

recorded in the Bible of Judah.<sup>64</sup> The author of Account B<sub>2</sub> found it necessary to update the early prophetic story, to counter the critique and respond to the Rabshakeh's political and theological claims, and to fit the messages of the story to the new experience of the Jewish community in Babylonia in the second half of the sixth century BCE.

CLIO IN A WORLD OF PICTURES—ANOTHER LOOK AT THE LACHISH RELIEFS FROM SENNACHERIB'S SOUTHWEST PALACE AT NINEVEH\*

Christoph Uehlinger

So, when we look at these Assyrian sculptures, we have to see them not merely as products of one age and place, but as the results of a process which began when they were being manufactured, continued through thousands of years, and is still continuing... Nearly all these things, moreover, are now fragmentary or decontextualized. In interpreting them, we have to allow not only for assumptions that may colour our own image of what they meant and mean, but also for physical changes not directly related to their original appearance and function.<sup>1</sup>

*Introduction*

The so-called 'Lachish reliefs' from room XXXVI of Sennacherib's 'Palace without Rival' in Nineveh<sup>2</sup> were discovered by A.H. Layard during his

\* I am grateful to Lester Grabbe for inviting me to contribute a piece to the present volume, and for editorial improvements. This article is based on observations made years ago when I assisted Othmar Keel in the preparation of a monograph on the history of interpretation of ancient Near Eastern iconography and the Bible; see provisionally the entry, 'Iconography and the Bible', in *ABD* III, pp. 358-74 (359-60 for comments on the Lachish reliefs). My own interest in Assyrian palace reliefs goes back to 1983-84, when I was able to study them in London under the guidance of Julian Reade, to whom I owe essential insights in Assyrian monumental art. A few years before, in 1981, I had been lucky to participate in the Lachish excavations directed by David Ussishkin, who was then fully engaged in the interpretation of Sennacherib's room XXXVI reliefs on the basis of his stratum III findings. My critical discussion of his theory should not obliterate the lasting gratitude I owe to this admirable field director, perspicuous interpreter and stimulating writer.

1. J. Reade, 'Restructuring the Assyrian sculptures', in R. Dittmann *et al.* (ed.), *Variatio Delectat: Iran und der Westen* (Gedenkschrift für Peter Calmeyer; AOAT 272; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2000), pp. 607-25 (625).

2. A. Paterson, *Assyrian Sculptures: Palace of Sennacherib. Plates and Ground-Plan of the Palace* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, n.d. [several printings 1912-15]), Pls. 68-78; D. Ussishkin, *The Conquest of Lachish by Sennacherib* (Tel Aviv Publi-

64. Machinist, 'The Rab Šāqēh at the Wall of Jerusalem', pp. 156-58.

# **'Like a Bird in a Cage'**

**The Invasion of  
Sennacherib in 701 BCE**

**edited by  
Lester L. Grabbe**

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ÄAT	Ägypten und Altes Testament
AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	David Noel Freedman (ed.), <i>The Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> (New York: Doubleday, 1992)
<i>AbrN</i>	<i>Abr-Nahrain</i>
ABS	Archaeology and Biblical Studies
<i>AfO</i>	<i>Archiv für Orientforschung</i>
AGJU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
<i>AHw</i>	Wolfram von Soden, <i>Akkadisches Handwörterbuch</i> (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1959–81)
ALASPM	Abhandlungen zur Literatur Alt-Syrien-Palästinas und Mesopotamiens
ALGHJ	Arbeiten zur Literatur und Geschichte des hellenistischen Judentums
<i>AMI</i>	<i>Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran</i>
AnBib	Analecta biblica
<i>ANET</i>	James B. Pritchard (ed.), <i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950)
AnOr	Analecta orientalia
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AOS	American Oriental Series
<i>ARAB</i>	Daniel David Luckenbill, <i>Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia</i> (2 vols.; 1926–1927)
ASOR	American Schools of Oriental Research
Ash.	R. Borger, <i>Die Inschriften Asarhaddons</i> ( <i>AfO</i> Beiheft 9; Osnabrück: Biblio Verlag, 1956)
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
ATD, E	Das Alte Testament Deutsch, Ergänzungsband
<i>AUSS</i>	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
<i>BA</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BAIAS	<i>Bulletin of Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society</i>
BAL <sup>2</sup>	R. Borger, <i>Babylonisch-Assyrische Lesestücke</i> ( <i>Analecta Orientalia</i> , 54; Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 2nd edn, 1979)

second expedition to Nineveh (October 1849 to April 1851). In contrast to most other Assyrian reliefs, except the Black Obelisk,<sup>3</sup> these slabs could be related to a precise historical event a few months only after their discovery.<sup>4</sup> On display in the British Museum since c. 1856,<sup>5</sup> they figure since then among the best-known and most celebrated pictorial references to Israelite and Judahite history and illustrate almost any account on the Bible and the ancient Near East.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, modern archaeological research has definitely established the identification of Lachish with Tell ed-Duweir in the Judean Shephelah. As a result of substantial excavations on behalf of three major expeditions, the British Wellcome-Marston expedition led by

cations of the Institute of Archaeology, 6; Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1982), pp. 76-93; R.D. Barnett, Erika Bleibtreu and G. Turner, *Sculptures from the Southwest Palace of Sennacherib at Nineveh*, II (London: The British Museum, 1998), I, pp. 101-105, II, Pls. 322-52.

3. See O. Keel and Ch. Uehlinger, 'Der Assyrerkönig Salmanassar III. und Jehu von Israel auf dem Schwarzen Obelisk', *ZKT* 116 (4, 1994; A. Gampfer Festschrift), pp. 391-420; Ch. Uehlinger, 'Bildquellen und ,Geschichte Israels': grundsätzliche Überlegungen und Fallbeispiele', in C. Hardmeier (ed.), *Steine—Bilder—Texte. Historische Evidenz außerbiblicher und biblischer Quellen* (Arbeiten zur Bibel und ihrer Geschichte, 5; Leipzig Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2001), pp. 25-77.

4. As early as 1851, the Irish reverend E. Hincks identified the names of Sennacherib and Lachish on the caption which accompanies the reliefs, thus allowing Layard to relate the pictures to events and people well-known from the Bible. See below and particularly Layard's *Discoveries in Nineveh and Babylon; with Travels in Armenia, Kurdistan and the Desert: Being the Result of a Second Expedition undertaken for the Trustees of the British Museum* (London: John Murray, 1853), pp. 152-53 with n. \* recording Col. Rawlinson's reluctance to accept Hincks' identification.

5. Their early inventory numbers show that they were registered in the British Museum in 1856 (56-9-9, 13-14 according to Gadd, 14-15 according to Barnett *et al.*, *Sculptures*), where they were then reassembled and restored. The present inventory numbers are WAA 124904-124915, running from restored slabs 5 to 16. See C.J. Gadd, *The Stones of Assyria: The Surviving Remains of Assyrian Sculpture, their Recovery and their Original Position* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1936), p. 174; Barnett *et al.*, *Sculptures*, I, pp. 101-105. A helpful concordance for the numbering systems employed by various authors is found Barnett *et al.*, *Sculptures*, I, p. 105. In the present article, we shall follow the numbering of Barnett *et al.*, which counts the 12 slabs preserved in the British Museum as nos. 5-16.

6. E.g. R.D. Barnett, *Illustrations of Old Testament History* (London: The Trustees of the British Museum, 1966), pp. 60-65; J.B. Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East in Pictures Relating to the Old Testament*, Second Edition with Supplement (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), nos. 371-74; T.C. Mitchell, *The Bible in the British Museum* (London: The British Museum, 1988), pp. 60-64 document 27; and cf. below, n. 54.

J.L. Starkey from 1932 to 1938 and two Tel Aviv expeditions headed by Y. Aharoni in 1966/68 and D. Ussishkin from 1973 to 1994, the city attacked by Sennacherib's army can today be identified beyond reasonable doubt with the remains of Lachish stratum III. The last-mentioned project has paid particular attention to the investigation of remains related to the Assyrian attack and to the restoration of major stratum III structures.<sup>7</sup> In the words of David Ussishkin,

There is no other case in biblical archaeology in which a detailed Assyrian relief depicting a city under attack can be compared to the actual remains of that city and that battle uncovered by the archaeologist's spade, while the same events are corroborated by the Old Testament as well as the Assyrian sources.<sup>8</sup>

Definitely, here is more than 'virtual history'<sup>9</sup>, and a pictorial source seems for once to be able to play a major role in historical reconstruction. It comes as no surprise that the 'European Seminar on Historical Methodology' should move beyond its generally text-and-archaeology-focused approach and consider the potential of this apparently unique pictorial source when addressing problems related to Sennacherib's campaign against Judah.<sup>10</sup>

7. See below, nn. 76-80 for references; final reports are in press.

8. Ussishkin, *Conquest*, p. 11.

9. Cf. Diana Edelman, 'What If We Had No Accounts of Sennacherib's Third Campaign or the Palace Reliefs Depicting His Capture of Lachish?', in J. Cheryl Exum (ed.), *Virtual History and the Bible* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2000), pp. 88-103, whose article opens with the startling invitation: 'Suppose no accounts of Sennacherib's third campaign in 701 BCE or the palace reliefs from room 36 of the palace of Nineveh, depicting the conquest of Lachish with the accompanying epigraph identifying the scene as Lachish, had survived'. Edelman then concentrates on the virtual absence of verbal accounts, which according to her would not change much of the outlines of the regional history which should be based on archaeology. As far as the reliefs are concerned, she does not consider them for their own sake as independent historical sources but only in an indirect way: 'Without the drawings (*sic*) of the siege of Lachish from the palace of Nineveh, archaeologists would lose a primary anchoring pin for their dating system' (p. 94), namely the dating of the destruction of stratum III and associated Judahite material culture to 701 BCE. The argument implies that what the reliefs depict can be identified on the ground but ignores what the sculptures actually mean. On the Lachish Reliefs see Russell's article 'Sennacherib's Lachish Narratives', in P.J. Holliday (ed.), *Narrative and Event in Ancient Art* (Cambridge Studies in New Art History and Criticism; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 55-73.

