves. Moreover, the study of the

ancient Near East can now be turned on its head. Now it is possible to see other ancient peoples such as the ancient Hebrews from a Mesopotamian lens.\(^2\)

An interesting line of inquiry follows from this new lens: what if we did not have the Bible (or any other Greek sources) and instead had to come to an understanding of the ancient Near East with only the Assyrian sources? How would the Phoenicians, Philistines, and Jews appear without looking at them through the lens of Biblical studies or classics? Obviously any picture of a people such as those of ancient Judah would be incomplete without considering all sources. However, by isolating one contemporary perspective on a people and then commenting on what emerges without input from foreign sources, we can paint a certain picture of antiquity that has yet to be skewed by later and foreign streams of thought. The drawback to this approach is of course that this picture is by nature incomplete because it does not include as many details about an event or person as can possibly be known. The advantage however is a different perspective from which to view what has become familiar territory. The ancient people of the Levant can now appear to contemporary eyes without Hebrew or Greek colors.

The Assyrian king Sennacherib (705 – 681 B.C.) is one example of an ancient character whose life and works have been analyzed by using contemporary sources as well as the writings of later authors from outside perspectives. Many scholarly works related to Sennacherib are usually a harmonization of these sources to produce a history of “what happened.” The types of questions being asked of multiple texts are often

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\(^2\) In discussing the historical problems of the Assyrian invasion of Palestine, Brevard Childs says this: “The question is particularly intriguing to the historian because seldom is a biblical story augmented by such a detailed source which is not only contemporary to the event, but which also reflects a point of view outside of the Hebrew community.” Childs, Brevard S. *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*. (London: S.C.M., 1967). 12.
intended to produce a synthesis of accounts if possible. For example in Sennacherib’s annals we read that this Assyrian king exacted 800 talents of silver from Jerusalem as part of his tribute (OI col iii line 42).³ In the Biblical account the amount is 300 (II Kings 18:14). Most approaches take discrepancies like this and ask which account if any is accurate and why. For the purposes of this work, that question is not relevant. Here I will ask questions such as: What does the amount recorded by Sennacherib’s scribe⁴ and the detail in which it is recorded say about how the Assyrians viewed Judah? How does this detail compare to other political entities which he claims to have subjugated? Even if not accurate, does the fact that he goes out of his way to depict Judah in such detail compared to how he depicts the Edomites, for example, tell us anything about the nature of Hezekiah’s kingdom itself?

Because these are the questions that occupy the pages of this thesis, the Bible and other Mesopotamian sources are used in a limited fashion. More informed readers will probably question why important issues such as Merodach Baladan’s involvement in the Judean uprising are not even discussed here. This is because while the Bible hints at this (II Kings 20:12), Sennacherib makes no mention of any Mesopotamian collusion in his writings. The conspiracy itself is understood from synthesizing outside sources with Sennacherib’s account. It may very well have been the case that Merodach Baladan sparked the whole revolt that is recorded in the account of the third campaign. This

³ References to Akkadian lines in the annals will come from The Oriental Institute (OI) prism unless otherwise stated. The English translation will be my own. See: Sennacherib, and Daniel David Luckenbill. The Annals of Sennacherib. (Chicago, IL: U of Chicago, 1924).
⁴ The use of the term “scribe” in this thesis refers to any person or part of the process by which the annals and other Assyrian inscriptions were written and compiled. It is not a reference to any one specific person. It could include the king, court officials, military personnel, or professional scribes themselves.
question however, is outside the bounds of the subject of this thesis. What is inside the bounds is rather how much attention Sennacherib gives his campaigns against Merodach Baladan versus how much he gives to his war against Hezekiah, and whether this can reveal anything about the ancient kingdom of Judah.

The exclusion of foreign sources is not a statement on the reliability of any outside account, nor is it a claim that the Assyrian sources are superior to the biblical, Babylonian, or later classical historical narratives. This is simply an attempt to isolate the Assyrian lens, analyze it, and comment on what emerges. The focus is to analyze the Assyrian text on its own terms, in particular what we see when we point that lens at the political, ethnic, and religious entities encountered by Sennacherib on his third campaign. Any conclusions drawn by the reader about the veracity of any other work from the ancient Near East are purely incidental.

I do intend to draw from outside sources, but only as they give needed context to the events leading up to the third campaign. Many of these sources will still be Assyrian, and the annals of Sargon II and Tiglath Pileser III will be featured most prominently among them. Sennacherib did not write in a vacuum, and so understanding Assyrian involvement in these regions before he invaded them will be important to this study. This is also how I intend to employ the Hebrew Bible as well as other ancient Near Eastern writings. Once that background is achieved, I intend to isolate Sennacherib’s account and then comment on what is said regarding the peoples with whom he crosses paths.

To accomplish this I will examine the writings and material artifacts which Layard as well as later excavators discovered, in search of clues to understand the above-mentioned entities of the ancient Levant. First, I will introduce the sources examined throughout the
course of this thesis. Next, I will present a brief historical background to Sennacherib’s third campaign. Then I will look at the structural breakdown of Sennacherib’s annals (the most complete account of the third campaign) and discuss what the structure of the narrative can tell us about the places written in it. Following that, I will provide an analysis of each phase of the campaign from the primary writings and reliefs. This will include a historical background of Assyria’s recent involvement in each region. Then I will point out what can be known of these regions from Sennacherib’s written and graphic depictions. The goal is to produce a commentary on the annals and inscriptions of this Assyrian monarch with a special emphasis on the political situation of the peoples he encounters.
Chapter 1 - Sources

Written Sources

Scholars can draw a picture of the life and campaigns of Sennacherib from an abundant amount of sources in the form of writings, inscriptions, and reliefs. Regarding the written sources, Louis Levine writes, “There exist references to approximately two hundred and fifty manuscripts which can be attributed with certainty to Sennacherib. Of these, some one hundred and fifty-seven contain either complete military inscriptions, or fragments thereof.”

In addition, Layard uncovered the vast palace complex in which many military exploits and construction projects are depicted graphically. Lining the halls of Sennacherib’s ancient home are reliefs depicting his conquests including the conquest of Phoenicia and Judah and inscriptions do appear on some of them.

With regards to these “manuscripts,” the most important among them are the famous annals of Sennacherib. These annals were written for public display and on clay tablets, cylinders, and prisms that were deposited in special containers placed at the foundations of buildings. They were not necessarily written contemporaneously with the events they describe, and their subject matter covers both construction projects and military campaigns. Almost all come from the same site at Kuyunjik (modern Mosul).

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After each campaign, Sennacherib’s scribes would produce another edition and deposit it in the corners of a newly constructed part of the palace.\(^6\)

The first of these editions contains only an account of the first military campaign. The second edition (known as the Bellino Cylinder), which was written after the second military campaign includes a more abbreviated version of the first campaign, as well as an account of the second campaign. The account of the first campaign in the first edition is significantly more detailed than the account of that same campaign found in any later manuscripts. However, this is not immediately relevant to this study since these first two editions do not discuss the third military campaign. The third edition, written on what is known as the Rassam cylinder, represents the first account of the third military campaign into Phoenicia, Philistia, and Judah. It also includes accounts of the first and second military campaigns and appears to follow the same version written in the second edition.\(^7\)

All later editions show little variation in the account of the third campaign.\(^8\) The latest and most complete editions are the Taylor Prism (691 B.C.), a prism now housed in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem (691 B.C.), and the Oriental Institute Prism (689 B.C.).\(^9\) For the purposes of this study the differences in the account of the third campaign between these three prisms are minor.\(^10\)

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\(^7\) Honor writes, “What is important to note is that subsequent scribes have not summarized the Bellino account, but the story of the first two campaigns is found in all later editions with no or only very slight modification.” Honor, *Sennacherib’s Invasion of Palestine: A Critical Source Study*. 3.

\(^8\) Ibid., 6.


\(^10\) Should the reader wish to examine these three prisms, a good source is the RINAP website. This website has a translation of the campaigns described in these annals and is based on these
Of course only editions with accounts of the third campaign are immediately relevant to this study. However, the relationship between the versions is important to point out. The variations between the editions, while small, can give additional clues into the political situation of the region covered. Therefore, it is important to note these variations whenever they further enlighten the narrative. Consequently, I will highlight the differences in the editions only when there are relevant variations that affect our understanding of the region covered in the third campaign. However, most of these variations are relatively minor and the basic account of the third campaign is essentially the same from one edition to the next.

It should be noted that despite the similarities, we clearly recognize that the scribe(s) took some liberties with regards to the official account. Indeed, there may not even have been an official account. We notice small expansions and deletions in the narratives, but they are usually innocuous and often present no discernible ideological cause. As Levine writes, “It would seem, therefore, that the idea of a canonical version, at least in the strict sense that the term is used in Biblical studies, was a foreign concept to the Assyrian scribe; and that certain parameters of variation were acceptable from the very beginnings of the transmission of the text.”11 Because of this, one should not assume all variations betray some hidden message about the event recorded.

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Highlighting this phenomenon are other types of stone inscriptions such as the narratives on the famous bull statues, which decorated the entrances to Sennacherib’s palace. Here we can read of the same military campaigns, albeit in abbreviated form. There does not appear to be a political motive for the amending of the account. The assumption is that sometimes the text was shortened simply to save space on the medium.\textsuperscript{12} There may have been some original source to the inscription, but there is no attempt to try to make an exact copy in the way a biblical scribe might in later days.

The particular version of the annals used in this thesis is taken from the Oriental Institute (OI) prism housed at the University of Chicago.\textsuperscript{13} As mentioned above, other complete versions show little difference when compared to this prism. This prism contains a description of eight military campaigns, and it is essentially the same text as the above-mentioned Taylor prism now housed in the British Museum. It is no more or less accurate than other versions, but since it is one of the most complete and accessible accounts of Sennacherib’s third military campaign, I have chosen it as the base text from which to look for clues regarding the ethnic groups he encountered on his third campaign.

\textit{The Reliefs}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{12} Regarding some of the campaign summaries written on stone slabs, Levine writes, “Four of these, those on stone slabs, have a relatively limited surface, and this may well account for the shortness of the text when compared with the annals.” He does go on to point out however, that on some mediums there is sufficient space for the longer version and the shorter version is still used. Levine, "Preliminary Remarks on the Historical Inscriptions of Sennacherib." In History, Historiography, and Interpretation: Studies in Biblical and Cuneiform Literatures. 67-68.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{13} Sennacherib, and Daniel David Luckenbill. The Annals of Sennacherib. Another more modern translation used is the Sennacherib corpus number 022 on the RINAP website mentioned in note 7. The translation of the OI prism into English is mine.}
Another source for Sennacherib’s third campaign are the extensive reliefs found in the remains of his palace at Kuyunjik. Sennacherib’s artists decorated the walls of his abode with depictions of his conquests, and the third campaign in Phoenicia and Judah is well represented. In his monumental work on the Assyrian palace at Nineveh, John Malcolm Russell identified a total of eleven rooms with reliefs dedicated to the third campaign and another two rooms with partial depictions of this same campaign.\textsuperscript{14} Not all of these reliefs are well preserved. However, among the well-preserved reliefs is the famous graphic depiction of the battle at Lachish in room XXXVI. This 38 x 18 foot chamber gives us an Assyrian photograph of one of the major walled cities of ancient Judah, and because it is “among the best and most completely preserved relief series from the Southwest Palace,”\textsuperscript{15} it should provide many contemporary clues into this ancient people. There is even an epigraph on the relief identifying the city as Lachish.\textsuperscript{16} Because of this, the decorations of room XXXVI in the Nineveh palace provide an excellent source for understanding the ancient people of Judah.

\textit{A Word on Reliability}

With respect to the reliability of Assyrian royal annals, one must treat these sources as any other from antiquity. For example, if we accept these narratives at face value, Assyrian kings never lost any wars. That is to say, the Assyrian sources only include details which depict the monarch as powerful and successful. What remains we have are clearly propagandistic. Indeed, as the OI prism examined in this thesis opens,

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 64.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 161.
“Sennacherib the great king, the strong king, king of the world, king of Ashur, king of the four corners of the earth; the competent shepherd, favorite of the great gods, the one who guards truth, the one who loves justice; the one who aids, who helps the weak, the one who seeks good deeds; perfect youth, heroic man; foremost of all the rulers, the shackle which restrains the insubmissive, the one who strikes the enemy; the god Assur, the great mountain, has granted me dominion without rival, and made my weapons more powerful than all who sit on a throne; from the upper sea of the setting sun to the lower sea of the rising sun, all the black-headed people he made bow down at my feet and obstinate rulers feared battle” (col i line 1-16)

Since this “king of the world” is a “heroic man” who has a dominion without rival given to him by a god, the modern historian must shed much of his credulity when reading the account of his restraining of the insubmissive. This means that for the purposes of this thesis, a good deal of critical reading will be necessary. Looking for clues regarding the peoples he conquers will be akin to a modern intelligence analyst looking for facts about the United States in a North Korean press release. The task is challenging and certainty will be difficult. However, only by looking beyond the inflated rhetoric in the above-mentioned sources can we find data that will assist us in increasing our awareness of subcultures in the ancient world.

The visual representations are no different in this regard. Julian Reade writes,

“Each palace of which the sculptures were an integral part, had its individual character. They have features in common, so that we can see a logical consequence of development and sometimes imitation, but they were designed for different kings each of whom was anxious to prove his own superiority. The king’s names, titles, and achievements were written repeatedly in both conspicuous and concealed places, and frequently assert

that he had done what his predecessors had failed to do. The palace was a massive corpus of personal propaganda.\textsuperscript{18}

Sennacherib’s palace was certainly no exception, and much of the art lining his palace was dedicated to his military campaigns. In fact on Sennacherib’s palace walls, “military narrative pictures were transformed into sweeping panoramas capable of covering vast stretches of wall without difficulty, far superior in this respect to anything that had gone before.”\textsuperscript{19} The theme of much of his art was his own greatness on the battlefield. Therefore, investigating his annals will require a critical eye that looks beyond the facade.

\textit{Summary of Sources}

The multiple written accounts, such as the annals on clay prisms as well as inscriptions on stone monuments, contain minor variations, and part of the process of the analysis in this thesis will be to note these variations should they impact our understanding of the campaign in question. I will use the Oriental Institute prism as the base text for my analysis and incorporate into the picture any writings from Sennacherib’s scribes that cover the subject of the third campaign. Also I will analyze the art, which decorated the palace at Nineveh, to see what can be determined as relevant to Phoenicia, Philistia, and Judah. In so doing, I will exercise great caution because the Assyrian kings were given to exaggeration, and their material remains, both written and


graphic, functioned largely as propaganda. From this process we hope to arrive at details from an Assyrian perspective regarding the political, ethnic, and religious entities encountered by Sennacherib on his third campaign.
Chapter 2 - Background to the Third Campaign

The Legacy of Assyrian Cruelty

Assyrian Monarchs embarked on military campaigns with relative frequency. The fact that Sennacherib sent his army to fight on foreign lands is, by Assyrian historical standards, unremarkable. Most of his military excursions were simply attempts to put down rebellions in lands already conquered by his predecessors. Two of the campaigns listed in the annals occur in the same area, dealing with the same enemy, and for the same reason – a revolt from Assyrian rule.

The Assyrian empire had acquired a notorious reputation for cruelty, which no doubt contributed to a constant rebellious sentiment within its conquered territory. A little over a century before Sennacherib, a legacy of extreme brutality was born in the western campaigns of king Ashurnasirpal II who, upon the completion of overtaking a city, would brag of building pillars decorated with the filleted skins of rebellious city chiefs, walls constructed from live prisoners plastered on top of each other, and mounds of eyes, ears, and hands from vanquished soldiers. Each succeeding Assyrian king would feel

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20 Here are two particularly graphic depictions that illustrate this. The first is what Asumnasirpal II records after his capture of the city of Sāru. He had rounded up those he deemed guilty and then slaughtered them in front of his newly appointed governor. He relates: “I appointed Azi-ili as my own governor over them. I erected a pile in front of his gate. I flayed as many nobles as (i 90) had rebelled against me (and) draped their skins over the pile; some I spread out within the pile, (and) some I erected on stakes upon the pile, (and) some I placed on stakes around the pile. I flayed many right through my land (and) draped their skins over the walls. I slashed the flesh of the eunuchs (and) of the royal eunuchs who were guilty. I brought Aḫi-iababa to Nineveh, flayed him, (and) draped his skin over the wall of Nineveh” (A.0.101.1 col i line 86-90). Another example is his graphic depiction of his treatment of conquered peoples in the account of his
compelled to live up to such high standards of viciousness. So when Sennacherib boasts of hanging the bodies of the nobles of Ekron on stakes around the city (OI col iii line 8-10), he was simply following an Assyrian military tradition. This tradition fed a constant desire to throw off the Assyrian yoke. For example, during the reign of Sennacherib’s son Esarhaddon, we read in a letter from the people loyal to the Assyrian crown in Nippur in the south that, “The king knows it: all countries hate us on account of Assyria; we cannot set foot in any country. Wherever we go we risk being killed, (for people say), ‘Why have you sworn allegiance to Assyria?’” Sennacherib’s annals are a record of this ancient Mesopotamian king giving an unambiguous answer to why one might not want to break such an allegiance.

The first substantive Assyrian conquest of the region covered in Sennacherib’s third campaign came under Tiglath Pileser III (745-727 BC). George Roux writes, “From every point of view, Tiglath Pileser must be considered as the founder of the Assyrian

response to the people of Têla after his successful siege on that city. He states, “I felled 3,000 of their fighting men with the sword. I carried off prisoners, possessions, oxen (and) cattle from them. I captured many troops alive: from some I cut off their arms (and) hands; from others I cut off their noses, ears, (and) extremities. I gouged out the eyes of many troops. I made one pile of the living (and) one of the heads. I hung their heads on trees around the city. (ii 1) I burnt their adolescent boys (and) girls. I razed, destroyed, burnt, (and) consumed the city” (A.0.101.1 col i line 114-116). Grayson, Albert Kirk. Assyrian Rulers of Early First Millennium BC I (1114-859 BC). Vol. 2. (Toronto: U of Toronto, 2002.) 199 & 201.

Pfeiffer, Robert H., E. A. Speiser, and John K. Shryock. State Letters of Assyria: a Transliteration and Translation of 355 Official Assyrian Letters Dating from the Sargonid Period (722-625 B.C.). Ed. W. N. Brown. (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1935). 96 Letter #123. A more recent translation of this same letter is found on the State Archives of Assyria website. It reads: “The king knows that all the lands hate us because of Assyria. We do not have safe passage in any of the lands. Wherever we go, we get killed with the words: ‘Why did you grasp the feet of Assyria?’ Now we have blocked off my city gates; we do not go out to the open country.” It is entitled Nippur Cut off from Water and is catalogued at K 00517. The website is: http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/saao/corpus

22 The Assyrians intended to use brutal methods to keep a defeated people from revolt. The irony we see is that revolt was a persistent problem for many Assyrian monarchs because of such brutality.
empire.”23 And indeed he was, as he marched the Assyrian army to the southern reaches of Philistia and Judah, creating a buffer zone between his empire and the imperial rival power in Egypt. “Although the traditional habit has been to refer to the Sargonid empire, it is now admitted that the latter was really set up by Tiglath Pileser III, the first sovereign who succeeded in extending Assyrian domination over vast territories, divided into provinces headed by governors appointed by, and reporting to the central government.”24 Later Assyrian kings, with rare exceptions, strove to maintain the empire he had built. Sennacherib’s annals are also an account of that maintenance.

The Primary Antagonist in the Annals

The chief antagonist in the narrative of the annals is Merodach-Baladan, whose revolutionary activities began under Sennacherib’s father, Sargon II. Once a loyal subject of the Assyrian crown,25 Merodach-Baladan shed that loyalty with the change in dynasties. The death of Shalmaneser V and the accession of Sargon motivated the Chaldean upstart to sever ties with Nineveh and seek Babylonian independence with the help of the Elamites. Sargon neutralized the rebellion. He eventually deals kindly with the inhabitants of Babylonia and even sacrificed to the gods of the city. He seems to have held only Merodach-Baladan responsible for the upheaval and continued to pursue him into the marshes of what is today southern Iraq. From here Merodach-Baladan

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disappears only to reemerge as the chief rival on multiple campaigns in Sennacherib’s annals.\textsuperscript{26}

\textit{Father & Son Relationship: A Sign of Weakness?}

Sargon’s relationship with his son is difficult to understand. Like many Assyrian kings before him, he had trusted his son with the administration of the kingdom while he was away campaigning at war. On one of those campaigns, Sargon marched his army through the very regions Sennacherib would also revisit during his third campaign. Sargon conquered Phoenicia and Philistia, but he does not mention the city of Sidon in his account. While he described exiling the inhabitants of Samaria,\textsuperscript{27} no mention is made of a conquest of the kingdom of Judah. However, during this expedition, Sennacherib remained home to run the day-to-day affairs of the Assyrian empire within its borders.

However, some historians suggest that the relationship between father and son was strained. Susan Wise-Bauer writes, “Five years after his defeat of Babylon, Sargon II died and left his throne to a son who hated him. In none of his inscriptions or annals does Sennacherib even acknowledge his father.” From this she speculates about the reason for the rebellion, which lead to Sennacherib’s third campaign: “Sargon had apparently not been reticent in spreading his opinion of his son abroad. When Sennacherib came to the

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 99.
throne, the provinces-convinced that the crown prince was boneless and inadequate-celebrated their coming freedom from Assyrian rule.”

Summary of the Historical Background

Whether inspired by an enduring legacy of Assyrian cruelty, the persistence and resistance of Merodach-Baladan, or the perceived weakness of the crown prince, the provinces that Sargon II won so decisively erupted in defiance almost immediately after his death. Rebellion broke out first in Babylon, where during his first campaign Sennacherib claims to have “accomplished the defeat of Merodach-Baladan, king of Babylonia, together with the army of Elam, his ally, in the plain of Kish” (OI col i line 20-22). In his second campaign, he records that he turned his attention to the high mountains in the east where the Kassites and Yasubigallai were also rebelling (OI col i line 65-68). Upon subduing this rugged region, Sennacherib moved to defeat the rebellion in the Levant in his third campaign.

It is on this third campaign that we are introduced to characters such as Lulê of Tyre, Šidka of Ashkelon, and Hezekiah of Jerusalem. All of these figures would challenge the new Assyrian sovereign. It is the response to this challenge that gives us the essential material for the annals in which Sennacherib describes his campaign into Phoenicia, Philistia, and Judah. These annals are the primary Assyrian lens through which we may observe these three ancient cultures in the final years of the 8th century B.C.

Chapter 3 – The Structural Analysis of the Third Campaign

*Basic Structural Observations*

The first question that requires attention is the manner in which the Assyrian author breaks down this campaign structurally. Of the 430 lines that cover military campaigns on the OI prism, 96 lines discuss the third campaign. This is approximately 22% of the entire military narrative covering a total of eight campaigns. By comparison, the scribe recorded the first campaign in 62 lines, the second in 54 lines, the fourth in 25 lines, the fifth in 38 lines, the sixth in 22 lines, the seventh in 44 lines, and the eighth in 107 lines. Of course, there were certainly additional campaigns not mentioned here. However, of the military exploits Sennacherib sought to record in writing on this prism, he devoted substantially more space to this third campaign than to any other campaign apart from the most recent (the eighth campaign).

It is entirely appropriate to analyze these texts by military campaigns because that is the very literary division used by this Assyrian author. Previous Assyrian kings would

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29 It should be pointed out that the first 20 lines of the prism are devoted to the praise of Sennacherib. Also, there are more lines at the end of the eighth campaign, but these are dedicated to a description of construction projects back at Nineveh. The total of 430 lines is made up of only parts of the OI prism that cover the military campaigns. For the final lines of the sixth column see Sennacherib, and Daniel David Luckenbill. *The Annals of Sennacherib*, 128-130. 30 “In the standard editions of the campaigns the accepted number is eight, but it is known that there were at least four additional expeditions, and there could have been more, since there are many years for which no record of military activity is preserved.” Grayson, A. K. "Assyria: Sennacherib and Esarhaddon (704–669 B.C.)", *The Cambridge Ancient History*. Ed. John Boardman, I. E. S. Edwards, E. Sollberger, and N. G. L. Hammond. 2nd ed. Vol. 3. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). 105.
record their military accomplishments by referencing the year each event occurred relative to their accession year. Sennacherib breaks with this tradition and structures the narrative by campaign number. In each edition containing more than one campaign, the scribe divided the narrative with the phrase, “on my nth campaign” (ina x girriya). The campaigns do not necessarily correspond to a column on a prism or any other material aspect of the medium. Rather they are literary devices, which provide breaks in the account. Thus, the reason we can separate out the third campaign for analysis is because that is the literary division used in the annals themselves.

Three Phases?

Most modern historians divide this third campaign in three phases: Phoenicia, Philistia, and Judah. Along the way, Sennacherib’s army marches through the territory of what we now know as these three political entities. However, this is not the account given in the annals themselves. Indeed, while Judah is mentioned, nowhere in the OI prism does the word “Phoenicia” or “Philistia” even appear. The tripartite structure of this campaign is still valid, and, consequently, that is the basic structure used in this thesis. However, it must be noted that this is not the political/ethnic structure recorded here by the scribe. That is a paradigm used by modern historians and does not conform to the view we see when looking through the Assyrian lens itself.

As mentioned before, the structure of the annals is clearly divided up by military campaigns rather than the usual Assyrian accounting by royal accession year. In the middle of the accounting of the third campaign, we are given an important statement, “in

the course of my campaign” (*ina mētiq girrīya*). Since references to the campaign seem to provide the overall structure of the annals, we are tempted to see this phrase as a literary device indicating a new phase of the campaign. If we allow for this, then it could be posited that Sennacherib saw his third campaign in two phases instead of the modern historians’ usual three. However, the events described before and after do not seem to naturally divide there. The defeat of the king of Ashkelon is mentioned before, and the cities, which aligned with him, are defeated after. Therefore, it is unlikely that this statement was included to reference a new phase of the campaign.

*Is the Determinative a Possible Division in the Narrative?*

One other possibility is to divide the campaign up by the use of the Akkadian determinative “KUR” for the word *mātum*, meaning land or region. One example of a comparable use of this determinative is an inscription on a stone slab found at Caleh from the time of Adad-Narari III. Here he does not break up his account by campaigns as Sennacherib does, but in his account of his western conquests, he encounters many of the same political/ethnic entities. “I subdued (the territory stretching) from the bank of the Euphrates, the land of Hatti, the land of Amurru in its entirety, Tyre, Sidon, Samaria (Humri), Edom, (and) Palastu as far as the great sea in the west.” Palastu in this text is Philistia, and Samaria is identified as the land of Humri (biblical Omri). The inscription is not necessarily divided by this determinative. However, what is significant here is that the scribe does use the KUR determinative in front of each political entity given, and thus logographically defining each in the same category.

32 Grayson, Albert Kirk. *Assyrian Rulers of Early First Millennium BC II (858-745 BC)*. Vol. 3. (Toronto: U of Toronto, 2002). 213. (A.0.104.8 lines 5-10)
When Sennacherib’s scribes are writing, they also use this determinative for some of these same political/ethnic entities. During the third campaign, this determinative is used a total of eight times with two of these (Egypt and Ethiopia) being clearly foreign to the territory covered. This means it is possible that Sennacherib was intending to record this campaign as a series of conquests of six distinct political entities.

There is no doubt a political entity of some kind is being referenced by the use of this determinative. However, this determinative is not likely a method for structuring the account of the third campaign. The reason for this is the manner in which he lists a series of regional chiefs who pay him tribute in lines 50-58. From lines 50 to 54 there is a list of heads of cities, which gave tribute to Assyria. The format for this listing is first to provide the determinative for a person, his name (presumably the chief of the city), and then the city name in gentilic form. The last of these cities is Ashdod. However, the list continues but now there is a person who is associated with a KUR also given in gentilic form. Three kings of “KUR”s are listed: Beth Ammon, Moab, and Edom. He then states that all these are the kings of the KUR of the Amurru (OI col ii line 50-58). It is the same determinative for KUR used here in apposition to show that the previous three are all sub-regions of the land of the Amurru.\(^{33}\) In this account we see that Sennacherib’s use of the determinative KUR is inconsistent. Thus, we cannot with certainty break up the third campaign by the use of this determinative.