10. Note, however, that a recent monograph on the 701 campaign does not expect much new insight from the Lachish reliefs: W.R. Gallagher, *Sennacherib's Campaign to Judah: New Studies* (SHCANE, 18; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1999), pp. 13-14. By Gallagher's explicitly stated criterion ('Because much has already been written on the

The present article will not provide a comprehensive commentary on the Lachish reliefs. Its aim is a more limited one and may be summarized in two questions: Granted first that the Lachish reliefs may indeed be considered as historical primary sources, how should historians deal with these pictures? To put it another way, how should they approach the reliefs' particular quality as *pictorial* records of an historical event? Second, how should the different categories of information we have concerning the conquest of Lachish (topography, geography, archaeology, pictures, texts and literature) be related one to another in the process of historical reasoning and reconstruction? This paper will argue that while most commentators have indeed tried to follow an integrated or 'holistic' approach, including all or many different types of evidence, text- and archaeology-based preconceptions have often led them to wrong or deficient interpretations of the reliefs and have failed to address the pictorial record as a distinct, partly independent and complementary source of historical information and ancient historiography in its own right. We shall posit that in order to correctly use and evaluate a pictorial source in historical terms, the modern interpreter not only has to learn the particular 'language' of images, in this instance, Assyrian<sup>11</sup> and particularly Sennacherib's palace reliefs,<sup>12</sup> but

Lachish reliefs, they are...not investigated here', p. 13), scholars should first stop investigating the biblical tradition about Sennacherib and Hezekiah, then put an embargo on the study of Sennacherib's inscriptions, and concentrate instead on the analysis of the sculptures which have attracted much less critical scholarly attention than the textual record.

11. Much preliminary work in this respect has been accomplished by J.E. Reade in his 1965 dissertation, published later in a series of articles: 'Assyrian Architectural Decoration: Techniques and Subject-Matter', and 'Narrative Composition in Assyrian Sculpture', *Baghdader Mitteilungen* 10 (1979), pp. 17-49 and 52-110; *idem*, 'Space, Scale and Significance in Assyrian Art' and 'The Architectural Context of Assyrian Sculpture', *Baghdader Mitteilungen* 11 (1980), pp. 71-74 and 75-87. See further by the same author: 'Ideology and Propaganda in Assyrian Art', in M.T. Larsen (ed.), *Power and Propaganda: A Symposium on Ancient Empires* (Mesopotamia, 7; Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1979), pp. 329-43; 'Neo-Assyrian Monuments in their Historical Context', in F.M. Fales (ed.), *Neo-Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: New Horizons in Literary, Ideological and Historical Analysis* (Oriens Antiqui Collectio, 17; Rome: Istituto per l'Oriente, 1981), pp. 143-68; and finally, *Assyrian Sculpture* (London: British Museum Press, 2nd edn, 1998 [1983]). See also above n. 1. A major recent synthesis is P. Matthiae, *L'arte degli Assiri: Cultura e forma del rilievo storico* (Storia e società; Rome: Laterza, 1996).

12. Sennacherib's reliefs have been thoroughly investigated by J.M. Russell in three major monographs: *Sennacherib's Palace without Rival at Nineveh* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1991); *The Final Sack of Nineveh: The Discov-*

also to inquire into the rules which governed their commissioning, production and display in antiquity.

### *The Lachish Reliefs and their Scholarly Interpretation*

#### *Discovery and Documentation*

To judge from published information, the Lachish reliefs were discovered by A.H. Layard during the latter part of his second expedition,<sup>13</sup> probably in August 1850.<sup>14</sup> The relevant entries on this phase of work are absent from Layard's original fieldnotes, presumably because he was not at Kuyunjik at the time when room XXXVI was first touched upon by his workers.<sup>15</sup> The earliest statement known to me is contained in a manu-

*ery, Documentation, and Destruction of Sennacherib's Throne Room at Nineveh, Iraq* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998); *The Writing on the Wall: Studies in the Architectural Context of Late Assyrian Palace Inscriptions* (Mesopotamian Civilizations, 9; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999). On the Lachish Reliefs, see Russell's article 'Sennacherib's Lachish Narratives', in P.J. Holliday (ed.), *Narrative and Event in Ancient Art* (Cambridge Studies in New Art History and Criticism; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 55-73.

13. See Layard, *Discoveries*, p. 148. Although ch. VI starts with December 1849 and ch. VII continues with Layard's visit to Nimrud where he spent Christmas, the very unprecise indication 'During the latter part of residence at Mosul' for the discovery of the Lachish reliefs cannot refer to early December 1849. Since Layard's earlier numbering system followed an alphabetic order, the discovery of room XXXVI, earlier named OO, must indeed be placed in the latter part of the second expedition as a whole. Note that Layard was frequently absent from Nineveh, be it for work at Nimrud or further travels; for a summary, see R.D. Barnett, 'The Palace and its Excavation', ch. I in Barnett *et al.*, *Sculptures*, I, pp. 3-7.

14. See Russell, *Palace*, 39, according to whom the room XXXVI reliefs were found by Layard's foreman Toma Shishman, in contrast to what Layard himself has written in publication.

15. On extant fieldnotes and other manuscripts, see R.D. Barnett, 'Sources for the Study of the Palace', in Barnett *et al.*, *Sculptures*, I, pp. 8-19. The relevant part of the fieldnotes is British Library, Add.MS. 39089E, which contains notes on a few rooms excavated before OO, notably GG and JJ to MM, but more information on later discoveries. According to the inventories published by Barnett *et al.* (*Sculptures*, I, p. 9), rooms NN to RR are not recorded in extant fieldnotes. These would have concerned precisely the suite of adjoining rooms XXXVII, XXXVI and XXXV and—less interesting for our purpose, because unconnected—the two rooms LV and LVI situated at their back. Of all these, XXXVI is to my knowledge the only one where Layard recorded sculptures. We may suspect then that he took no fieldnotes at all on these rooms and decided instead, for lack of time and given the relatively good state of preservation and the complexity of the Lachish reliefs, to concentrate on their drawings. (This judgment may need revision in

script compiled by Layard after the close of the excavations.<sup>16</sup> Ironically, however, although this statement might be considered a true 'primary source' drafted by a major eyewitness,<sup>17</sup> it is not very helpful in every respect since its description of the room XXXVI reliefs is clearly wrong for several major features.<sup>18</sup> Unfortunate as this may be, we cannot know

light of the announced publication of further primary documentation, see G. Turner, 'Sennacherib's Palace at Nineveh: The drawings of H.A. Churchill and the discoveries of H.J. Ross', *Iraq* 63 [2001], pp. 107-138 [107].)

16. British Library, Add.MS. 39077, fol. 75r-79v published by J.M. Russell, 'Layard's Descriptions of Rooms on the Southwest Palace at Nineveh', *Iraq* 57 (1995), pp. 71-85.

17. J.M. Russell, 'Sennacherib's Palace without a Rival Revisited: Excavations at Nineveh and in the British Museum Archives', in S. Parpola and R.M. Whiting (eds.), *Assyria 1995: Proceedings of the 10th Anniversary Symposium of the Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project* (Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1997), pp. 295-306, calls the manuscript mentioned in n. 16 'the first and most complete eyewitness description of Sennacherib's palace since antiquity' (p. 295).

18. According to Russell ('Layard's descriptions', p. 92), the relevant entry on fol. 78v reads: 'OO. All drawn except south side and from SE corner to lion, on which apparently King in chariot receiving prisoners, and warriors leading horses'. The exceptions must refer to the first four (or actually five) greatly damaged slabs which were not sent to London. Note that Layard's published description does not mention the king in his chariot anymore but refers instead to 'large bodies of horsemen and charioteers' (*Discoveries*, p. 149). There are rare instances in Sennacherib's palace where the king may appear twice or more on the sculptures of a single room, e.g. in the throneroom or in room V-8, V-11, V-32, [V-42 and] V-48 (see Russell, *Final Sack*, Pls. 118-19, 124-25, 157-59, 176-77, 188-89 which greatly improves the presentation of Barnett *et al.*, *Sculptures*, II, Pls. 50-76). However, these rooms either cover several events of one campaign or several campaigns; the king in his chariot receiving prisoners always closes an episode, with the camp serving as divider between several episodes. Room XXXVI presents a completely different situation. A depiction of the king in his chariot receiving prisoners on one of the first slabs would have been in blatant tension with the composition of the room's pictorial narrative. Room XXXVI concentrates on a single episode and consequently had the king appear only once, receiving booty and subdued people (see below). Layard's mistake is explicable: When describing slabs '1-4' (perhaps from memory, since he had not drawn them), he probably assumed that the OO (= XXXVI) series should start with a review of chariots and horses similar to V-10-12 (discovered already at the end of his first campaign in late spring 1847). On second thought (rather than control of the evidence, which he did not have at hand), he later dropped the reference to the king.

The manuscript statements on rooms OO (XXXVI) and MM (XXXIV) are remarkable for another feature: in striking contrast to Layard's published description which has human-headed winged bull colossi flanking the entrance that led into room XXXVI

anymore what Layard exactly saw in September 1850 and thus shall ever depend on his published account of 1853 (see below) and his drawings.

Concerning the latter, the *original drawings* which Layard drafted from 6 to 11 October 1850 on site<sup>19</sup> have apparently not survived, even though two series of 'Original drawings' are preserved in the famous elephant folio at the British Museum: the first series includes rough, unsigned key sketches made on site, most probably by Layard's draftsman C.I. Hodder (fig. 1). The main purpose of this series was to register and number the many fragments on the wall in order to allow their subsequent dismantling, identification and later reassembling.<sup>20</sup> As a matter of fact, these sketches are not always very accurate, particularly in the marginal and bottom areas of the slabs. The other series consists of drawings made and signed by Layard himself (fig. 2).<sup>21</sup>

(8, b) and which compares them with the biblical cherubim (see *Discoveries*, p. 445), the manuscript mentions a pair of *lions*, as pointed out by Russell ('Layard's descriptions', p. 82; *idem*, in *Assyria 1995*, p. 296). It would seem that in this instance we should favour this earlier record (and thus correct Ussishkin's reconstruction in *Conquest*, p. 70 fig. 60).

19. Barnett *et al.*, *Sculptures*, I, p. 6. On Layard drawing the reliefs, see Barnett *et al.*, *Sculptures*, II, Pls. 200 (no. 278b) and 369 (no. 463b). The latter, however, is clearly an idealized picture, the seated Arab of S.C. Malan's watercolour (Pl. 368 no. 463a) having been replaced by Layard himself on the lithograph of N. Chevalier published in Layard's *Discoveries*, opp. p. 345!

20. Or.Dr. II 7-15; Barnett *et al.*, *Sculptures*, nos. 428b-436b. Layard did not like the work of Hodder, who incidentally lost his health under the burden of his charge. Although Hodder's drawings certainly fulfilled their primary function, they are not always accurate, being the work of a nineteenth-century artist (and as such somehow reminiscent of E. Flandin's drawings from Khorsabad). Our fig. 1 combines two separate drawings. The straight edges, continuous drawings of cracks, siege planes and other devices wrongly suggest that slabs 6 and 7 joined neatly on-site when copied by Hodder. However, when mounted together the two drawings obviously do not fit. As a matter of fact, the artist has overlooked numerous details in the most destroyed marginal areas.

21. Or.Dr. I 58-62; Barnett *et al.*, *Sculptures*, nos. 428a-439a; note Layard's handwritten instructions for the printers on Pls. 324 and 336. Comparison of figs. 1 and 2 show considerable differences along the join of slabs 6 and 7. One of Layard's most blatant errors concerns the bottom of slab 7 (where Hodder's sketch had been more than cursory). Two pairs of slingers at the right bottom of slab 7 may serve to appreciate Layard's drawing: the pair turned right is turned backwards as if moving up the siege ramp, while the pair turned left is considerably enlarged and placed on the plinth, i.e. much too low. It comes as no surprise that neither Hodder nor Layard recorded the Judahite captives marching along the plinth from beneath the gate tower towards the Assyrian king (see below, fig. 7).

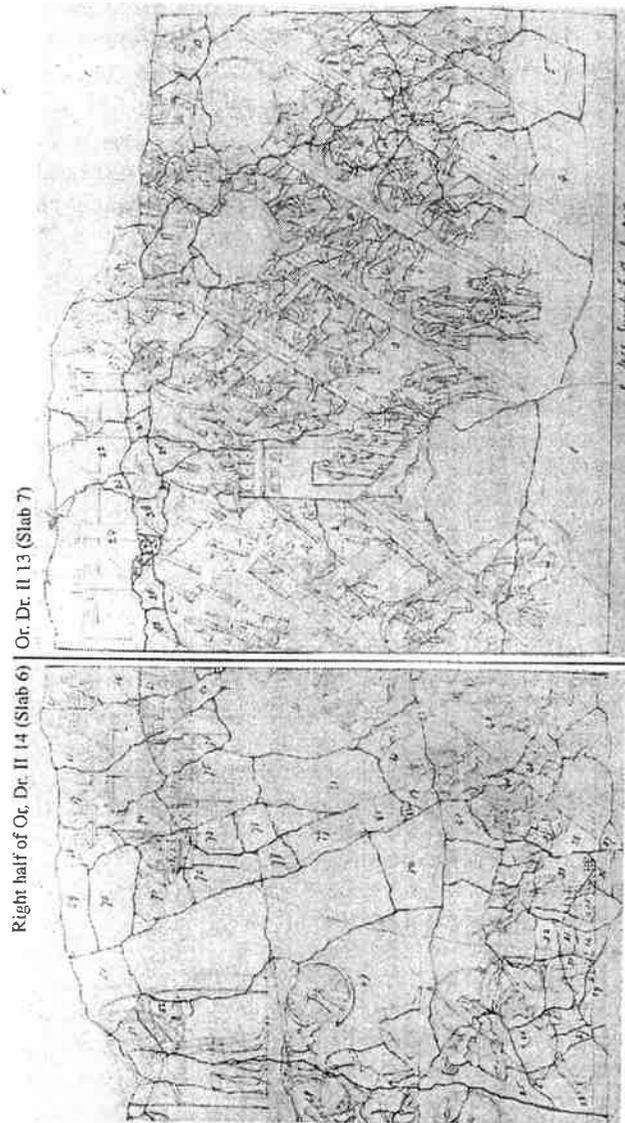


Fig. 1. Section of C. I. Hodder's revised field sketches, assembled from two separate folios; note the individual numbering of fragments and the somewhat idealized join between slabs 6 and 7.



Fig. 2. Section of A.H. Layard's drawings prepared in London. Note that the left margin does not correspond to the left edge of slab 6. The gaps between slabs 6-7 and 7-8 are not recorded on the drawing, and restorations not marked as such. The bottom of slab 7 is severely misinterpreted.

These are sometimes considered to be most reliable since drawn at Nineveh, but Layard actually drew them in England in preparation of his Second Series of *Monuments of Nineveh*,<sup>22</sup> without direct access to the originals which still remained in Nineveh at that time. The precise relationship of these drawings to Layard's on-site sketches is unclear to me. The merits of the drawings produced in London notwithstanding, close comparison with extant reliefs demonstrates that Layard normalized or omitted numerous details probably under the pressure of time, restored others where only fragments of the originals had been preserved, and at times added conjectured features where no material basis of the original reliefs remains. Consequently, both Hodder's and his own drawings (and of course the published plates based on the latter, fig. 3)<sup>23</sup> have as a rule to be checked against the originals wherever preserved.

As for the *original slabs* themselves, they were finally dismantled and packed in April and May 1853 by H. Rassam, following a visit to Kuyunjik by Col. Rawlinson. They then travelled in twelve cases (together with a total of 118) to Baghdad (June 1853), Basrah (January to March 1854) and Bombay, from where they left later during the year to arrive in England in late February or March 1855.<sup>24</sup> It follows from this chain of events that neither Layard's London drawings nor the plates in the *Second Series* of his *Monuments of Nineveh* could be checked against the originals before going to the printers. Both depend exclusively on Layard's field drawings, not on the original slabs, a fact which is rarely recognized by scholars. Since the plates became standard reference once they were published, one may reasonably surmise that together with Hodder's sketches they must have guided the people engaged in the difficult task of reassembling and restoring the fragments in the British Museum. Still, certain details restored in plaster on the reliefs presently on display cannot be documented in any early drawing or print.

22. A.H. Layard, *A Second Series of Monuments of Nineveh; including Bas-Reliefs from the Palace of Sennacherib and Bronzes from the Ruins of Nimroud. From Drawings made on the Spot, during a Second Expedition to Assyria* (London: John Murray, 1853), Pls. 20-24.