\(^{33}\) It is important to note that there are a couple of textual variants which instead of using the determinative KUR, record the URU determinative for city before Beth Ammon and Moab. This further highlights the inconsistent use of determinatives for the political entities recorded in this part of the annals. Therefore, the existence of the variants further enhances the case that such determinatives cannot be used as indications of a phase of the campaign or literary structure of the narrative. For examples of these variants see the RINAP website at http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/rinap/rinap3/corpus/. This will be under the Sennacherib corpus 017. The fragments with these textual variants are catalogued as BM 103000 and IM 056578.
Sennacherib Calls the Entire Region “Hittite Land”

The account of the third campaign begins with the line, “In my third campaign I went against the Hittite land” (ina šalši girriya ana ʾḫatti lu allik). The determinative KUR is used and is properly translated as “Hittite-land” (OI col ii line 37). Given the way the determinative is inconsistently applied as mentioned above, it is likely that Sennacherib saw this whole region covered in the third campaign as “Hittite land.” What follows this introductory line is a series of conquests of city-states and other sub “KUR”s or regions of varying size and importance within the land of the Hittites. As best we can determine from the structure of the annals, the Assyrians of Sennacherib’s day saw the whole region of what we call Palestine or the Levant as the land of the Hittites.

Sennacherib is not alone referring to this area as such. There are indications that his father Sargon II also thought of this region as Hittite. Sargon also campaigned through this region and called the people even as far south as Ashdod, “Hittites.” Ashdod is a city normally associated with Philistia, but in his discussion of the rebellion of Azuru king of Ashdod, he mentions that he “put an end to his rule over the people of his land and set up Ahimitu, his full brother, as king over them.” In the next statement he describes these people: “The Hittites, plotters of iniquity, detested his rule and elevated (to the kingship) over them Iatna, who had no claim to the throne and who had (lit., knew) no (more) respect for authority than they (themselves).”\(^{34}\) He states plainly that the people of Ashdod are controlled by Hittites who don’t approve of his choice for governor and thus install an upstart named Iatna. Sennacherib’s son Esarhaddon also refers to the Hittite land on his campaign west. Regarding his attack on Sidon he states, “And I gathered

together the kings of Hatti, and the seacoast, all of them, and in another place I had a city built.” He does make the distinction between Hatti and the seacoast, but when he conquers the area, he reorganizes them all into one Assyrian province.

**The Term “Hittite” is Invoking the Past**

It is likely that Sennacherib’s use of the term Hittite is less an accurate designator of the ethnicity of the people of the region and more an atavistic term referring to the days of earlier Assyrian kings and their defeat of this once great empire. The height of Hittite power came in the 14th century when from their capital in Carchemesh, they ruled much of the Near East including the region under consideration. Their empire would fade only to see a brief revival in the 11th century. The Assyrian Monarch Tiglath Pilesar I would eventually subjugate this neo-Hittite polity as well as the entire Phoenician coast. On a document found at a temple in Ashur he records the conquest of Sidon and Byblos and then states, “And (afterwards) on my return march (towards Ashur) I subjected the entire country of Great-Hatti, I imposed upon Ili-Teshup, king of Great Hatti a tribute of […] talents [of…] and of cedar beams.” Tiglath Pilesar I would elsewhere boast that, “In all forty-two lands and their princes from beyond the Lower Zab, a region of distant hills, unto the further side of the Euphrates, and the land of Hatti and the Upper Sea of the West, from the beginning of my rule up to the fifth year of my reign, my hand has

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35 Luckenbill, Daniel David. *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia* vol 2. 205.
While remnants of some Hittite peoples no doubt survived into the late 8th/early 7th century, the glory of this once great empire was long gone by Sennacherib’s day. Sennacherib is using a term which recalls the days when Assyrian kings of old governed a people on the rise, marched out of Mesopotamia, and defeated a legendary Hittite menace.

We also know that the political/ethnic entity of both Judah and Philistia did exist in his day, but of the three above-mentioned polities that we use to structure this account, only one, Judah, is mentioned in these annals. Even so, Sennacherib does mention Philistia on one other known occasion. In one record of building improvements he writes, “The people of Kaldu, the Aramaeans, the Mannai, (the people of) Kue, and Hilakku, of Philistia and Tyre, who had not submitted to my yoke, I snatched away (from their lands).” The scribe used the determinative KUR before the reference. Clearly Sennacherib knows that within this region are the political entities of Judah and Philistia.

The term Phoenicia is Greek in origin. It is unclear how the inhabitants of this region referred to themselves, but contemporaneous with the third campaign, the Hebrew prophet Isaiah refers to the Phoenician coast as Canaan (Isaiah 23:11-12). The term “Canaan” is also an archaic term and a relic from the second millennium B.C. to refer to this region. In other places in the Hebrew Bible, the region seems to be known by its most significant cities, Tyre (Amos 1:9-10 and later in Ezekiel 27) or Sidon (I Kings 5:6

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38 Luckenbill, Daniel David. *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia* vol 1. 85.
At best we can tell from outside sources, this region was a loosely connected series of city-states with varying levels of cooperation and hostility.

This is exactly what Sennacherib’s use of the determinatives indicates about the coastal region in his annals. Other than the reference to Hittite land, all place names in what we now call Phoenicia carry the determinative URU for a city (OI col ii line 38-44). Also, in line 44, after listing eight cities in the region, the scribe refers to them as, “his cities” (alānišu), referring to the king of Sidon. There is no mention of Tyre in these annals, but there is an interesting textual variant bearing that name which will be discussed later. The important point here is that the Assyrians referred to this area as a collection of cities belonging to one king without using the determinative KUR.

Characteristics of the Hittite Land

One additional indicator that Sennacherib sees this whole region as Hittite is that in the annals there are some cultural characteristics mentioned as “Hittite” that are usually connected with Phoenicia, Philistia, Syria, and perhaps even Judah. While on his sixth campaign, he pursues the rebellious Bit-Yakin peoples who fled via the sea into Elamite provinces. Sennacherib records, “In Hittite ships I crossed the sea” (OI col iv line 37). Expanding on this he later writes in an inscription found at Nebi Yunus, “In Hittite ships

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40 “We should bear in mind the double meaning of ‘Sidonian,’ which sometimes stands explicitly for the inhabitants of Sidon, and sometimes for the Phoenicians, as it is used both in the Bible.” Katzenstein, H. Jacob. The History of Tyre, from the Beginning of the Second Millennium B.C.E. until the Fall of the Neo-Babylonian Empire in 538 B.C.E. (Jerusalem: Schocken Institute for Jewish Research of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1973). 130.

41 Ibid., 6-8.
which I built in Nineveh and Tilbarsip, I crossed the sea.” In both instances, KUR is used before the word Hittite. He is careful to record that while he may have built them at Nineveh, he definitely used a type of ship that he calls Hittite.

However, it is the Phoenician city-states that were known throughout the ancient Near East as master seafarers. Historian of Tyre Jacob Katzenstein writes, “The maritime knowledge of Phoenician cities is attested to in various sources in ancient tradition.” Moreover, there are records of major empires relying almost entirely on the naval expertise of the Phoenicians. Thus, if someone wanted to build reliable sea transport capable of moving a large army across a vast body of water, the Phoenician style of shipping would be preferable. The Assyrian scribe here is satisfied to employ the more encompassing term Hittite instead of any narrower reference to Phoenician culture.

Another cultural characteristic of the region defined by Sennacherib as Hittite is the palace architecture. In his account of the improvements he made at Nineveh, he records building a “portico, patterned after a Hittite palace, which they call in the Amorite tongue

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43 Katzenstein includes a discussion of the shipbuilding fame of the Phoenicians with reference to Philo of Byblos stating that the city of Tyre invented the building of ships. He also refers to the shipbuilding guild at Ugarit and Diodorus’ mention of shipyards in Tyre. Katzenstein, The History of Tyre, from the Beginning of the Second Millennium B.C.E. until the Fall of the Neo-Babylonian Empire in 538 B.C.E. 24-25.
45 Katzenstein has a brief discussion of the prominence and skill of the Tyrian sea traders throughout the Mediterranean as far back as the 10th century B.C. Katzenstein, The History of Tyre, from the Beginning of the Second Millennium B.C.E. until the Fall of the Neo-Babylonian Empire in 538 B.C.E. 125-126; Further illustrating this, Homer writes, “One day a band of Phoenicians landed there. The famous sea-dogs, sharp bargainers too, the holds of their black ship brimful with a hoard of flashy baubles.” Homer, and Robert Fagles. The Odyssey. (New York: Penguin, 1997). 332 Book XV 465-467.
a bīt ḫilānī.” This exact phrase was also used by his father Sargon II on an inscription at his palace in Khorsabad. Excavations carried out in both Syria and in the palaces at Khorabad and Nineveh show a distinct similarity in the decorations of the column bases, which supported the porticoes of the palaces in both regions. Both Sargon and Sennacherib identify the origin of this style is in the Hittite land.

The word ḫilani used by Sennacherib is a Hittite word, and it simply means “gatehouse.” However, there is, “no link between the North Syrian palaces of the first millennium and imperial Hittite architecture.” It appears that whoever the inhabitants of the Hittite land were in Sennacherib’s day had created a new architectural style not connected at all to the palace architecture of the glory days of the Hittite empire in the 14th century. It also appears that these inhabitants of this region spoke a Canaanite language (which Sennacherib identifies with another 2nd millennium archaic term, “Amorite”), but when referring to this portico had borrowed an older term from the Hittite language to describe it. The Assyrians applied this term when they imported the “Hittite” architectural style from Syria for their palaces. The word ḫilani itself then is possibly an atavistic term recalling earlier periods of Hittite dominance. The adjective

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47 Luckenbill, Daniel David. *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia* vol 2. 53.
48 “The texts are corroborated by column bases actually found in Assyria. Both types used in Syria are represented. A model base from Nineveh is carved in the shape of a winged human-headed cow supporting a column base of the flat cushion type, decorated in the characteristic Syrian manner. Actual column bases with this decoration were found in various localities at Khorsabad and at Nineveh.” Frankfort, H. "The Origin of the Bît Hilani." *Iraq* 14.2 (1952). 126.
49 Ibid., 127.
50 Frankfort provides a discussion of why the North Syrian architecture of the 9th-7th centuries is not at all connected to the palace architecture of the Hittite empire of previous centuries despite the Hittite cognate in the Amorite language. Ibid., 128
Hittite employed by the Assyrian scribe is used to refer to both this architectural style in Syria and a type of ship built in the Phoenician city-states.

*Summary of the Structural Analysis*

To summarize the structural breakdown of the campaign according to Sennacherib, there is an archaic designation, “Hittite land”, given to the general area. What follows is his campaign against various city-states and countries within that land. The common breakdown of the campaign in three phases (Phoenicia, Philistia, and Judah), while useful, is not reflected in the text itself. The text itself calls the whole region “Hittite land” and even assigns the title Hittite to certain cultural characteristics normally associated with Phoenicia and Syria. This is not to say that these same three political/ethnic entities are not present or even identified in other places and in other ways. However, he is referring to them as all part of what the Assyrians saw as a greater Hittite region.
Chapter 4 – Phase 1 Phoenicia

*Why Phoenicia?*

The Assyrian army began the third campaign with an invasion of the Phoenician city-states. However, the scribe never gives any specific reason as to why Sennacherib came against them. In the later phases of the campaign we are told that Ṣidka, the king of Ashkelon, and Hezekiah, the king of Judah, did not submit to Sennacherib’s yoke. We are also told that Hezekiah took an Assyrian governor hostage in Jerusalem. In Phoenicia, no such specifics are recorded.

It is possible that this first enemy encountered had orchestrated some kind of revolt against the payment of tribute for at least part of the region. After Tiglath Pileser III had first conquered Phoenicia, the Assyrian army exacted tribute from both Tyre and Sidon. At one point they placed a ban on the Phoenicians doing business with the Egyptians or Philistines.\(^{52}\) By the time of Shalmaneser V, king Lulê attempted to end Assyrian domination. He refused to submit to the demands of the Assyrians, which resulted in the Assyrians besieging him. This siege lasted into Sargon’s reign and ended with Lulê still in power. However, it is likely that he had to pay some kind of tribute.\(^{53}\) In any case, the


\(^{53}\) Isaiah 14:8 says, "The cypresses rejoice at you, the cedars of Lebanon saying, ‘since you were laid low, no woodcutter comes up against us’.” This is possibly a reference to Sargon II. The Hebrew prophet is taunting him by claiming that because of his demise, the cedars in Lebanon will no longer be cut down. Presumably then, the wood from the region of Lebanon was one of Sargon’s demands on the region. Childs, Brevard S. *Isaiah*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001). 127.
relationship seems to be relatively peaceful until news of Sargon’s death spread throughout the ancient Near East. For Lulê, this would be a chance to liberate his kingdom from foreign taxation. However, Sennacherib never specifically states this is his grievance against him.

Regardless of what this king of Sidon had done, Sennacherib was already predisposed to distrust the Phoenician vassal. While still the crown prince, the young Assyrian ruler received a report from a Nabû-riba-ahhe who was still back in Nineveh. This report seems to describe the Sidonians as less than energetic in their service to the Assyrian state. He writes, “The Sidonites and their heads did not go to Caleh with the crown prince, my lord, nor are they serving in the garrison of Nineveh. They loiter in the center of town, each in his lodging place.” Whatever the new Phoenician king had done, reports like this and a history of rebellion were already in Sennacherib’s mind when he began this campaign.

_Provisioning the Invasion From The Vast Armory at Tyre_

An additional reason for the invasion of Tyre could be that the area under the control of Lulê held the key to the success of the entire campaign. Following the account of Lulê’s fate, the scribe provides a list of cities, which he calls, “his strong cities” (alânišu dannūti). The Assyrians saw this list of cities as belonging to Lulê. It would be a mistake to think that this is an exhaustive list of cities that the Tyrian government

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54 Katzenstein, _The History of Tyre, from the Beginning of the Second Millennium B.C.E. until the Fall of the Neo-Babylonian Empire in 538 B.C.E._ 226-331.

controlled, and there are other examples of city lists not being exhaustive. Tyre’s influence was definitely broader than just these eight.