23. Note that on fig. 3 = *Monuments*, II, Pl. 21, the vertical join of slabs 7 and 8 has totally disappeared, except below the fourth tower from left of the lower wall.

24. See Gadd, *Stones*, pp. 105-107, 174, and cf. *supra*, n. 5.

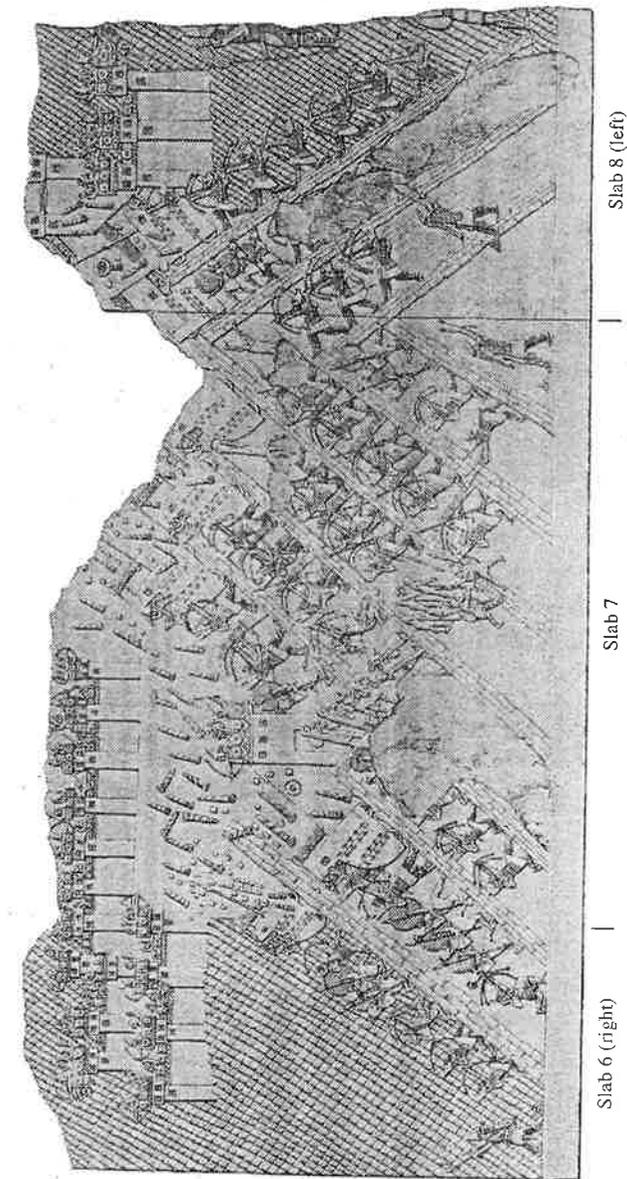


Fig. 3. Layard's plate depicting the siege scene, based on the drawing reproduced in fig. 2 and published as *Second Series*, Pl. 21. Note that the straight line dividing slabs 6 and 7 has disappeared; the straight margin on the left and the wavy margin at the right end of the published section are *ad hoc* devices with no basis in reality.

Just as any exegesis of a text should start with textual criticism, that is to ascertain the material basis of one or several manuscripts, a pictorial analysis should consider the material quality of its primary document before attempting an interpretation, be it iconographical and/or historical. In the particular case of the present study, the complicated history of the discovery, recording, dismantling, reassembling and restoration of the Lachish reliefs needed to be briefly retold, since it may serve as a patent reminder how much in the realm of history depends on processes of recording, storage and restitution of data. Moreover, this history will have to be kept in mind when we come to the discussion of scholarly interpretations, some of which heavily rely on particular drawings or on a particular physical arrangement of the original slabs. (For the sake of convenience, the reader is invited to refer to our fig. 8, which provides an overview on the series together with relevant slab numbers.)

#### *Layard's Published Commentary*

But let us turn to Layard's *verbal description* of his discovery. The most ample commentary, partly based upon his fieldnotes, was published in chap. VI of his *Discoveries in Nineveh and Babylon*. It first recalls the discovery in 1848, just before Layard first returned to Europe, of a monumental human-headed bull on the east side of the Kunyunjik palace. More such bulls flanking various entrances to courts and rooms of the palace were unearthed when Layard returned to the site in 1849. The inscriptions running over these bulls allowed Revd Hincks to identify Sennacherib as the builder of this palace in a memoir read at the Royal Irish Academy in June 1849. According to Layard,

Subsequent discoveries confirmed this identification, but it was not until August, 1851, that the mention of any actual event recorded in the Bible, and in ancient profane history, was detected on the monuments, thus removing all further doubts as to the king who had raised them.<sup>25</sup>

Layard must refer here to Sennacherib's campaign against Judah, which is the only 'actual event' of this king's reign recorded both by biblical texts and ancient profane history (Herodotus and, as far as Phoenicia is concerned, Menander viz. Josephus). He then offers a lengthy paraphrase,

25. Layard, *Discoveries*, p. 139. On the relationship of Layard and Hincks and the latter's rivalry with Col. Rawlinson, see K.J. Cathcart, 'Edward Hincks (1792-1866): A Biographical Essay', in K.J. Cathcart (ed.), *The Edward Hincks Bicentenary Lectures* (Dublin: The Department of Near Eastern Languages, University College, 1994), pp. 1-29.

based on Hincks' analysis and interpretation, of the Bull and two prism inscriptions, the so-called Bellino and Taylor cylinders. Hincks had already recognized place names such as Ashkelon, Ekron, Gaza and Jerusalem in the final paragraph of Sennacherib's account of his third campaign, and identified the names of Padi(ya) and Hezekiah, but did not adopt Rawlinson's suggestion to read the name of Lachish in another, badly preserved passage of the account. Noting that the Assyrian and biblical records agreed 'with considerable accuracy', Layard did not deny 'some chronological discrepancies' but insisted on what he considered an equally interesting task: he had related the details of Sennacherib's inscriptions 'in order that we may endeavour to identify the sculptured representations of these events on the walls of the chambers and halls of that magnificent building'.<sup>26</sup> However,

Unfortunately the upper parts of nearly all the bas-reliefs at Kouyounjik having been destroyed the epigraphs are wanting; and we are unable, as yet, to identify with certainty the subjects represented with any known event in the reign of Sennacherib. *There is, however, one remarkable exception.*<sup>27</sup>

The exception is of course Lachish, but Layard would not release his 'scoop' too easily. His account now switches to a long description of an exceptionally promising chamber, as yet unnamed,

in which the sculptures were in better preservation than any before found at Kouyounjik. Some of the slabs, indeed, were almost entire, though cracked and otherwise injured by fire; and the epigraph, which fortunately explained the event portrayed, was complete. These bas-reliefs represented the siege and capture by the Assyrians, of a city evidently of great extent and importance.<sup>28</sup>

Although Layard's account makes it clear from the outset that the decisive 'explanation' of the picture would come from the epigraph, he discloses the city's name only after a three-page description of the reliefs,<sup>29</sup> thus nourishing a growing sentiment of tension and expectation in his readers' minds as in a rhetorically well-organized oral exposition.<sup>30</sup> The account

26. Layard, *Discoveries*, pp. 146-47.

27. Layard, *Discoveries*, p. 148 (emphasis added).

28. Layard, *Discoveries*, p. 149.

29. Layard, *Discoveries*, pp. 149-51; quoted extensively in Barnett *et al.*, *Sculptures*, I, pp. 101-104.

30. One is reminded of Ezekiel's *mise en scène* of the siege of a city drawn on a brick (Ezek. 4-5), developing considerable performance before the city's identity is disclosed by a divine statement (5.5: 'this is Jerusalem'); see Ch. Uehlinger, "'Zeichne

progresses along the extant slabs from left to right, transforming the pictures into a continuous narrative in a way that may come quite close to what the Assyrian designers had originally intended.

Layard's often-quoted narrative ingeniously intermingles four categories of information. First, it identifies particular motifs in a general or more specific sense: double walls, battlements and towers, fig and wine in the hilly and wooded country around, kneeling archers, spearmen, slingers, siege ramps and engines, defenders etc. Particular attention is given to details of dress:

The vanquished people were distinguished from the conquerors by their dress, those who defended the battlements wore a pointed helmet, differing from that of the Assyrian warriors in having a fringed lappet falling over the ears. Some of the captives had a kind of turban with one end hanging down to the shoulder, not unlike that worn by the modern Arabs of the Hedjaz. Others had no head-dress, and short hair and beards. Their garments consisted either of a robe reaching to the ankles, or of a tunic scarcely falling lower than the thigh, and confined at the waist by a girdle. The latter appeared to be the dress of the fighting-men. The women wore long shirts, with an outer cloak thrown, like the veil of modern Eastern ladies, over the back of the head and falling to the feet.

It is remarkable that Layard already distinguished very clearly two categories of men among the vanquished, which he understood as fighters vs. chiefs, a distinction which O. Tufnell, R.D. Barnett and others would later elaborate upon.<sup>31</sup>

Second, Layard brings in a dramatic, emotional tone when he perceives the footsoldiers on the left as 'a compact and organised phalanx' or when he states that 'the besieged defended themselves with great determination'. Third, his verbal narrative aptly mirrors the structuring of the pictorial representation: while the approaching army on the left is described in orderly separated ranks,<sup>32</sup> the account of the central panels showing the battle at its

eine Stadt...und belagere sie!" Bild und Wort in einer Zeichenhandlung Ezechiels gegen Jerusalem', in M. Küchler and Ch. Uehlinger (eds.), *Jerusalem. Texte—Steine—Bilder* (Othmar and Hildi Keel-Leu Festschrift; *Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus*, 6; Fribourg: University Press and Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987), pp. 109-200.

31. See below, pp. 283-89.

32. As a matter of fact, Layard does not go into great detail but idealizes the picture according to his own expectations of a well-organized phalanx when he mentions three organized ranks of archers, the first kneeling, the second bending forward and the third standing upright. On the actual reliefs, bowmen and slingers to the left of the city are

height combines attackers and defenders in single sentences, creating a vivid impression of excitement and confrontation:

Spearmen, archers, and slingers thronged the battlements and towers, showering arrows, javelins, stones, and blazing torches upon the assailants. On the battering-rams were bowmen discharging their arrows, and men with large ladles pouring water upon the flaming brands, which, hurled from above, threatened to destroy the engines. Ladders, probably used for escape, were falling from the walls upon the soldiers who mounted the inclined ways to the assault.

The description then suddenly returns to calm with a statement announcing capitulation:

Part of the city had, however, been taken.

Fourth, Layard analyses particular features on the slabs in comparison with reliefs from other rooms and once even from Khorsabad. This comparative procedure allows him to address prominent specificities of the present series, to identify particular personages such as the Assyrian king and to give meaning to some particular scenes with the help of parallels. To quote but two examples, the observation 'In no other sculptures were so many armed warriors seen drawn up in array before a besieged city' justifies the interpretative statement that 'The whole power of the great king seems to have been called forth to take this stronghold'. When describing the Assyrian king sitting on his throne (compare our fig. 9b), Layard notes that 'In his right hand he raised two arrows, and his left rested upon a bow; an attitude, probably denoting triumph over his enemies, and in which he is usually portrayed when receiving prisoners after a victory'.<sup>33</sup>

One may notice that Layard's description remains largely within the limits of iconography, with only a few comments of an iconological order

generally shown in pairs standing upright; only occasionally is there a single kneeling archer inserted, more often than not dividing different contingents among the attackers. This feature breaks down the standard order which might otherwise have looked too mass-produced and distracted an onlooker's attention (cf., e.g., the Assyrian overseers along the rows of foreign working teams in court VI and room XLIX). Moreover, it could well have served to delimit or bind together sections which had been executed by different sculptors.

33. The description of the 'ten banks or mounts, compactly built of stones, bricks, earth, and branches of trees' is not only based on the evidence of the Lachish reliefs but rather on more detailed representations such as preserved in room XII (Barnett *et al.*, *Sculptures*, II, Pls. 150-53) and on the unique slabs showing the actual construction of a siege ramp in room XLIII (*Ibid.*, Pls. 374-75).

and minimal recourse to textual information derived from Assyrian inscriptions or the Bible.<sup>34</sup> This is remarkable in the light of his prior discussion of Sennacherib's inscriptions and of his just-announced programme according to which the cities represented on the reliefs should be identified on the basis of the inscriptions.<sup>35</sup> However, we should probably not understand Layard's restriction to iconographical description as reflecting an intentional methodology. Rather, we must remember that he had worked on Assyrian reliefs years before the first cuneiform inscriptions were read and that he was therefore used to close iconographical observation unhindered by texts. The descriptions of the reliefs draw heavily on his fieldnotes which he had written down months before the city was actually identified by Revd Hincks. Still, his account is rhetorically built up to finally lead readers towards the inscription which held the power to disclose at once the identity of the mysterious city:

Above the head of the king was the following inscription, [follows the cuneiform text] which may be translated, 'Sennacherib, the mighty king, king of the country of Assyria, sitting on the throne of judgment, before (or at the entrance of) the city of Lachish (Lakhisha). I give permission for its slaughter.'<sup>36</sup>

This statement represents a real climax and turning-point in Layard's account, since from now on the Bible leads the pen, producing a whole series of interpretative short-circuits between unrelated sources. As a result, his interpretation from now on loses most of its critical potential:

34. The major exception is the—erroneous—identification of the Assyrian official facing the king as 'the Tartan of the Assyrian forces, probably the Rabshakeh himself' (Layard, *Discoveries*, p. 150). As J. Reade has shown, this figure should on 8th- and 7th-century sculptures be identified with the crown-prince; see J.E. Reade, 'Two slabs from Sennacherib's palace', *Iraq* 29 (1967), pp. 42-48 (45-47); *idem*, 'The Neo-Assyrian Court and Army: Evidence from Sculptures', *Iraq* 34 (1972), pp. 87-112 (93); *idem*, 'Kronprinz', *RLA* VI/3-4 (1982), pp. 249-50; Michelle I. Marcus, *A Study of Types of Officials in Neo-Assyrian Reliefs: Their Identifying Attributes and their Possible Relationships to a Bureaucratic Hierarchy* (unpublished PhD thesis, Colombia University, 1981), pp. 69-73, 79-81.

35. See above, nn. 25-26.

36. Layard, *Discoveries*, p. 152. Hincks' translation is itself an interesting testimony to the early interpretation of the scene represented on the reliefs in terms of *judgment* and *slaughter*, both terms with obvious biblical overtones. See below for our current understanding of the caption.

Here, therefore, was the actual picture of the taking of Lachish, the city, as we know from the Bible, besieged by Sennacherib, when he sent his generals to demand tribute of Hezekiah, and which he had captured before their return [footnote \*: 2 Kings, xviii. 14. Isaiah, xxxvi. 2. From 2 Kings, xix. 8., and Isaiah, xxxvii. 8., we may infer that the city soon yielded.]; evidence of the most remarkable character to confirm the interpretation of the inscriptions, and to identify the king who caused them to be engraved with the Sennacherib of Scripture. This highly interesting series of bas-reliefs contained, moreover, an undoubted representation of a king, a city, and a people, with whose names we were acquainted, and of an event described in Holy Writ. They furnish us, therefore, with illustrations of the Bible of very great importance.<sup>37</sup> The captives were undoubtedly Jews, their physiognomy was strikingly indicated in the sculptures, but they had been stripped of their ornaments and their fine raiment, and were left barefooted and half-clothed. From the women, too, had been removed 'the splendor of the foot-ornaments and the caps of network, and the crescents; the ear-pendants, and the bracelets, and the thin veils; the head-dress, and the ornaments of the legs and the girdles, and the perfume-boxes and the amulets; the rings and the jewels of the nose; the embroidered robes and the tunics, and the cloaks and the satchels; the transparent garments, and the fine linen vests, and the turbans and the mantles, 'for they wore instead of a girdle, a rope; and instead of a stomacher, a girdling of sackcloth'. [footnote †: Isaiah, iii. 18-24. &c. (...)]<sup>38</sup>

This is the language of faith, of prophecy and fulfilment, not of a critical nineteenth-century historian. All of a sudden, the sculptures cease to deliver their own, particular message and become mute under the steamroller-like emphasis with which the Bible is used to interpret the pictures. It is not what the pictures show that is important to this commentary, but rather what they definitely do not show, for example Jewish physiognomy or jewellery of Jewish (rather Judahite) ladies. What could be considered an incredibly rich source of information on how Assyrian artists perceived Judahite Lachish, its environment and its population submitted and exiled dries up and vanishes in the face of biblical, or, to be more precise, bibliacist nineteenth-century anti-Jewish rhetoric.

#### *A Methodological Parenthesis*

The main methodological lesson to be learnt from this account resembles the well-known conclusions of the debate on the Bible and archaeology

37. Footnote \* inserted here responds to Col. Rawlinson who had 'denied that this is the Lachish mentioned in Scripture'.

38. Layard, *Discoveries*, pp. 152-53 (emphasis added).

held fifty years ago between W.F. Albright, M. Noth and R. de Vaux, namely that each category of information, each source should be analyzed independently in line with its own particular potential and according to the specific methodology required by the subject. Only when this primary analysis has been accomplished and the limits of each source's information potential have been explored should different sources be brought together.