Why then just these eight? It is possible that these cities all followed Lulê into his rebellion and then eventually succumbed to “the terrors of the weapon of Ashur.” Thus we could conclude that the scribe’s inclusion of them here in the annals was to show his readers that resistance to his rule was futile. However, there is a better option for understanding why these cities are listed. The scribe describes them as strong cities and then also as, “his strong, walled cities, where there were supplies for his garrisons” (bīt dūrāni ašar rīti u maškīti bīt tuklatešu; OI col ii line 44-45). The term bīt dūrāni simply means, “walled cities.” A rītu is a pasture and a maškītu is a watering place. As for the term bīt tuklatešu, this literally means “house of his weapons” or in other words his armory. These cities were the places where supplies for horses and weapons for soldiers were stored for the garrisons that defended the Phoenician cities. The Assyrian scribe is likely describing these cities as supply depots for any Tyrian land forces. Their seizure by Sennacherib’s army meant that the provisioning of any future rebellion was now in the hands of the invaders. If any Phoenician city-states decided to stand up to Sennacherib, they would have to do so with what limited supplies they had available to them at that time.

However, more important than just discouraging future rebellion, taking these cities also would likely have been an asset in keeping the Assyrian army moving successfully through the Levant. Moving a massive force across a vast area with the intent of

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subjugation is a severe logistical challenge. Supplies, food, and weapons all require constant replenishment after protracted periods of fighting. In antiquity and even up until recent times, invading armies would have provisioned and resupplied themselves by the resources of the territory they conquered.

In his essay *Warfare and Military Control in the Ancient Near Eastern Empires*, Israel Ephʿal makes this key observation and poses an important question that it raises:

> The fact that the arenas of war spread over vast areas also demands consideration of logistics, i.e. the art of moving and supplying armies. This subject, despite its crucial importance, is almost entirely neglected in the study of military history of all periods (because no glory is attached to it). In so far as we are concerned with ancient Near Eastern empires this is a difficult subject to deal with because documentation is scarce. For illustration I shall content myself with one problem:
>
> Royal inscriptions and archaeological excavations attest to the existence of a great arsenal (*ekal māšarti*) in Nineveh, as well as in other Assyrian capitals, in which battle equipment (including weapons, chariots, and other vehicles) as well as horses and pack animals were kept. We have no evidence for the existence of such arsenals outside Assyria proper. In view of the remoteness of arenas of war from the center and the change of military objective every year, however, we should ask how the great armies solved the problem of supplying unit equipment.\(^5^7\)

The answer to Ephʿal’s question of how the Assyrian army is resupplied (for at least the third campaign) lies here in the description of the Tyrian cities. When he states there is, “no evidence for the existence of such arsenals outside Assyria proper,” we assume he means Assyrian-made arsenals or weapons depots. The Tyrians had these eight cities, which are clearly described as places for supplies. Sennacherib’s seizure of them meant that not only would Tyrian resistance be severely limited, but also Assyrian conquest could be greatly enhanced.

Given that we know Tyre was a wealthy trading city, it stands to reason that they would have a rather impressive amount of supplies and weapons at these armories. However, another reason to assume a large cache of military necessities was present on the Phoenician coast is the evidence from these annals as well. Of the cities that Sennacherib describes on his third campaign, there are no other accounts given of armories or resupply centers. Judah is said to have as many as 46 walled cities that Sennacherib conquered (OI col iii line 19-20), and it is likely these had some weapons for use by the Assyrian forces. However, given that Judah was conquered last during this campaign and that it was so far away from the land of Assyria itself (what Ephʿal calls the “time and space factor”), the quantity of supplies at the Tyrian cities would have needed to be rather impressive in order to achieve the success recorded. This impressive quantity was likely Sennacherib’s first priority regardless of what Lulê had done.

In that same essay, Ephʿal provides a very useful chart in which he calculates that an army moving at the speed of 25 km per day would take 140 days to get from Babylon to the south of Palestine and back. If they were to cover 30 km per day the same trip would only take 117 days. He states, “To this should be added the time required for the various military actions, such as fighting, siege, negotiations, looting, and so on.” For Sennacherib to be effective for an extended period of time on a foreign battlefield, he would have needed vast quantities of supplies and weapons. Where did he get these supplies? The Assyrian scribe tells us it was at the armories and depots of the Tyrian city-state. If this account is reliable and Sennacherib continued to fight and win battles

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throughout Palestine, then we can assume these armories were quite impressive. Given the logistical requirements of such a campaign, the conquest of these eight cities would have been a key to the entire endeavor.

_A Small Textual Variant – What does it tell us about the Political Scene at Phoenicia_

It would seem at first glance the Assyrians chose to initially attack the city of Sidon. Sennacherib writes in his annals, “Lulê, king of Sidon, the terrifying splendor of my sovereignty overcame him and far off in the midst of the sea he fled” (OI col ii line 38-40). This “king of Sidon” fled when faced with the power of the Mesopotamian invaders. However, on a bull inscription found at Nineveh this same event is recorded with an important addition. It says, “Lulê king of Sidon, - my terrifying splendor overcame him, and from Tyre he fled to Cyprus in the midst of the sea.”59 It is the same Lulê who is stated to be the king of Sidon, but on the bull inscription this king of Sidon is fleeing from Tyre. The textual variations in the accounts are usually minor, and the Taylor and OI prisms often provide the most complete accounts of an event. We discover that this event is one of the exceptions to this rule. The variant here is important since it reinforces our understanding of an important aspect of the Phoenician political scene.

In order to explain why this textual variant is important, I will need to provide some background to the city of Tyre and its relationship with the other Phoenician city-states. For much of the history of the Phoenician coast, the relationship between the various city-states was one of competition, and from time to time one of these cities would rise to

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prominence and dominate the region. The two most dominant city-states were Tyre and Sidon.

Beginning with the rise of king Hiram I to the throne in the early 10th century B.C., Tyre became the dominant force in the region. However, a generation later one Ethbaal, a priest of Astarte, launched a coup and managed to wrest power from Hiram’s descendants. In II Samuel 5:11 we read that, “Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David.” However, in I Kings 16:31 we read of “Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians.” In one Hebrew narrative the king of the region is connected with the city of Tyre. One who is called a king of Sidon in another Hebrew narrative then deposes that previous king’s line. Some have suggested that Ethbaal was actually a priest in the city of Sidon, and when he accomplished his takeover, he effectively politically fused the two cites together for centuries to come. In any case, at this point sources begin to indicate that the one who occupied the throne of Tyre also carried the propagandistic title “king of the Sidonians.” The two city-states appear connected politically. Other Assyrian sources certainly reflect this phenomenon. From the variation in Sennacherib’s account we see evidence that the political structure on the Phoenician coast had not changed.

61 I Kings 5:1 also records this title for Hiram.
62 Katzenstein, The History of Tyre, from the Beginning of the Second Millennium B.C.E. until the Fall of the Neo-Babylonian Empire in 538 B.C.E. 131-132.
63 A thorough discussion of the evidence for this is outside the scope of this thesis. However, Katzenstein has a great survey of this on pages 129-135. He writes, “The political unit ‘Tyre and Sidon’ headed by the ‘king of the Sidonians’ was clearly a reality by the time of Shalmaneser III, as we may see in three documents from his reign. The first is a band from the ‘Gates of Balawat’ depicting the tribute brought by ‘Tyre and Sidon’ in the first campaign of Shalmaneser III to the west, in 853 B.C.E.” He then continues, “The accompanying inscription reads: ‘I received the tribute (brought) in the ships from the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon…’ The crucial fact here is
According to the abovementioned variant account on Sennacherib’s bull inscription, Lulê was the king of Sidon, but he was fleeing from Tyre when the Assyrian army came through. By taking note of this textual variant in Sennacherib’s writings in light of the history of the region, we can suppose with some degree of certainty that Tyre still exercised a high degree of influence over Sidon. As Katzenstein concludes, “Hence we can say with certainty that from the time of Ethbaal until the end of the eighth century B.C.E. the city of Sidon with its dependencies was an integral part of the kingdom of Tyre, at first perhaps a vassal state, but eventually part and parcel of the Tyrian empire.”

_A Textual Variant – What Does it Tell Us About the Fate of the Phoenician King?_

Another minor textual variant could provide a clue as to the timing of Lulê’s fate. The Bull inscription states that he fled to Cyprus where he died. However, the Rassam cylinder, the earliest known account of the third campaign, omits the phrase, “he died” that tribute was brought in ships, that is, from the island of Tyre. The picture, too, bears out our conclusion, for we see on the left side of the band the Tyrian monarch standing on the shore on a island (= Tyre) with his back to the city.” The other two pieces of evidence from Shalmaneser that he offers are that these two cities are not included in a list of enemies during the battle of Qarqar despite other Phoenician cities being listed. Also there are two parallel documents recording the same tribute. One states it came from “Tyre and Sidon” and the other just from Tyre. He also lists references from the Hebrew Bible (Amos 1, Zechariah 9, and Isaiah 23), which all come from a later time but reflect the same phenomenon (see note 63 below). Katzenstein, _The History of Tyre, from the Beginning of the Second Millennium B.C.E. until the Fall of the Neo-Babylonian Empire in 538 B.C.E._ 133-134. It should be pointed out that the prophet Isaiah, contemporary with these events, reflects the same political setup. In Is 23:1-18 there is a prophecy against the city of Tyre but it is interlaced with references to Sidon as if they are equals. He even says in v12, “Arise, pass over to Cyprus; even there you will find no rest.” This is likely a reference to Lulê’s flight. Katzenstein states that the title “king of Sidonians” for Tyrian royalty remained in use for over 170 years and then states importantly, “this fact is most important for the proper evaluation of Assyrian documents.” Katzenstein, _The History of Tyre, from the Beginning of the Second Millennium B.C.E. until the Fall of the Neo-Babylonian Empire in 538 B.C.E._ 131-132. 

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66 Ibid., 132.
(šaddašu ĕmid). This suggests that there may be a timeframe in which we can say that Lulê died. Anson Rainey explains, “The demise of (E)lulî/Elulaios in Cyprus is not recorded in the Rassam cylinder from 700 BCE. It first appears in the text of Cylinder C from the eponym of Nabû-dûru-ušer (697 BCE). That would lead to the assumption that the rebel Phoenician king died between 700 and 697 BCE.”67 If this deduction is correct, then the textual variants in Sennacherib’s writings give us a time frame for the death of the Phoenician king.

Regarding the phrase “he died” (šaddašu ĕmid), some translators make another deduction. In these translations, the phrase is taken as an idiom to mean he died. The first word is šaddû which literally means “mountain” with the third person masculine possessive pronoun added. The second word is the stative form of the root word, emēdu, which means “to lean on, impose, rely on, come into contact with, or go into hiding.” Together they form an idiom that means “to disappear.”68 It is therefore not certain that Lulê died in the abovementioned time frame on Cyprus. He could have simply taken refuge there for many years. Either way he disappears from the political scene at this point. However, when one reads from some translations that “he died,” it must be noted that this may not be precisely what the Assyrians recorded.69

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69 I found a similar example of a slight mistranslation that led to a historical inaccuracy. Hayim Tadmor explains another Akkadian word dâku that has been mistaken in the past. He points out...
Concluding the First Phase in Phoenicia

To conclude his time in Phoenicia, Sennacherib replaced the occupant of the throne at Tyre with Tuba’lu. This replacement may actually have been from Sidon instead of just carrying the name “king of Sidon” as a reflection of the local political dynamic. He is described as “Tuba’lu, the Sidonite.” The Akkadian uses both the city determinative URU and the name of the city in gentilic form (OI col ii line 51). Later on we know from Esarhaddon’s writings that this king would also cause problems for the Assyrian empire, but for now at least he would be paying heavy tribute “for all time, without ceasing” (OI col ii line 47-49).

According to the annals, Sennacherib forced at least five other Phoenician cities to do the same. It seems the forces of this Mesopotamian sovereign had intimidated others in the region into submission to the Assyrian throne. These other cities had likely known that Tyre had outlasted the previous attempts at subjugation by the Mesopotamian forces. This new Assyrian king had simply appeared with his army, and with no trace of a fight, forced the same Tyrian king to flee. In light of this, there is no doubt that resistance seemed futile for these remaining cities.

Transjordanian Interlude – The Weak Kings of Amurru

Not only was the flight of Lulê felt on the coast but also in the Transjordan region as well. Sennacherib identifies this region as the land of the Amurru, and he includes Edom, Moab, and Beth Ammon as part of it (OI col ii lines 55-58). All of their respective

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that the two meanings of the word either “to defeat” or “to do battle with” were not always acknowledged and this “led to a misinterpretation of several historical events.” Tadmor, Hayim. "Historical Implications of the Correct Rendering of Akkadian Daku." Journal of Near Eastern Studies 17.2 (1958): 129.
monarchs or "kings of Amurru" would now have to pay heavy tribute, which they were to bring to the feet of the king. They in return could keep their kingdoms. Why these specific kings? We are not told, but Sennacherib is likely making a point that any king who submits and pays tribute will not be punished. These kings may have initially felt the pull of Lulê’s rebellion but realized the Assyrian forces coming against them were simply too much for them to handle and so continued the payment of tribute.

Sennacherib thus decided to spare them.

This would not be the first time this region paid into the coffers of an Assyrian king. During the conquest by Tiglath Pileser III three decades earlier, a joint Damascus-Israel coalition was defeated. This fundamentally changed the political landscape in Transjordan. The Aramean kings in Damascus and the House of Omri in Samaria had dominated this region for many years. These listed Amurru kings were part of their dominion. When Tiglath Pileser III crushed their short-lived coalition, the region of Transjordan moved into the sphere of Assyria, who we now read collected tribute annually.  