Moreover, the major fallacy of many comparative studies combining different sets of evidence into a single account is their often unspoken tendency to look for mutual confirmation and agreement between sources instead of different, possibly contradictory testimonies. With regard to pictorial analysis, it appears plainly from Layard's account that textual information should in principle only be imposed on the 'reading' of images when all other interpretative strategies, descriptive and iconological, have been exhausted. One could of course argue against this principle that it represents a purely theoretical construct, since interpretation is practised by scholars who generally have prior knowledge of texts and who cannot at any time blend off this parallel information. Still, the minimal requirement for a methodologically acceptable historical analysis of a pictorial representation is that the interpreter should try to analyze an image according to the possibilities, rules and conventions of figurative representation, not of texts, and that he or she should have a self-critical attitude and check at any stage of analysis whether a particular description or interpretation of a total image or of a particular feature relies on internal iconographical arguments or on external information, whether iconographical or textual.

Once external information is brought into the argument, one should always measure the relative distance, so to speak, between different sources. Parallel information derived from the same medium, for example images, should be privileged wherever available. Within a certain medium, information derived from the same genre, for example Assyrian palace reliefs, and, if possible, the same time or context, for example, the palace of Sennacherib, should also be privileged. This is precisely what Layard had done in the pre-inscriptional phase of his work. Once we bring in texts, inscriptions derived from identical or close contexts will have to take priority over texts of further removed origin. For this reason, the captions or epigraphs on Assyrian reliefs certainly have a major role to play in the process of historical analysis of the reliefs (incidentally, in room XXXVI the king's right hand holding the arrows is raised as if pointing towards the major epigraph, see below, fig. 9a). However, even the epigraphs have to

be put in their proper place and should not be misunderstood as condensed summaries of the reliefs.

### *The Epigraphs*

Epigraphs on Assyrian palace reliefs are physically linked to the pictures and must have been drafted more or less at the same time, if not by the same individuals, as the reliefs themselves. A study of the relation between Sennacherib's reliefs and epigraphs is beyond our present topic,<sup>39</sup> but I should briefly comment on the epigraphs in room XXXVI since, as we have seen, they take a prominent role in Layard's and in many later accounts. Two epigraphs are preserved, one above the Assyrian crown-prince and senior officers facing the king (below, fig. 9b) and the other above the royal tent (fig. 9c); my suspicion—which I cannot however substantiate—is that a third epigraph might have identified the city on the now lost upper part of slabs 6-8 (cf. fig. 8).<sup>40</sup> The epigraph above the royal tent simply tells that this is 'the tent (*zaratum*) of Sennacherib, king of Assyria'.<sup>41</sup> One wonders at first sight why this statement was deemed necessary, since the royal tent appears on many other occasions without any such label. Looking for parallels, we may recognize that the camp epigraphs in rooms I, V and X come closest to the unique tent epigraph of room XXXVI. The reason for this particular inscription may well be that only here is the royal tent shown outside the protection of a fortified camp.

J.M. Russell, an expert on Southwest palace sculptures, has rightly noted that Sennacherib's epigraphs take over, to some extent, the role played by bands of annalistic inscriptions in earlier Assyrian palaces. In contrast to earlier epigraphs, they not only identify foreign places and people but often accompany the Assyrian king himself. According to Russell, they thus 'serve a more active role in the interpretation of the images, identifying the participants on both sides and giving a descriptive summary, thereby

39. Note the important contributions by P. Gerardi, 'Epigraphs and Assyrian Palace Reliefs: The Development of the Epigraphic Text', *JCS* 40 (1988), pp. 1-35; Russell, *Palace*, pp. 24-31, 269-78; E. Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sennacherib-Inschriften* (AfO Beiheft 26; Horn: Institut für Orientalistik der Universität Wien, 1997), pp. 123-28; Russell, *Writing*, esp. pp. 134-42, 283-92.

40. Note however that Sennacherib's extant epigraphs do not include simple place names in contrast to those from the palaces of Tiglath-Pileser III and Sargon II.

41. Russell, *Palace*, p. 277; Frahm, *Einleitung*, p. 127 T 51; Russell, *Writing*, p. 288.f

focusing attention on the significant features of the action'.<sup>42</sup> I strongly disagree with this characterization of Sennacherib epigraphs as summaries. In the case of room XXXVI, no sensible onlooker can maintain that the main epigraph summarizes the pictorial narrative, nor even its most significant features, since it simply reads:

- 1 <sup>Id</sup>XXX-PAP<sup>meš</sup>-SU (*Sîn-ahhē-erība*) MAN (*šar*) ŠÚ (*kiššati*) MAN  
(*šar*) KUR (*māt*) Aššur
  - 2 ina <sup>giš</sup>GU.ZA (*kussī*) *né-me-di ú-šib-ma*
  - 3 *šal-la-at* <sup>uru</sup>La-ki-su
  - 4 *ma-ḥa-ar-šu e-ti-iq*
- 1 Sennacherib, king of the world, king of Assyria,
  - 2 took place on/in<sup>43</sup> a/the *nēmedu* throne,<sup>44</sup> and
  - 3 the booty of Lachish
  - 4 passed before him.<sup>45</sup>

This statement merely characterizes the particular sub-scene to which it is physically related, adding four elements to our understanding of the details: first, it identifies the king by name, whereas the image simply shows *the* Assyrian king in his full attire. But who among ancient onlookers would ever have doubted that this is Sennacherib? One wonders whether the epigraph's main purpose in this respect was not after all to state that the king had been there *himself*.<sup>46</sup> At the same time, we should be aware that identifying the king by name on an epigraph is not really an isolated phenomenon since the royal name was applied to almost any inscription in the palace. The label's second line then puts emphasis on a particular act of royal authority. This feature of the epigraph is unique, so we should attach particular importance to it. The king's sitting down in the *nēmedu* chair probably had a ceremonial function, either at the end<sup>47</sup> or already during

42. Russell, 'Sennacherib's Lachish Narratives', p. 68; *idem*, *Writing*, p. 140.

43. Not 'set up a throne', as translated in Barnett *et al.*, *Sculptures*, I, p. 104.

44. See Russell, *Final Sack*, p. 223 for the suggestion that the hitherto unclear *nēmedu* may refer to a movable throne, an interpretation that would be consistent with other textual attestations of the term. Other scholars have taken *nēmedu* as a reference to a throne with armrests.

45. Russell, *Palace*, p. 276; Frahm, *Einleitung*, p. 127 T 50; Russell, *Writing*, pp. 287-88.

46. Note that in contrast to the testimony of inscriptions, Sennacherib never plays an active role in battles depicted on the reliefs, but is generally shown receiving homage in his chariot or within his fortified camp (see next footnote for references).

47. The scene is known already on Tiglath-Pileser's reliefs from Nimrud and wall paintings from Til Barsip. It features on several of Sennacherib's reliefs, although

the battle. Third, the epigraph identifies the conquered town (Lachish), which is again a specifically verbal, indexical function. Fourth and final, the epigraph mentions the review of booty. While features 1 and 3 have an identifying function, 1 being generic and 3 more particular, 2 and 4 closely parallel parts of the pictorial scenario. Features 1, 3 and 4 occur on six other Sennacherib epigraphs and define what E. Frahm has called 'Beute-Beischriften'.<sup>48</sup> One may note that these follow a standard formula always put in 3rd pers. masc. sing., whereas the 'Eroberungs-Beischriften' use either 3rd or 1st pers. sing. Clearly, the purpose of these epigraphs is not to summarize the content of the room XXXVI reliefs, but to identify major places and people and to answer implicit questions such as 'what did the king do on that day of victory?' or 'what about this peculiar tent outside the camp?', helping to secure the correct interpretation of *significant details* only which did not simply follow standard pictorial conventions.

Interestingly enough, we know of two cuneiform tablets with epigraph-like notations. Frahm, who has studied these tablets anew, was inclined to consider them as drafts for epigraphs but hesitated because of some formal and linguistic peculiarities.<sup>49</sup> Commenting on one of the tablets, Russell noticed the mixture of campaigns, a feature which would not be consistent with a basic rule of Sennacherib's palace decoration except the throne room. He therefore suggested that the tablet was a later compilation, rather than a preliminary draft of epigraphs.<sup>50</sup> I cannot avoid thinking of some kind of *aide-mémoire* designed for courtiers who would guide visitors through the palace or lead them to particular rooms and explain the meaning of the sculptures. True, this palace certainly was not conceived for tourists visiting a museum,<sup>51</sup> but Sennacherib himself claims to have conceived the palace and 'filled it with splendor for the astonishment of all people'.<sup>52</sup> Visitors must have been numerous, both among courtiers and foreigners, who would have needed and appreciated some basic explanations when looking at these highly complex pictorial compositions.

always set inside the camp except for room XXXVI (cf. Barnett, *Sculptures*, II, Pls. 35, 412, 504; other examples are lost, e.g. slab VII-6, *Ibid.*, Pls. 128-29).