In a letter found at Nimrud dating from either the time of Tiglath Pileser III or Sargon II, we read that Ammon, Moab, Judah, Gaza, and Edom all had brought some form of tribute to Calah for the Assyrian king. The fact that these kings brought tribute to Sennacherib would be unremarkable unless for some reason they had briefly decided

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70 B. Oded wrote a good survey on Assyrian domination of the region. He does not reference Sennacherib at all, but he cites records from Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal to show that during their time, Edom, Moab, and Ammon were under constant threat from marauding bands of Arab tribes and that the Assyrian army would on occasion need to undertake military campaigns to solve the problem. The Amurru kings themselves were too weak to defend their own territory. The Assyrian military had established outposts along the “Kings Highway” to protect the travel lines for payment of tribute. None of this however, is recorded by Sennacherib. See Oded, B. "Observations on Methods of Assyrian Rule in Transjordania after the Palestinian Campaign of Tiglath-Pileser III." Journal of Near Eastern Studies 29.3 (1970). 177-186.

to cancel payment. Lulê’s rebellion may have been such an occasion even if they quickly realized the folly of such action.

Unfortunately not much else can be determined about the Amurru people from just Sennacherib’s official propaganda. Whatever inspiration they took from the news of Sargon’s death faded away quickly. These Amurru kings appear quite unconfident in their ability to fend off a major attack from a distant power. Thus they opt to pay off the invaders rather than suffer Lulê’s fate. Sennacherib’s inclusion of them here in this account is probably to show that after Tyre’s submission, many in the region just fell in line with the new Assyrian authority. Not much else can be gleaned from this account of the Amurru land other than the region’s relative weakness.

Summary of the Observations of Phase 1

In this first phase of the third campaign we learn from Sennacherib’s official propaganda that the political alliance of Tyre and Sidon, which had existed for almost two centuries, was still in force. Tyre was the chief city, but Tyrian kings were called “King of Sidon” as a way of showing political union and for propaganda purposes. This Tyrian/Sidonian city-state alliance was likely wealthy and had amassed large armories nearby for their ground forces. These armories were probably large enough to aid in the provisioning of a foreign army from a distant land for most of the required period of conquest. When the king who had controlled these armories fled in fear of the Assyrians, none of the other nearby city-states felt confident enough to stand up to the invaders. This also included the land of the Amurru kings who were in such a reduced state that they continued to send tribute even if there might have been a brief attempt to cancel
payment. With Phoenicia subdued and the relatively weak powers of the Transjordan region cowed, Sennacherib moved on to Philistia.
Chapter 5 – Phase 2 Philistia

Introduction and Brief Historical Survey

With the Phoenician coast and the Tranjordanian region subdued, Sennacherib continued to the next phase of his campaign in Philistia. One characteristic of this region that we can learn from Sennacherib’s writings is that the Philistine polity was relatively weak when the third campaign begins. I have identified four signs from Sennacherib’s writings that the region historically known as Philistia was in decline when the Assyrian army marched against them in the late 8th century. However, before outlining these signs, I will give a brief survey of Assyrian involvement in Philistia immediately prior to Sennacherib’s invasion.

Philistia’s apparent demise did not begin with Sennacherib’s invasion. As we will see, there are indications in these annals that Judah had dominated part of Philistia for at least a few years. However the main cause for long-term decline was likely previous Assyrian invasions. Tiglath Pileser III was the first to reach Philistine territory with his army. The Philistine king, “Hanunu, the man of Gaza was terrified before my mighty weapons and….fled.”72 Hanunu was eventually restored to power in Gaza but not until the Assyrians had exacted tribute from the city. Tiglath Pileser III also brought other parts of Philistia under Assyria’s hegemony. The most notable was Ashkelon where the

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Mesopotamian sovereign claims he placed Rukibti in charge after his father violated a previous oath. This same Rukibti plays a minor part in Sennacherib’s annals as well.

Even more relevant to Sennacherib’s campaign was the revolt against Sargon II and the role that Egypt played during his efforts to retake the region. Under Sargon, Hanunu again led Gaza into rebellion along with other regional powers. Egyptian forces initially aided him in his endeavors, but even they eventually were defeated and fled from Sargon. Gaza was reclaimed, Hanunu was led away in chains to Assyria, Gaza was forced to pay tribute, and much of the Philistine coast was subdued.

From this time on much of this region enjoyed a calm relationship with Sargon II. The Assyrian king had secured the border with Egypt, and the two rivals enjoyed good relations for much of his reign. Sargon records, “I opened the sealed harbor of Egypt. The Assyrians and Egyptians I mingled together and I made them trade with each other.” Even when the previously mentioned revolt of Ashdod occurred and the leader of the rebellion Iatna fled to Ethiopia, the Ethiopians themselves returned him to the Assyrians for punishment. A young Sennacherib no doubt saw the value of a peaceful relationship with these cities, and correspondence between him and his father from this time records rich payments from Ashdod and either Ashkelon or Gaza.

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73 Luckenbill, Daniel David. *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia* vol 1. 281.
75 Ibid., 92.
76 Tadmor reasons that some kind of an agreement had occurred between the two regional powers for the return of fleeing prisoners. Tadmor, "Philistia under Assyrian Rule." *The Biblical Archaeologist* 29.3 (1966). 94 note 34. The incident is described by Sargon. He does not mention any agreements, but does mention that fear of reprisal forced the Ethiopians to return the fugitive. Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia* vol 2. 31-32.
his reign, Sargon II had clearly subdued the Philistine coast and there was peace and cooperation between Egypt and Assyria.

First Sign of Weakness in Philistia – The term “Philistia” is never mentioned

As mentioned before, the term “Philistia” to designate this region is not used here in the annals to refer to the people of the southern coast of the Levant. Since it is used only once in another inscription of his, we know that the Assyrians knew of a political entity of Philistia at this time. However, the scribe does not use that political moniker for this region in the annals. The scribe does name a person associated with the revolt – Ṣidka. However, he does not mention any polity associated with his people or cities. He only states that he was king of Ashkelon.

One might be tempted to think that he does not call Ṣidka’s faction “Philistine” as a slight to the rebel leader’s credentials. However, this is unlikely since there are other parts of the region that did not join him in this revolt. Cities such as Ashkelon and Beth-Dagon took part in the rebellion. However, others like Gaza are not mentioned, and so we can assume they maintained some loyalty to the Assyrian crown. The city of Ekron seems to be separate from Ṣidka. It is not listed as one of his cities and was likely operating more under the control of Jerusalem. Nonetheless, they too attempt to free themselves from Mesopotamian control. Some cities revolted with Ṣidka, some cities remained either neutral or loyal to Assyria, and some cities revolted under Judah’s influence. What is significant is that in all these cases, none of these entities are labeled
as Philistine. This suggests that Sennacherib saw this area less as a unified political entity and more as a poorly connected collection of city-states.

**Second Sign of Weakness in Philistia – Divided Political Allegiance**

From Sennacherib’s perspective the main provocateur in the Philistine rebellion was the above-mentioned Ṣidka. We are told at first that he, “had not submitted to my yoke” (OI col ii line 60-61). We are also told that Ṣidka does have a following outside of Ashkelon. We read of “cities of Ṣidka” (alānīMES Ša Ṣidka) that appear to have capitulated late and only after the Assyrians besieged them. “Beth-Dagon, Joppa, Banaibarka, Asuru, cities of Ṣidka, who had not speedily bowed in submission at my feet, I besieged, I conquered, I carried off their spoil” (OI col ii line 69-72). It is unclear if these sieges took place before Ṣidka’s capture, and thus the city of Ashkelon surrendered its leadership without a fight, or if Ṣidka and his family were hauled off to Assyria and then those loyal to his cause slowly gave in. In either case, the fact that it took them some time to surrender indicates that this following was somewhat loyal.

Ṣidka’s following does not seem to have extended to Gaza, Ekron, and Gath. These cities, and perhaps a few others, were under the influence of the court at Jerusalem. In the case of Gaza, Sennacherib does not record any resistance at all. He only states that he took the city from Hezekiah and gave it to a more loyal king named Ṣilli-bēl (OI col iii line 31-34). The fact that not everyone followed Ṣidka in his rebellion indicates that
throughout the Philistine region, there was a political divide between those who wanted independence and those who wished to maintain the status quo of Assyrian hegemony. We may also assume, since Sennacherib restores the line of Rukibti to power, that there was an element in the city of Ashkelon that would have preferred to stay loyal to Assyria. The scribe does not mention any battle in Ashkelon. He only writes that Șidka and his family were taken captive back to Assyria. He places Rukibti’s son, Sharru-lu-Darri in charge of Ashkelon and there is no mention of any violent conflict associated with this power change. The loyal faction, represented by Rukibti’s son, owed their allegiance to the Assyrian throne that put them there. The rivals, led by characters such as Șidka, were either yearning for restored Philistine greatness or seeking an alliance with the more local power in Egypt. It is likely these two elements were at political odds with each other, and these competing loyalties certainly diminished the strength of the Philistine polity.

Also after defeating the combined forces outside Eltekeh, Sennacherib states that there were some in Ekron who did not go along with the rebellion. He clearly recognizes there is a faction still loyal to Assyria present in Philistia. Those who treated Assyria lightly, he counted as spoil. However, those who had not taken part in the revolt, he spoke their pardon. Sennacherib then restored Padi over this surviving loyal remnant. (OI col iii line 8-16). The fact that Sennacherib recorded there was a party of Ekronites, which did not go along with the uprising, indicates the divided nature of the region prior to the invasion.
Third Sign of Weakness in Philistia – Hezekiah’s Influence

Another indicator from Sennacherib’s writings of the relative weakness of Philistia at this time is the subordinate relationship of some of its cities to Judah. In Sennacherib’s Letter to God, we read of, “[the city of Gath?] a royal [city] of the Philistines, which H[ezek]iah had captured and strengthened for himself.” The city name Gath is restored, but there is no doubt that it is a royal city of the Philistines. Sennacherib describes it as firmly controlled by Hezekiah, and his “strengthening” of the city includes it being surrounded with high towers and a palace as high as a mountain with a moat dug around it. He had also stationed some of his most skillful warriors there. This is the same Gath known to many modern readers from the story of David and Goliath and is certainly described in the Bible as an important city for the Philistines. However, Sennacherib tells us that by Hezekiah’s day, it was under Judah’s control.

Not just Gath, but Ekron as well had fallen under the sphere of Hezekiah’s influence. The scribe records, “The governors, princes and people of Ekron who Padi their king is the lord of the oath and curse of Assyria, they threw in iron fetters and they gave him to Hezekiah of the land of Judah; he confined him like an enemy; they performed an abomination. Their heart became afraid” (OI col ii lines 73-78). It is significant that Sennacherib says that the leadership of Ekron deposed Padi, but did not keep him there. Instead they sent him to Jerusalem as a prisoner (OI col iii line 15). Ekron is not listed as one of Šidka’s cities. Therefore given what we are told happened, Hezekiah’s court

79 Ibid., 27-28.
probably carried a lot of weight there. They certainly shared in Șidka’s anti-Assyrian sentiment, but looked initially at least to Jerusalem for support of their actions.

It could be that the city of Ekron itself did not feel confident that it was capable of holding such an important prisoner within their walls. Given the presence of the above-mentioned faction at Ekron who did not take part in the rebellion, they may have opted to send Padi to what they perceived as a more secure confinement in Jerusalem. However, it is more likely that Hezekiah wanted to control when or if the cities under his influence could capitulate to the Assyrian threat. He probably demanded the important prisoner be held in his capital for the purpose of any future bargaining with Sennacherib’s forces. Because they transferred the Assyrian governor to Jerusalem, the mutinous leadership of Ekron had no way to negotiate down any reprisal that was sure to come. They had already begun a dangerous revolt and had been convinced to give their most valuable hostage over to the closest regional power. They were almost certainly under heavy pressure from the Judahite capital to have made such a dangerous move.

Also highlighting the Hebrew control of Philistia is the fact that when Sennacherib records he had sufficiently besieged Hezekiah in the capital of Judah, he says, “his cities which I plundered, I cut off from the midst of his land.” The three cities he lists as his cities are Ashdod, Gaza, and Ekron. He then establishes a king over them more sympathetic to Assyria (OI col iii line 30-34). These cities are all historically Philistine cities. However, by Sennacherib’s day, he tells us they were Hezekiah’s. Clearly the kingdom of Judah had expanded their influence in Philistia prior to this campaign.

80 We have no indication that this hostage was used politically, but the Assyrians certainly used hostages in similar fashion. Tadmor, "Philistia under Assyrian Rule." The Biblical Archaeologist. 98.
Fourth Sign of Weakness in Philistia – Dependence on Southern Powers

Sennacherib tells us that the frightened leadership of Ekron, “They received help from the Egyptian kings, the bowmen, the chariots, the horses without number of the strong king of Ethiopia; they came to their assistance” (OI col ii line 79-81). It may have been because of the political divide within Philistia itself, or perhaps it was because of the perceived might of Assyria, but in either case the political leadership needed outside help to stand up to Sennacherib’s forces. They certainly could not stand on their own. Since they had transferred their hostage over to Hezekiah, they could not negotiate their way out of rebellion. Sennacherib tells us, “they became afraid” (OI col ii line 78). It is possible that this reference in the annals is just propaganda. However, given that they did ask Egypt and Ethiopia for aid means at the very least that they did not think they could defend themselves without assistance at that time. They were dependent on the southern powers for the advanced weaponry and forces required to maintain their independence from Nineveh.

Missed Signs – The View From the Nile

Their southern neighbors did in fact come to their aid. This is remarkable because this shows a clear break from the peace that had been established under Sargon II. Even if this peace was established under threat, it was still maintained until this Philistine rebellion. There is no question that the recent accession of Sennacherib to the throne prompted such attempts to throw off the imperial yoke, a typical pattern upon accession of new monarchs. Either they considered Sennacherib weak, or the anti-Assyrian faction in the coastal region must have been gaining enough momentum for the Egyptians and
Ethiopians to risk sending their forces to confront the invaders. In any case what is important to note is that there is a change in policy in the south and the armies of Egypt and Ethiopia combine with Ekron, Timnah, and Eltekeh to march to do battle against Assyria’s new king.

Another reason this incident is remarkable lies in the nature of the battle itself. The scribe records, “in the environs of Eltekeh, they came up against me in battle order, they sharpened their weapons” (OI col ii line 82 – col iii line 1). What Sennacherib continues to describe here is an open field battle and not a siege or counterinsurgency operation. It is the only battle of this nature recorded on the third campaign, and as such it says something about the nature of the coalition.

In his essay Warfare and Military Control, Israel Ephʿal highlights for us three main forms of warfare. One form is guerilla warfare in which an enemy simply antagonizes an occupying power. This requires a minimal level of military capability because the combatants can strike the occupiers and then hide. They do not have to gain or maintain any territory or city. Another form is siege warfare. Here an enemy just has to outlast the aggressor. His fortifications must be strong enough and his supplies must be deep enough to hold out for sometimes years on end. This requires a moderate level of military capability because in order to be victorious, he is not required to gain ground. He only has to maintain what he has. The third form of warfare is the open pitched battle, which usually does not last long, but requires a high degree of both confidence and capability since each side is looking to gain and maintain control of the other. Comparing the first two, he says the siege is, “by nature a static and longer contest because the defender is supported by fortifications which considerably reduce the
advantages of quantitative and qualitative superiority, as well as the maneuvering ability of the offender.”81 In other words an inferior military force will likely prefer a siege to an open field fight because the process of the siege degrades the advantages of the superior force. If the fortifications are effective over time, they become a force equalizer for the weaker army.

The general context in which he explains this principle of warfare is the behavior of the Assyrian army as it invades foreign lands. However, what applies here to the Assyrian army can equally apply to their opponents. Most of the battles fought on Sennacherib’s campaigns were of the siege form. Their enemies would have known that open field combat against such an enemy was folly and thus chose to hold out behind fortifications. The defenders would then only need to withstand assaults or outlast the sanction of supplies.

That this coalition chose to come out and fight tells us something about how they saw themselves. “This implies that an army will fight a pitched battle only if it can match swords with the opposing force in condition of dynamic warfare and estimates that it will have a reasonable chance of success.”82 As afraid as they were of the Assyrians, the anti-Assyrian faction in Philistia, the Egyptians, the Ethiopians, and possibly some augmenting forces from Judah (though this is not mentioned) together felt confident enough to defeat the invaders outside the protection of defensive fortifications. We may look through the Assyrian lens and see clear signs of Philistine weakness, but sitting on

the banks of the Nile, the leadership in Egypt saw a chance to be free of the Assyrian menace. Therefore, they gambled with a major open field battle against Sennacherib’s army.

The coalition proved too weak to defeat the invaders. According to Sennacherib, the gamble did not pay off and the battle ends with an Assyrian victory. Sennacherib claims to have Egyptian and Ethiopian prisoners whom he kept alive. That he did not kill them suggests that either he did not wish to inflame the relationship with the southern powers or perhaps he wished to use these prisoners for bargaining in future negotiations.

The Philistine members of the coalition however, incurred retribution. The victors plundered Eltekeh and Timnah, and executed reprisals upon the leaders of Ekron when they, “raised their bodies on stakes all around the city” (OI col iii line 8-10). The Nile powers failed to observe the weakness of their Philistine ally, embarked on a risky and unnecessary military adventure, and paid for it with a humiliating defeat in this the only recorded open field confrontation of the third campaign.

Summary of Observations on Phase 2

This defeat of Ekron concludes the second phase of Sennacherib’s third campaign. In the account of this campaign we learn that the Philistine region was still relatively weak. Not only had generations of Assyrians conquered their territory in recent past, but the kingdom of Judah had, at least during the reign of Hezekiah, established control of some of its cities. Indeed, the Assyrian monarch never mentions the term “Philistia” in the annals, and only once refers to this area as Philistia in other known inscriptions. The region also appears divided as to how to respond to the encroaching Mesopotamian
threat, and there is evidence that many did not go along with the defiance. For those who did rebel, they required the assistance of the Egyptians and Ethiopians because they were too weak to handle the invading forces alone. Despite this weakness, those who did rise up managed to convince their neighbors to the south that their strength was sufficient enough to breach established peace rather than maintain the status quo. This would culminate in the only open field confrontation that Sennacherib records while in the Levant.

Those in Philistia who remained loyal to Assyria survived, and the rebellion was put down for the time being. Only one area within “Hittite land” remained to be conquered. The aforementioned king Hezekiah also chose the path of defiance and had maintained this disposition despite what he saw had happened to his neighbors. As a result, for Sennacherib, the road to the subjugation of rebellious colonies and Pax Assyriaca would now take him through the kingdom of Judah.
Chapter 6 – Phase 3 Judah

The Rise of Hezekiah’s Kingdom

On a bull inscription from the palace at Nineveh, the scribe abbreviated the account from the annals of the third phase of Sennacherib’s third campaign: “I destroyed the wide district of Judah; the distant, obstinate Hezekiah, its king, I made him bow to my feet.”

Some have argued that parts of this phase of the campaign actually began during the invasion of Philistia, and in light of the fact that certain cities of Philistia are in the hands of the Judahite king when Sennacherib invades, this should not be ruled out. There is no way to know for certain since not all the details in the annals are meant to be in exact chronological order. In any case, here the scribe focuses on what seems to be the main portion of the third campaign – the wide kingdom of Judah and its strong proud king.

From the account of this campaign in the annals, the inscriptions, and the reliefs, I have identified four signs that Judah was in fact the dominant political entity in the Levant at the time of Sennacherib’s invasion. I will need to provide a brief historical survey of Judah’s relationship with Assyria in the immediate years before the invasion in order to highlight this from Sennacherib’s texts. By looking at the way previous

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83 Sennacherib, and Daniel David Luckenbill. The Annals of Sennacherib. 77.
Assyrian kings had dealt with Judah, we can determine that this rise to regional
dominance was not only real, but also a relatively new phenomenon.

Hezekiah’s father, Ahaz, oversaw a kingdom suffering from decline and dependent on
foreign powers for its defense. After Tiglath Pileser III subdued the previously discussed
revolt in Gaza, he listed Ahaz the Judean as one of many who brought him tribute.85
Earlier, Ahaz had sent him a letter requesting assistance against the Arameans, and even
offered to pay him from the temple treasury. The Deuteronomic History does not provide
any further details about relations between Ahaz and Assyria beyond their vassal-
suzerain status, but the Chronicler indicates that there was further Assyrian intervention
in Judah.86 The so-called Syro-Ephraimite war saw Israel and Syria attempt to force
Judah to join their coalition against Syria, but when Assyria eventually turned to these
rebels, Judah remained a loyal vassal to Assyria. The Assyrians eventually conquered
Damascus and, with regard to their Israeliite cousins to the north in Samaria, Tiglath
Pileser III claims he, “razed all its cities to the ground, its people and its cattle I had
despoiled, the city of Samaria alone did I leave, they slew Pekah their king.”87
Meanwhile in the south, Judah remained on the sideline, but in a significantly reduced
state.88

Introductions, Translations, and Commentary.* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and
Humanities, 1994). 170-171. This is part of Rainey’s historical survey of the region in *The
86 2 Chronicles 28:20-22 “So Tiglath Pileser king of Assyria came against him and afflicted him
instead of strengthening him. Although Ahaz took a portion out of the house of the Lord and out
of the palace of the king and of the princes, and gave it to the king of Assyria, it did not help him.
Now in the time of his distress this same king Ahaz became yet more unfaithful to the Lord.”
88 There is a very thorough survey of the history of this era drawing from both Hebrew
and Mesopotamian sources Ibid., 227 – 232.
Not long after this, a new king in Samaria, Hoshea, stirred up the anger of the new Assyrian king Shalmanesser V. This Assyrian monarch reigned only a few years and it appears that just as he was about to subdue the last holdout of the Israelite kingdom, Sargon II took over as the sovereign of Mesopotamia (722 B.C.). Hezekiah had become king of Judah in 728 B.C. He watched the change in power in Assyria and saw what both Shalmanesser V and the new king Sargon II had done to Samaria. He understood the serious implications of any resistance to Assyrian domination.

When Did Hezekiah’s Rise Begin?

It is possible that Hezekiah began to expand his military capability upon seeing Sargon’s destruction of Samaria, but it is more likely that he avoided confrontational activities and simply paid the required tribute for much of the Assyrian king’s early reign. This would keep his northern border relatively calm. He may have seen the need for credible defenses to his kingdom after seeing his relatives to the north being crushed, but any serious attempt at a military buildup would definitely attract unwanted Assyrian attention.

Sargon mentions that he himself took Gath. We noted earlier a reference to Hezekiah in Sennacherib’s Letter to God, which states that Gath was “captured and strengthened for himself,” and that he built some rather impressive fortifications there. This Judean fortification of the Philistine city likely came either at the very end of Sargon’s reign or in

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the few years that Sennacherib ruled before he launched his invasion into Judah.91 However, Sargon II barely mentions Judah in his writings.92 Because of this, any military escalation begun during Sargon’s time would have been in its infancy stages or else quite transparent to the new sovereign. A serious buildup certainly would catch the eyes of the Assyrian king and thus bring down the wrath of Ashur. So it is more likely that Hezekiah begins a military escalation when Sennacherib ascends to the throne.

First Sign That Judah is the Regional Powerhouse – Many Walled Cities

When Sennacherib comes to the Levant, he describes Hezekiah’s kingdom as already robust. In the above-quoted boast in the bull inscription we find a hint of the first of four signs that indicate Judah was the superior political entity in the Levant. He stated, “I destroyed the wide district of Judah; the distant, obstinate Hezekiah, its king, I made him bow to my feet.”93 What the scribe says here in abbreviated form, he explains in more detail in the annals. What does he mean by “wide district of Judah?” He explains that this refers to “46 of his strong, walled cities, and small cities encircling them, which were without number” (OI col 3 line 19-21). No other description by Sennacherib of a political entity in the Levant approaches the amount of cities in this enumeration. The city lists in Phoenicia and Philistia are no doubt incomplete, but it is safe to assume that should there have been a “wide district” of comparable size under the control of Șidka or

91 Na'aman, “Sennacherib's "Letter to God" on His Campaign to Judah." *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* No. 214. 27; Sennacherib takes over in 705 BC and the third campaign begins in 701 BC.
92 Judah is on a list of peoples that pay tribute to Sargon II. Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia* vol 2. 105.
Lulê, the scribe most likely would have included it in his boast. We do hear about the eight Tyrian supply cities, which as mentioned before likely had vast quantities of military provisions. However, there is no mention of small cities “without number.” Moreover, these Judean cities are described by Sennacherib as being walled. Even if we allow for these walls to be of relatively poor quality, the fact that Hezekiah’s kingdom fortified so many cities suggests that this kingdom had considerable resources.

Also important is that with the exception of Babylon, this list of cities given in the annals is larger than any other region invaded by Sennacherib. After a relatively lengthy description of the plundering of Babylon, he describes Merodach-Baladan as controlling the largest number of cities: “In the might of Assur my lord, 75 of his strong cities, walled cities of Chaldea and 420 small cities encircling them, I surrounded, I conquered, their spoil I carried off” (OI col i line 35 – 38). He does also enumerate cities taken from other fierce enemies. On the second campaign when the scribe describes the invasion of the land of Elippi and the flight of its king, Ispabâra, we read of a relatively smaller number of cities: “The cities Marubishti and Akkuddu his royal residence-cities, together with 34 small cities encircling them, I besieged, I captured, I destroyed, I devastated, I burned with fire” (OI col ii line 16-19). In other instances in these annals when the scribe enumerates the cities of a given territory, the number is no larger than thirty-four. In all other instances in the annals where we read of an enumeration of cities, the lists are not as extensive as Judah, and none of the cities are said to be walled. Other than Babylon, no political entity encountered on any of his campaigns is described as controlling more urban centers than Judah.
Of course we should not look at this as an exact count of cities under Hezekiah’s control, and the comparison here is not one of a literal understanding of what the annals describe. However, the scribe chose to use enumeration of cities as a literary device in his narrative and in so doing, assigned a large amount of cities to Judah. It may not be valid to simply count up the cities and conclude Judah’s relative strength from the sum, but it is valid to point out that the scribe uses the enumeration of cities as a way to describe strength. Given the comparison, this clearly indicates the relative strength of Judah at least within the context of the Levant.

He not only describes forty-six of these cities as being strong and walled, but he also records that a good deal of effort went into their capture. He writes of siege engines, battering rams, mines, tunnels, and breaches as all part of the effort to subjugate the region (OI col iii 21-23). If we can believe this account, then it appears that the fortifications, while not insurmountable, were quite substantial. This would only have

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94 We should not make an exact comparison of any two political entities such as Babylon versus Judah from a literal reading of the numbers in these annals. Here Babylon is said to have 420 small cities. This is no doubt a larger amount of small cities than existed at this time in Judah. The Assyrian kings were more familiar with their southern neighbors and therefore more able to accurately count its cities and environs. Thus despite the fact that Judah is described as having small cities without number, its actual number was likely smaller than the cities of Babylon. Also, in his book Gallagher points out the size difference between Mesopotamian versus Palestinian cities: “Jerusalem, by far the largest city in Judah, had an area of 600 dunams in 701; Ashdod had an area of 350 dunams; Lachish, 72 dunams; and Ashkelon, 66 dunams. By contrast Dur-Sharrukin had an area of 2,935 dunams; Calah, 3500; Babylon, 2,000; and Nineveh, 6,870. Thus even Jerusalem was small by Mesopotamian standards.” Obviously, given this size difference, any straight numeric comparison falls short. However taken as a literary device, we can still see in the enumeration of cities, that the scribe intended to describe Judah as a regional powerhouse. Gallagher, Sennacherib’s Campaign to Judah: New Studies. 263-264.

95 In Ussiskin’s book on the battle at Lachish, he points out that there is a remarkable correlation with the artist’s perspective of the depiction of the battle of Lachish found at Nineveh and the excavated archaeological remains of this period. Ussishkin, David. The Conquest of Lachish by Sennacherib. (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv U, Institute of Archaeology, 1982). 119-126.
been possible if Hezekiah had at his disposal a quite substantial amount of resources with which to construct defenses for his cities.