48. Frahm, *Einleitung*, p. 124.

49. Frahm, *Einleitung*, pp. 211-13.

50. Russell, *Writing*, p. 139.

51. See Russell, *Palace*, pp. 222-40, 251-52 on intended and actual audience of the palace reliefs.

52. Russell, *Palace*, p. 252.

*Studies since Layard, Mainly on Realia*

This is not the place to review in detail the numerous studies, paraphrases or spurious remarks that scholars, most of them more at home with the Bible than with Assyria, have devoted to the Lachish reliefs between 1853 and 1980.<sup>53</sup> I suspect that a research history would have to struggle with a considerable bibliography just to conclude that major insights for the overall understanding of the series as a whole were rarely produced during more than a century, or if produced went unnoticed. As a matter of fact, most commentators confined themselves to repeating what Layard had already seen, elaborating sometimes on one or another particular feature of Judahite or 'biblical' realia<sup>54</sup>, the 'ethnic' attribution of dress, weapons, a throne and other furniture, carts and sometimes even cattle to ancient Judahite culture having been established on the basis of the main *epigraph's* testimony. The Lachish reliefs have also regularly supplied shorthand information for research on Judahite fruit economy and silviculture during the Iron Age.<sup>55</sup> In the field of ancient Near Eastern studies concerned with Assyrian

53. 1980 witnessed the publication of a summary article by Pauline Albenda, 'Syrian-Palestinian Cities on Stone', *BA* 43 (1980), pp. 222-29, adding nothing substantial to previous knowledge, and of an article in which D. Ussishkin first outlined his new theory which reads the reliefs on the basis of new archaeological evidence (see below).

54. See, e.g., A. Legendre, 'Lachis', *Dictionnaire de la Bible, Supplément*, IV (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1908), pp. 15-16, 23-26 with figs. 4, 11-12; H. Gressmann, *Altorientalische Bilder zum Alten Testament* (Berlin and Leipzig: W. de Gruyter, 1926), figs. 138-41; K. Gallig, *Biblisches Reallexikon* (Handbuch zum Alten Testament I, 1; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1937): 'Die Reliefs von der Eroberung durch Sanherib... zeigen uns interessante Einzelheiten vom Leben der Bewohner (Kleidung, Wagen, Viehwirtschaft) und die Ausrüstung des jüdischen Residenten (Schwert, Thron u. a. m.)' (pp. 347-48).

55. Z. Amar and M. Kislev have recently argued that the Lachish reliefs show sycamores (*Ficus sycomorus*) among the tree species represented. According to Kislev, most trees (79 out of 108, i.e. 73 per cent) are sycamore trees, i.e. he simply suggests an alternative identification for the most commonly figured, fruitless tree type, which is usually held to represent olive trees. See M. Kislev, 'Sycamores in the Lachish Reliefs', in J. Schwartz, Z. Amar and I. Ziffer (eds.), *Jerusalem and Eretz Israel* (Arie Kindler Volume; Bar-Ilan: The Ingeborg Rennert Center for Jerusalem Studies and Tel Aviv: Eretz Israel Museum, 2000), pp. 23-30 (hebr., engl. summary 100\*). There are methodological problems in Kislev's approach, who does not consider the question on the background of artistic conventions and the overall picture of Sennacherib's reliefs but seems more interested in confirming a biblical description (1 Kgs 10.27 mentioning plenty of sycamores in the Shephelah). Note however his argument that sycamores were grown for logs in antiquity, and that they could be conveniently used for the

monumental art in general, the Lachish reliefs were of course regularly touched upon, but rarely to advance the interpretation of the series as a whole. Here too, scholars used pictorial evidence from room XXXVI mainly because it provided an undisputed historical and geographical anchor for particular details of geography, vegetation,<sup>56</sup> warfare,<sup>57</sup> dress<sup>58</sup> and other realia.<sup>59</sup> While all these studies are obviously important and essential to any 'holistic' approach to history, one cannot escape the conclusion that their scope remains somewhat limited and that they have failed to tell us the better part of the story. Only more recently, scholars have

construction of tracks for the battering-rams. In contrast, Amar distinguishes four instead of three commonly held species among the tree types represented, taking a variant of the fig tree with rounded instead of split leaves as a depiction of the sycamore. See Z. Amar, 'Agricultural Products in the Lachish Reliefs', *Beit Mikra* 159 (1999), pp. 350-56; *idem*, 'Agricultural Realia in the Lachish Reliefs', *UF* 31 (1999), pp. 1-12. This fourth type appears only once on the extant reliefs, namely on the join of slabs 9-10 (see Barnett *et al.*, *Sculptures*, II, Pl. 323 for a close photograph). Note Bleibtreu's opinion that this tree had remained unfinished (*Flora* [below, n. 56], p. 143), but the actual relief does not support her assumption. We should however recall Bleibtreu's distinction between 'Laubbäumen mit unverzweigten Ästen und kugeligere Krone' (*ibid.*, pp. 160-68) and 'Laubbäumen mit unverzweigten fast senkrecht stehenden Ästen' (*ibid.*, pp. 168-70). The former type shows considerable morphological variation, which would fit olive trees, while the latter is much more standardized and could imply, according to Bleibtreu, frequent cutting back.

In any case, it seems to me that the Lachish reliefs call for a distinction of five different tree types, which may be numbered from secure to unsecure identification: (I) grapevine (12 extant examples); (II) fig (10); (III) sycamore (1); (IV) leaf tree with relatively thin trunk and irregularly spread branches (olive tree?; 52+); (V) leaf tree with relatively thick trunk and regular, almost vertical branches (18+). Since small fruit such as olives, almonds or the like were never represented on the sculptures, it may be doubted that types IV and V represent one single species. In some rooms of Sennacherib's palace, type IV conventions were used to represent pomegranate trees, the fruit being the only feature allowing for precise identification.

56. Erika Bleibtreu, *Die Flora der neuassyrischen Palastreliefs: Eine Untersuchung zu den Orthostatenreliefs des 9.-7. Jahrhunderts v. Chr.* (WZKM Sonderband I; Vienna: Institut für Orientalistik der Universität Wien, 1980).

57. See Y. Yadin, *The Art of Warfare in Biblical Lands: In the Light of Archaeological Study* (2 vols.; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963).

58. See M. Wäfler, *Nicht-Assyrischer neuassyrischer Darstellungen* (AOAT, 26; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1975), pp. 42-55.

59. Note especially the inventories by B. Hrouda, *Die Kulturgeschichte des assyrischen Flachbildes* (Saarbrücker Beiträge zur Altertumskunde, 2; Bonn: Rudolf Habelt, 1965) and T. Madhloom, *The Chronology of Neo-Assyrian Art* (London: Athlone Press, 1970).

begun to address the ideological implications of the particular attention paid by Sennacherib's sculptors to matters of geographical and ethnographical diversity.<sup>60</sup>

What are the reasons for the scholarly reluctance to move beyond an exclusively environmental and artifactual approach? One reason may be that it is always easier for the interpreter to stay with putative 'facts' and 'realia' in a positivist manner. Second, both biblical scholars and Near Eastern historians have recognized that in contrast to what Layard and other nineteenth-century scholars had anticipated, the three major sources for Sennacherib's campaign against Judah (his inscriptions, his sculptures, and the biblical texts) actually tell quite different stories which may ultimately relate to the same history but cannot so easily be related one to another. As we have seen, each story needs to be 'read' and interpreted for itself. However, neither biblical scholars nor historians of the ancient Near East, all essentially involved in philology, are usually trained in iconographical and iconological analysis. Moreover, the artifactual approach has inevitably fragmented the room XXXVI reliefs into a kind of quarry where scholars pick out isolated features here and there without caring for the overall design and rhetorical programme of the series as a whole. As a result, the Lachish reliefs are generally regarded just in the way we look at photographs when reading a newspaper: as convenient illustrations but not as truly independent, and complementary, historical sources.

#### *The Lachish Reliefs, Topography and Archaeology*

Layard's discoveries preceded controlled archaeological excavations in Palestine by some forty years. It was to be expected that these would open up another dimension for the interpretation of the Lachish reliefs. Three stages may be distinguished in the development of a topography-and archaeology-based discourse on the reliefs. They coincide with three

60. See Stefania Mazzoni, 'Significato e ruolo del paesaggio nei rilievi di Sennacherib', *Contributi et Materiali di Archeologia Orientale* 4 (1992), pp. 151-66 (note that the article's headline erroneously refers to vol. 3, 1989); Michelle I. Marcus, 'Geography as Visual Ideology: Landscape, Knowledge, and Power in Neo-Assyrian Art', in M. Liverani (ed.), *Neo-Assyrian Geography* (Quaderni di Geografia Storica, 5; Rome: Università di Roma 'La Sapienza', 1995), pp. 193-202; P. Villard, 'La représentation des paysages de montagne à l'époque néo-assyrienne', in A. Serandour (ed.), *Des Sumériens aux Romains d'Orient: La perception géographique du monde* (Antiquités Sémitiques, II; Paris: J. Maisonneuve, 1997), pp. 41-58.

major excavation projects that were meant to bring to light the city known to have been destroyed by Sennacherib.