*Second Sign That Judah is the Regional Powerhouse – List of Tribute*

Another sign that Judah was a powerful political entity at the time of Sennacherib’s invasion is the list of booty and tribute recorded in the annals. Sennacherib does detail a remarkable amount of booty from his conquest of the Judean territory. He writes, “200,150 people, great and small, male and female, horses, mules, asses, camels, cattle and sheep without number I brought them out and counted as spoil” (OI col iii line 24-27). He finishes off the account of the third campaign with an even more impressive tribute list:

> “With 30 talents of gold and 800 talents of silver, precious stones, antimony, jewels, large sand stones, ivory couches, chairs with ivory back rests, elephant hide, ivory of an elephant, ebony, boxwood, and any heavy treasure, and his daughters, his harem, his male and female musicians into Nineveh, my royal city he had them bring it before me to give as tribute and perform service; he sent his messenger.” (OI col iii line 41-49)

Regardless of whether or not the amount of booty described in both sections is accurate, the list, by comparison to other conquered peoples, is substantial. We can assume Babylon was undoubtedly a wealthier city than Jerusalem. Even so, the detailed description of the spoil taken from it compares closely to that of Judah (OI col i line 20-35). The Arameans have a comparable number of people (208,000) he claims to carry off (OI col i line 50), but the total list of booty is still relatively smaller than what was exacted from Hezekiah. No list given in these annals of items taken as spoil compares to what Sennacherib describes having forced out of the hand of the Judahite monarch.

96 See Appendix A of this thesis for a discussion on the accuracy of Assyrian numbers.
Moreover, the list of booty taken from Jerusalem on this third campaign is large by comparison to other lists given by previous Assyrian kings. Scholar John Holladay calculates that Hezekiah’s tribute, “is one of the highest tributes recorded in the royal Assyrian inscriptions: sixth behind three out of four usurpers.” If his assessment is correct, then only five other enemies were ever described as paying out more tribute than Hezekiah in all of the extant written history of Assyria. Whatever accuracy we may determine for the content of this literary device, it is clear that its extent by comparison communicates a high level of importance attributed to Judah.

Third Sign That Judah is the Regional Powerhouse – Hezekiah Survives

Another sign of Judah’s regional dominance is the fact that the kingdom survives the Assyrian campaign. Despite the massive reduction in Hezekiah’s kingdom, Sennacherib never claims to have conquered Jerusalem and thus entirely subdued the kingdom of Judah. This fact is usually discussed in the context of trying to harmonize the account in the Hebrew Scriptures and the Assyrian records. While this is definitely a worthwhile subject of inquiry, here we will discuss Sennacherib’s failure as an aspect of how robust and durable the Judahite polity actually was from what the Assyrians themselves describe. The scribe cannot be expected to overtly state the failure of the Assyrian army to complete their mission in Judah, but how he does record what happens at Jerusalem indicates the strength of ancient Judah relative to other powers the Assyrians confronted.

The scribe describes Hezekiah as being caged up like a bird (OI col iii line 27-28). The bird is not an uncommon analogy in the annals. Indeed, these annals open with Sennacherib causing the mighty kings of the earth to flee like birds (OI col i line 16-19). There are two other specific occasions when individuals in these annals are compared to a bird. The first is Merodach-Baladan who flees like a bird from Sennacherib in the fourth campaign (OI col iii line 59-65). The second are the mountainous warriors on the peak of mount Nipur who at the beginning of the fifth campaign are not submissive and eventually are conquered by the Assyrian invaders (OI col iii line 78-79). However, the comparison to birds is indicative of an enemy who ultimately survives even if it is clearly meant as a derisive description in Sennacherib’s writings.

A previous Assyrian king has also employed this metaphor to describe an enemy. In the same year that Tiglath Pileser III came up against king Rezin in Damascus, his scribes speak of a similar confrontation. William Gallagher in his book *Sennacherib’s Campaign to Judah* quotes the Assyrian source: “For 45 days I set up my camp [in the surround]ings of his city and enclosed him like a bird in a cage. His gardens (and) [grapevi]nes, orchards without number, I cut down; I did not leave a single one.”

He then proceeds to explain that the Assyrians obviously did not take the city, but clearly wanted to use this simile to describe their enemy as imprisoned. In a footnote he points out that the Assyrians did indeed conquer the city but not until a year after this

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98. The original source of this quote from Tiglath Pileser III can be found in Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III, King of Assyria: Critical Edition, with Introductions, Translations, and Commentary*. 78-79. However, the idea of comparing this quote to Sennacherib’s annals was from Gallagher’s book where he does state he made a few changes to Tadmor’s translation. Gallagher, *Sennacherib’s Campaign to Judah: New Studies*. 133
Here we have a clear example of an enemy being compared to a bird. We also know that at the time of this comparison, that same enemy had not yet been defeated. The bird analogy may be an attempt to humiliate the king of Damascus, but given the rest of the context in which it was written, it instead communicates the aggressor’s failure.

The same must be true of its use in Sennacherib’s annals. Hezekiah is simply imprisoned instead of fleeing. Other Judean cities as well as Ekron he described as being captured, leveled, or taken. He says he joyfully entered Babylon (OI col i line 28). In other places he claims of his enemies: “Their cities I captured and I carried off their spoil, I destroyed, I devastated, I burned with fire” (OI col iv line 11-12). Nowhere does any of this kind of language appear in the conclusion of the siege of Jerusalem. This is a striking omission and can only indicate the ultimate failure to finish the subjugation of Judah. This does not mean that there was not widespread destruction across the Judean countryside. However, the third phase of Sennacherib’s third campaign ends with Hezekiah in a cage and not as captured or having fled. This can only mean that he and his diminished kingdom survived.

Sennacherib also sets up “earthworks” or rather fortifications against the city of Jerusalem. The word used here is bīrātī and it is the plural of the word for fortress or citadel. The ancient Assyrian monarch could not penetrate the capital so he set up these fortresses around the area of the city to turn back any who try to leave (OI col iii line 27-30). The goal in so doing is to starve the city into submission instead of breach its

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99 Ibid., 133 footnote 31.
100 “Earthworks” is how Luckenbill translates this, but Gallagher as well as more recent translations update this to “fortresses.” Sennacherib, and Daniel David Luckenbill. The Annals of Sennacherib. 33. Also see Gallagher, Sennacherib’s Campaign to Judah: New Studies. 129; RINAP’s translation is at http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/rinap/rinap3/corpus/
perimeter. His son and grandson would have to do the same to Tyre with this important similarity – they never conquered Tyre either. These descriptions are meant to distract the reader from the fact that the enemy is too well entrenched to conquer and thus other forms of harassment are employed. When one reads of these fortifications, the Assyrian military sounds quite intimidating. However, when one factors in what is omitted, it is apparent that this description was included to mask the fact that Hezekiah’s city had not been breached.

When Lulê saw the Assyrian army approaching, he fled without even putting up a fight. Šidka did not last long and was taken back to Nineveh into captivity. The Egyptians, Ethiopians, and Philistines matched swords on the open field with the Mesopotamians (who were a long way from home for this battle) and were unsuccessful. Hezekiah on the other hand was left caged up like a bird with Assyrian fortifications encircling him. To be sure, the territory of Judah was severely diminished, and the Assyrian invasion reduced the size and strength of the kingdom. However, Hezekiah is left unpunished in his capital city when the narrative ends. Given the aggressive onslaught by such a proven and determined enemy, the survival of the Jerusalem is an unambiguous sign that the polity of Judah proved to be the Levant’s superior power when Sennacherib came for his conquest.

Fourth Sign That Judah is the Regional Powerhouse – Elite Troops

The fourth sign of Judah’s regional superiority is the existence of advanced military personnel in Jerusalem. It is no surprise that Sennacherib leaves out many specifics as to

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how the Judeans were able to withstand his invasion. However, he does record one important hint about the sophistication of the military forces stationed in Jerusalem.

He mentions that Hezekiah had brought in *urbi* and *ṣābē* for reinforcements (OI col iii line 39). These can be translated as “auxiliary forces” and “elite troops” respectively.\(^{102}\) Before each word is the determinative LU for a type of people or a skill. This has led some to believe that the *urbi* are actually Arabs.\(^{103}\) However, this is a mistranslation, and it is likely that *urbi* is some sort of technical military term, in the light of its usage in other contexts.\(^{104}\) The determinative LU can definitely refer to a people of a certain skill, and when the scribe records the battle with the Egyptian charioteers he uses this same determinative before that type of skilled warrior. We are also told these *urbi* with this determinative are part of Hezekiah’s efforts to strengthen the city. Since they are a part of the fortification, they are also likely more capable warriors than just average conscripts.

There are some (usually older) translations, which indicate that these specialized troops deserted when Sennacherib’s army comes against the city.\(^{105}\) Others simply believe that this is just another way of describing that these troops cannot be counted on.\(^{106}\) In any case they seem to be part of the subsequent detailed list of tribute that

\(^{102}\) This is found on col iv line 24 on the RINAP website at [http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/rinap/rinap3/corpus/](http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/rinap/rinap3/corpus/)


\(^{104}\) Ephʿal also points out that Sennacherib spells “Arab” differently in other places in the annals and thus it is almost certainly not a marker of ethnicity. Ephʿal, I. ""Arabs" in Babylonia in the 8th Century B. C." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 94.1 (1974) 110-111 note 16.


\(^{106}\) After a good discussion on why the translation of “desertion” is a bad reading, Gallagher writes, “The word *tillati* is untypical in Assyrian royal inscriptions and it was not widely used in the first millennium B.C. The phrase was probably taken from omen literature, particularly the
Hezekiah was forced to pay out to keep the Assyrians from assaulting the city. Regular conscripted troops would not be a very valuable asset to give as a tribute. Even though Hezekiah had to surrender these elite troops, the fact that they were recorded as part of the tribute must mean that some of the military force employed by the Hebrews had respectable martial skills.\(^{107}\)

There is evidence that some of the captured Judahite soldiers were skilled enough to be employed by the Assyrians in important combat functions. On a panel that was found just outside of the Sennacherib’s palace in Nineveh, there is a depiction of the king’s bodyguard. The dress of one of the guards is quite similar to the dress of the Judahite soldiers depicted repelling the Assyrian assault on Lachish.\(^{108}\) It is likely this is meant to be a depiction of a Judean soldier in the service of the Assyrian military. If this soldier was selected to be a part of the king’s bodyguard, then it stands to reason that he would have above-average fighting skills. This depiction could very well be a reference to these urbi who were part of Hezekiah’s tribute and possibly serving in elite capacities back in Nineveh. Even if this depiction is not one of these urbi, the fact that these Judean soldiers were placed in such high-level positions indicates they were warriors of considerable skill.

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omen series šumma izbu, which sometimes has the passage šarru/rubû tillati irašši (the king/prince will have auxiliary troops). Iršû tillati was inserted in Sennacherib’s annals because it had some ironic undertones for an erudite Mesopotamian reader. The omens show that tillati troops could help a king to victory, but they could also be unreliable.” Gallagher, *Sennacherib’s Campaign to Judah: New Studies.* 140.

\(^{107}\) We also read in *Sennacherib’s Letter to God* that Hezekiah had “warriors skillful in battle” to defend Gath. This is not the same term for those he brought in to Jerusalem, but it is another indication that Sennacherib acknowledges the warriors of the Jewish kingdom had impressive fighting skills Na’aman, "Sennacherib’s ‘Letter to God’ on His Campaign to Judah." *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* No. 214 (1974), 26-27.

\(^{108}\) http://www.bmimages.com/results.asp?image=00111449001
Summary of the Observations on Phase Three

Sennacherib states that before the invasion, Judah was a wide territory with many walled cities, and that its king was strong and proud. I have outlined four reasons why we should not only believe him, but conclude that the ancient kingdom of Judah at the close of the 8th century B.C. was the premier political power in the Levant. The amount of cities identified as belonging to Judah is greater than all other political entities in the annals except for Babylon itself. The list of tribute taken is more extensive than any other recorded in the annals and one of the most extensive lists in all of Assyrian recorded history. His account of the final phase of the third campaign is meant to be a description of Hezekiah’s humiliation. In so doing the scribe employs similar methods used to describe other kingdoms that we know actually survived Assyrian aggression. He also did not include normal terminology used to communicate utter defeat of a foe. This means that for all of their efforts, the Assyrians failed to achieve the goal of full subjugation of Judah.

To be able to survive an Assyrian attack definitely requires a level of military sophistication and depth of resources beyond that of a second tier political entity. However, survive they did. This is a feat that only powerhouse city-states like Tyre accomplished when Sargon II besieged them; but other equally powerful kingdoms like the one in Damascus did not (even if it managed to withstand the first year of the invasion of Tiglath Pileser III).

Sennacherib meant to record for his descendants that he had humbled Hezekiah. However, by failing to conquer his capital at Jerusalem, he instead communicated a message that this once powerful Hebrew monarch and his line would live on. No other
political entity in the Levant had been able to withstand the Assyrian aggression and most had simply given up without a fight. Hezekiah chose resistance, and even though he had to pay off the invaders, he never ultimately submitted to their yoke. This would have only been possible if before the invasion, Hezekiah had at his disposal a comparatively larger amount of resources than all other city-states and political entities in the region.
Conclusion

Over 150 years ago, Sir Austen Henry Layard reopened the world of ancient Assyria for contemporary eyes. Before this, what little information we had about Mesopotamia had been transmitted to the modern world through the works of the Greek historians and the Hebrew prophets. With Layard’s discoveries, these obscure kings of antiquity took on a new life. Moreover, it was now possible to do to the Hebrews and Greeks what had long been done to the Assyrians – see them through the lens of an outsider.

This new possibility was the subject of this thesis. I have taken what Layard and later excavators have discovered and analyzed it for descriptions of the people of the Levant in the late 8th century B.C. The focus was narrowed to Sennacherib’s third campaign and the political/ethnic entities he encountered along the way. Only sparingly did I engage in harmonization of the contemporary Assyrian sources with later records. I worked almost exclusively with sources that were Mesopotamian and relatively contemporary with the events described. I sought to engage the Assyrians on their own terms without tampering from later and foreign perspectives. I wanted to view ancient Phoenicia, Philistia, and Judah with an exclusively Assyrian lens. What resulted was this commentary on Sennacherib’s writings and art with a special emphasis on the political and ethnic dynamic of the Levant when this Assyrian monarch launched his invasion of the region.

I discovered that the geographical breakdown that Sennacherib applies to this region was not exactly the breakdown we see in our history books today. Instead of the three
regions commonly discussed in modern historical-geographies, the invaders labeled much of the Levant with one atavistic term “Hittite.” What he then records is a continuous military campaign down the Mediterranean coast to the border with Egypt and then extending inland to the Judean hills.

Where we see Phoenicia, the Assyrians saw a collection of city-states with Tyre being the most prominent and whose king carried the label “king of Sidon.” Tyre had at its disposal several weapons depots and armories which the conquering army quickly seized. This allowed them the necessary provisions to successfully continue their campaign throughout “Hittite land.” Not much effort was required of the advancing army in this initial stage. Many of the cities and polities in this phase of the campaign surrendered without a fight.

Once Phoenicia had been subdued, Sennacherib continued his march along the coast where he found a politically divided populace in Philistia that had been weakened by years of Assyrian military campaigns and increased pressure from their neighbors. A few Philistine factions emerge from the text of the annals. One was controlled by a local upstart at Ashkelon and another was controlled by the court at Jerusalem. These two factions challenged the Mesopotamian invaders. Another faction seems to have remained loyal to the throne in Nineveh, and when this phase of the campaign had concluded, they would not only survive, but also be placed in power.

As weak as they appear in the Assyrian narrative, the rebellious Philistine parties had managed to convince the Egyptian and Ethiopian powers to the south to break an established peace and confront Sennacherib’s army. This culminated in the only open field battle recorded on this campaign. This was an event that showed that these
challengers carried with them what proved to be an overinflated confidence. The result was a disaster for the rebellion, and the Assyrians repaid the defiance with typical Mesopotamian cruelty.

Only one region remained on this campaign – the embattled kingdom of Judah. King Hezekiah had watched his father oversee a people who were beholden to foreign powers for their defenses. Once he ascended the throne, he seems to have maintained the status quo relationship with the Assyrians. For whatever reason, when the Assyrian crown was suddenly passed on to Sennacherib, the king of Judah felt the need for a military buildup. This king began to fortify his wide district in preparation for war. Eventually he would have forty-six walled cities under his command. From the narrative in the annals we can clearly see that in Assyrian eyes, Hezekiah oversaw the dominant power in the region. He had amassed enough wealth to create sophisticated defenses, train elite troops, and pay off a considerable tribute demand.

This payoff is described in the annals, but what is most revealing about this confrontation is what is not recorded. Absent in the narrative is any reference to a conquest of the city of Jerusalem. No other leader of a rebellion was allowed to keep his seat in his capital after challenging the might of Assyria. Despite a relatively successful campaign through the Judean hillside, the Mesopotamian army seems to have had trouble finishing off the capital of Judah. This indicates that Hezekiah administered an ancient kingdom that was able to accomplish what no other kingdom in the region had been able to do – resist Assyrian subjugation and survive. Because of this, there can be little doubt that the ancient kingdom of Judah was the dominant political entity in the Levant at the outset of Sennacherib’s third campaign.
Sennacherib records, “200,150 people, great and small, male and female, horses, mules, asses, camels, cattle and sheep without number I brought them out and counted as spoil” (OI col iii line 24-27). This high number of people recorded in this quote has been the subject of much scrutiny over the years. Some believe that is should not be taken at face value. They reason that this is just another example of Assyrian hyperbolic language used when describing a defeated enemy on a public monument or record. To demonstrate this, they point to known discrepancies between accounts and surmise that there is an exaggeration of the figures. There are business documents where an exact accounting of booty taken is listed and then a much higher number shows up in annals or monuments.

Of this phenomenon Olmstead writes, “The Assyrians as their business documents show, could be exceedingly exact with numbers. But this exactness did not extend to their historical inscriptions.” He then makes an observation about Sargon’s scribes that is applicable to the very number under discussion in Sennacherib’s annals:

What shall we say then when we find that a reviser has transformed a booty of 1,235 sheep in his original into a booty of 100,225! This last procedure, the addition of a huge round number to the fairly small amount of the original, is a common trick of the Sargonide scribe, of which many examples may be detected by a comparison of Sargon’s Display inscription with its original, the Annals. So when Sennacherib tells us that when he took from little Judah no less that 200,150 prisoners, and in spite of the fact that Jerusalem itself was not captured, we may deduct the
200,000 as a product of the exuberant fancy of the Assyrian scribe and accept the 150 as somewhere near the actual number captured and carried off. 109

The method of determining a more precise number is simple: dismiss any large rounded value in the final tally by removing the zeros in the total and then keep the lower number that remains.

Whether or not it is valid to simply remove the large round number from what is recorded and keep the remainder as the true value is still speculative. Not all inflations of numbers are “exuberant fancy” as Olmstead describes. There are plenty of scribal errors as well which better account for textual variants and discrepancies. Still the pattern of inflating numbers first shows up in the Middle Assyrian period and then we see it accelerated in the Neo-Assyrian accounts. 110 As a result we would be wise to show some incredulity at such a large number as 200,150.

While it may be proper to question this number, there are reasons why it should not be dismissed altogether. The above-mention destruction of Samaria and subjugation of Israel would have likely created a huge refugee wave down into the south. Shalmanessar V and Sargon II claimed many deportees, but presumably some had made it out before capture. Their cousins to the south would likely have taken at least some of them in. Thus the

110 Millard in his essay, “Large Numbers in the Assyrian Royal Inscriptions” provides a great discussion of Assyrian numbers on pages 213-222. “The majority of the large numbers in the Assyrian royal inscriptions are preserved in single sources only, or were copied without change. The opportunity to observe progressive inflation is, therefore, rare. Can the single sources be deemed reliable when they report large numbers? Each one needs examination on its own merits and in the overall context of the numbers.” Millard seems to imply that one can be unfairly skeptical when analyzing Assyrian propaganda. Millard, Alan R. ”Large Numbers in the Assyrian Royal Inscriptions.” Ah, Assyria--: Studies in Assyrian History and Ancient Near Eastern Historiography Presented to Hayim Tadmor. Ed. Mordechai Cogan and Israel Eph‘al . (Jerusalem: Magnes, Hebrew U, 1991). 220.
population of Judah probably experienced a sharp increase in Hezekiah’s day. Many of these might have found refuge in the small “cities without number” and thus were easily captured and taken away for resettlement. A presumed presence of a large number of Israelite refugees in the territory of Judah could easily explain the large number of captives recorded in these annals. While I do wonder about the large number here, there is no need to dismiss it completely.\(^{111}\)

Still there are debates over whether the archaeological record supports a population large enough in Judah at the time of the third campaign to make Sennacherib’s claim believable. The debates over archaeology are obviously outside the scope of this study and so will not be addressed here. However, it may have been the case that the population of Judah was too low to accept Sennacherib at his word. A method such as the one Olmstead posited would then seem necessary.

However, should the archaeological record prove sufficient to show definitively that there were not even 200,150 people in Judah at the time of Sennacherib’s invasion, there is another interpretation of the annals that should be explored. In his essay, "Implicit Population Figures and Historical Sense: What Happened to 200,150 Judahites in 701 BCE," Ziony Zevit makes an important set of observations that have relevance to the

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\(^{111}\) Millard mentions current studies are showing that not all inflations and discrepancies are just propagandistic in nature and thus not reliable. He says, “From this improved understanding should issue a finer evaluation of their content, although it is necessary to observe that a conforming to a formula or a tradition, using stock phrases or producing propaganda, does not thereby evacuate his narrative of historical content or accuracy.” He goes on to explain that Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal did not record large figures for the people captured. “The questions to be considered, therefore, concern the value of these large figures: are they fantasies, or indicators of great but imprecise numbers, or are they largely reliable historical records?” Millard, "Large Numbers in the Assyrian Royal Inscriptions." *Ah, Assyria—: Studies in Assyrian History and Ancient Near Eastern Historiography Presented to Hayim Tadmor.* 213-214.
accuracy of the number recorded. If he is correct, then perhaps Sennacherib’s scribes are closer to the real number than Olmstead claimed.

Zevit points out that the only people who are explicitly recorded in the account of the third campaign to have been removed and taken to Assyria, are Šidka and his family. Of Šidka he says, “I uprooted and I obtained for Ashur” (assuḫama ana Aššur uraššu). Sargon II employs these same verbs when discussing the resettlement of conquered lands on his campaigns. “However, when referring to Beth Dagon, Joppa, Bene Barak, and Azor, cities under Šidka’s control that had not submitted to him quickly, Sennacherib states only that he conquered them and ašlula šallasun ‘I despoiled their spoil.’ Sennacherib reports the same in his treatment of Eltekeh and Timnah, cities that sided with Ekron and Judah against him.”

Regarding the statement about the 200,150, the verb translated as “brought away” (ušešamma) is the same verb he uses to describe bringing Padi out of Jerusalem. It does not necessarily refer to resettlement, but rather simply bringing them out of their cities. He then states that he counted them as spoil (šalatiš amnu). For this to refer to resettlement, the preposition ana with a place name must be added. That preposition is not written here and we are only told that this incident is about spoil. Zevit writes:

Writing about Judah, Sennacherib does not use the verb with any distinctive preposition, while the context supplies no toponym that might be interpreted as the implicit destination of the purported exiles. In the

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113 “When removal from one place to another is intended and this verb alone is used, a necessary preposition is added: šallatu kabitu ašlula ana X ‘a great spoil I despoiled/captured/took/carried off/removed to (Assur, my city, etc.)” Ibid., 363.
absence of the requisite verb, preposition, and geographical name indicating their ultimate destination during a campaign not characterized by massive deportations, a description of exiling and resettling people from Judah to somewhere in Mesopotamia cannot be read into the text.\textsuperscript{114}

As far as Zevit is concerned, an exile was never intended for the 200,150.

What is intended is that these people were “brought out” instead of “brought away” from their cities. Their goods were then handed over to the Assyrians and counted up before the king. Zevit points out that this is exactly what the reliefs at Lachish show us happening after the battle there.\textsuperscript{115} “The Lachish reliefs commissioned by Sennacherib for his palace at Nineveh illustrate that, after the bloody fighting leading to the capture of that city, booty was taken, and Israelite families-men with their distinctive short, curled beards-forced out but allowed to depart with wagonloads of household goods and what appear to be bagged foodstuffs.”\textsuperscript{116} The people are being forced out of their homes, and we can assume that their possessions remaining back in the city were the booty collected. It may have also been the case that these homes were then used by Sennacherib’s soldiers for shelter during the rest of the campaign. However, this is not specified. Regardless, we are told by the annals that the population of Judah was brought out of their cities (not exiled), and the Lachish reliefs seem to show just that.

It is likely that not all of the population of the territory of Judah were ethnically homogeneous. The people of the region may have also included Philistines. As I have noted, Judah was in control of part of what was known as Philistia when the invasion

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 363
\textsuperscript{115} Zevit references the pictures of the reliefs in Ussiskin’s book Ussishkin, David. The Conquest of Lachish by Sennacherib. Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv U, Institute of Archaeology, 1982. 84-87.

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begins. These 200,150 people removed may have also included some Philistines who chose to side with Hezekiah. There may also have been the aforementioned refugees from Samaria in the area. Any estimate of the population of the territory of Judah should include the possibility of other ethnicities present.\footnote{Zevit, "Implicit Population Figures and Historical Sense: What Happened to 200,150 Judahites in 701 BCE?" Confronting the Past: Archaeological and Historical Essays on Ancient Israel in Honor of William G. Dever, 364.}

In any case none of these people are described as being deported. They are internally displaced and their possessions are appropriated by the Assyrian state. Since that is the case, this number in Sennacherib’s annals may have been a close estimate of the population of the kingdom of Judah minus the citizens of Jerusalem. Therefore, there is no need to suggest a hyperbole for the number 200,150. Olmstead’s theory, while interesting and plausible, is unnecessary given a proper interpretation of what is recorded in the annals.
Appendix B – The Current Controversy Over Ancient Judah

Many scholars in the field of Biblical Studies are currently debating the nature of the ancient kingdoms of Israel and Judah. For many decades, historians of the ancient Near East have viewed the accounts of the Patriarchs or the Exodus in the Hebrew Bible as being at best unverifiable and at worst outright fiction. However, these same historians treated the historical books of Hebrew scripture as a relatively reliable source from which to gain information on the ancient people of Judah. In the past few decades a new paradigm for the history of early Israel has emerged. A significantly more stringent line of skepticism is now applied to some of the Bible’s most well-known characters from the early monarchy such as David and Solomon. The new claim is that the narrative of the Davidic line is also largely fictional and Israel’s control over the Levant, if it even existed, was very much exaggerated in the Hebrew historical books. As of right now, there is still debate on this subject and no consensus has yet emerged.118

This debate is well outside the bounds of the topic of this thesis, and I am not intending to wade into this controversy here. Since one aspect of this thesis deals with the ancient kingdom of Judah, it is important to point out that by the time of Hezekiah and the period covered in this thesis, more of a consensus can be seen among even the most skeptical minds. Even while challenging the veracity of the account of the Davidic line, many scholars of the Bible still see that by Hezekiah’s day there existed in the

118 For a good survey of this debate see: Grabbe, Lester L. Ancient Israel: What Do We Know and How Do We Know It? (London: T & T Clark, 2007). 23-35.
Levant a full-blown political entity known as Judah. Two of the more well-known skeptics of Israel’s early history, Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, have this to say about Judah in the late 8th century:

In the wake of Assyria’s campaigns in the north, Judah experienced not only sudden demographic growth but also real social evolution. In a word, it became a full-fledged state. Starting in the late eighth century, the archaeological indications of mature state formation appear in the southern kingdom: monumental inscriptions, seals and seal impressions, and ostraca for royal administration; the sporadic use of ashlar masonry and stone capitals in public buildings; the mass production of pottery vessels and other crafts in central workshops, and their distribution throughout the countryside. No less important was the appearance of middle-sized towns serving as regional capitals and the development of large-scale industries of oil and wine pressing, which shifted from local, private production to state industry.  

Whatever cloud of skepticism hangs over the biblical narrative covering the 10th and 9th centuries, most scholars agree that by the late 8th century there is a more discernable political entity known as Judah that can be verified outside of the Hebrew sources. When Sennacherib’s armies come to conquer the Levant, Judah is there as a historically and archaeologically verifiable entity. This is not in question in the above-mentioned controversy.

Any conclusions the reader may draw from this thesis that are relevant to that debate are unintentional. The fact that my thesis confirms a “full-fledged” political entity known as Judah in the late 8th century is not likely to have any direct relevance on the above-mentioned debate. My conclusions from Sennacherib’s writings that Judah was rather robust in the late 8th century may provoke disagreement, but that disagreement is not directly connected to this controversy over the history of Ancient Israel and Judah.

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References