#### *W.M.F. Petrie: 'the Truth of Geography'*

Everyone who knows the Assyrian sculptures in the British Museum is familiar with one of the largest compositions there—the Siege of Lachish, by Sennacherib. On looking at this, *the truth of geography is seen at once, when the site is known*. The city stands, on the sculpture, with a gentle slope up to it on the left hand, a steeper slope in front, and a vertical cliff directly down from the base of the wall on the right. This corresponds to the view from the south. The left side is the west, the only side on which the ground rises gently; the steep front is the south side; and the cliff on the right is the east side, which was always worn away steeply by the stream. The gateway in front of the town *must be* that of which the steps were found on the south, leading up the glacis. Thence the captives are led away to the king at his camp on the right; this was therefore on the tongue of land between the Wady Muleihah and Wady Jizair... The valley with palms, on the right, *must be* the Wady Muleihah. This *testing of a sculpture* executed in Assyria, hundreds of miles distant from the place, is of great interest, as it shows that some sketches and notes were actually made, probably by a royal designer attached to the court, one of the secretaries. The essential points of the relative steepness of the three contiguous sides, the gateway, and the likely position for the camp, all show that the view is not a mere fancy piece.<sup>61</sup>

When read 110 years after its redaction, this paragraph written by W.M.F. Petrie, the founding father of the archaeology of Palestine, sounds somewhat pathetic since nobody today is prepared to believe a single word of it. To begin with, Tell el-Hesi is no more identified as the site of Lachish. Based on an improper reading of the topographical details depicted on the reliefs—Petrie simply overlooked the steep, almost vertical slope on the city's left side, and considerably misinterpreted the area to the right of the city as a 'valley of palms'—all of Petrie's 'truth of geography' appears like vanity destined to go down the Wadi Jisair.

Why then should we bother to recall such an accident of scholarship? Two reasons have led me to remember the episode: First, we should be aware that Petrie's arguments were found convincing at the time, as demonstrated, for example, by a 1908 entry in the renowned French *Dictionnaire de la Bible*.<sup>62</sup> Second, in the context of a discussion on meth-

61. W.M.F. Petrie, *Tell el Hesi (Lachish)* (London: Palestine Exploration Fund, 1891), p. 38 (emphasis added).

62. Legendre, 'Lachis', p. 27: 'L'image est d'une parfaite exactitude au point de vue topographique et correspond à la vue de la cité prise de sud'.

odology, we must stress the fact that Petrie's demonstration precedes along similar lines as D. Ussishkin's ninety years later (see below): it combines topographical and archaeological observations with a topographical interpretation of the reliefs, which are read in terms of visual perspective that allows a precise positioning of the onlooker; it moves on to locate the Assyrian camp and concludes with remarks on the quality of an eyewitness record taken on site by an Assyrian designer. An interpretative circle is thus construed in which the reliefs, topography and archaeology all play their role supporting one another's testimony. Ussishkin's theory is certainly much more refined and elaborated and based upon a much better informed 'reading' of the reliefs; obviously it will have to be evaluated on its own grounds. However, the structural analogy of his and Petrie's argument is striking and may help to sharpen our critical mind.

*Olga Tufnell: Two Walls and a Bastion*

A full century after Layard's publication of the Sennacherib reliefs, Olga Tufnell, who was in charge of the publication of the Wellcome-Marston excavations that had been directed during the 1930s by J.L. Starkey, presented another attempt at combining archaeological data with the pictorial record of the Lachish reliefs (viz., slabs 6-8 depicting the city proper; see fig. 4 for a new drawing published in her report).<sup>63</sup>

Tufnell limited herself to an extensive quote of Layard and a few sober, but very acute remarks on major agreements and differences between the city's portrayal on the sculptures and archaeological evidence. Against Starkey's earlier opinion and those of other authorities, Tufnell defended the main thesis that the city attacked and destroyed by Sennacherib should be identified with Lachish stratum III. This was in her opinion the necessary prerequisite for any comparison of the pictorial record and the archaeological findings (in contrast to more recent discussions, where the argument has sometimes been turned the other way round). Tantamount to her demonstration was the recognition of two walls both in the reliefs and on the ground. The excavations had indeed unearthed an upper wall of brick, which followed the edge of the escarpment, and a lower wall or revetment of stone

63. O. Tufnell, *Lachish III: The Iron Age* (Text and Plates) (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), frontispiece of text volume; see pp. 55-56, 62 for Tufnell's discussion of the reliefs. Note that this drawing is the first to show traces of Judahite captives at the bottom of slab 7. Accordingly, the two pairs of slingers mentioned above in n. 21 have been put back to their correct location. On the other hand, many missing parts are left blank in this drawing, a procedure which makes it impossible to appreciate the actual limits of extant slabs.

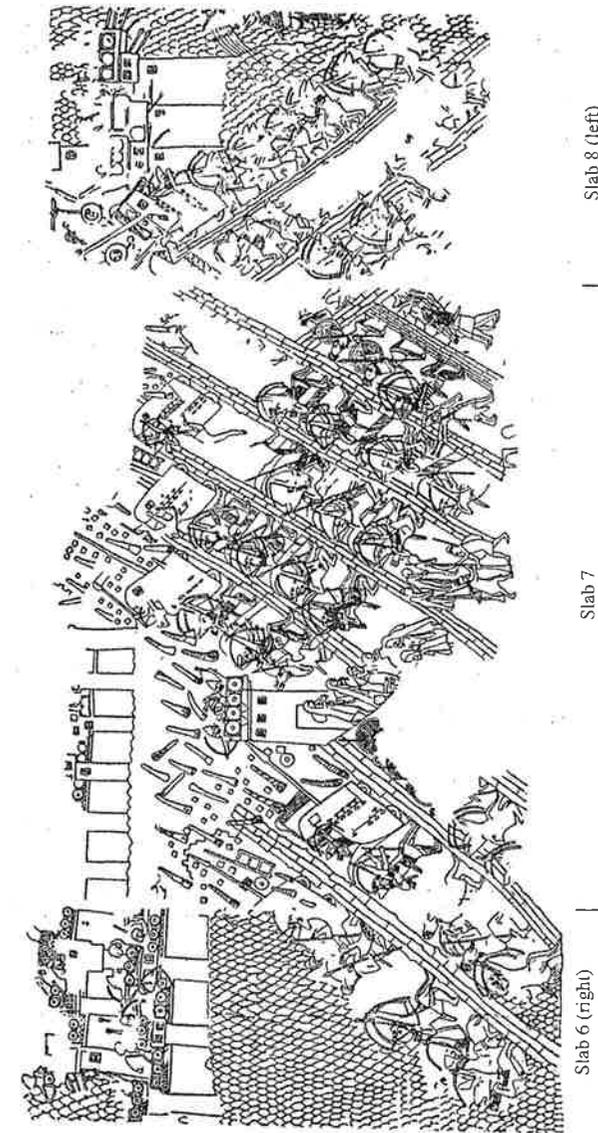


Fig. 4. New drawing of the siege scene published in *Lachish III* (1953); note that gaps are partly restored (particularly siege-planes and engines), partly left blank.

which ran some 16+ metres down around the slope. Both walls had recessed panels and projecting rectangular offsets or towers. Tufnell noted that on the reliefs, these are regularly spaced while on the ground they were set according to the contours of underlying bedrock. As for the bastion at the southwest corner, she saw it apparently freestanding, speculating that it had been unattached to the lower revetment in its earliest phase.<sup>64</sup> Since the details of these constructions were later clarified by the Tel Aviv expedition and are well-known, they need not detain us here any longer. Suffice it to note that Tufnell recognized basic points of agreement as well as considerable disagreements between the archaeological evidence and the sculptures, on which she would however not systematically comment. Of course, she also referred to arrowheads, slingstones, a spearhead, part of a bronze crest mount and the thick destruction layer covering the ascent to the city gate.

Five years later, R.D. Barnett, keeper at the British Museum and long-time the almost exclusive custodian of the reliefs (and of Layard's and others' 'Original drawings'), came back to Tufnell's presentation in order to 'consider the appearance of the city and attempt to reconstruct the events of the siege, a subject to which surprisingly little attention seems to have been devoted hitherto'.<sup>65</sup> Although his short article is often cited in secondary literature it did not add much to the subject beyond a number of questionable statements.<sup>66</sup> Barnett considered the sculptures to 'represent a gallant but confusing attempt by the artist, in the absence of perspective, to show several events happening at the same time which in fact succeeded one another'.<sup>67</sup> While he may be right on both points when they are taken separately, one cannot easily grasp his argument since perspective would not have solved the problem of telescoping different stages in time into a single, two-dimensional picture. Ironically, this is clearly demonstrated by a well-known drawing which a modern artist, Alan Sorrell, executed on Barnett's request.<sup>68</sup> The drawing introduced perspective but maintained

64. Since the bastion was clearly linked to the outer revetment in stratum III, this *ad hoc* hypothesis would certainly not explain why the Assyrian artist should have represented the bastion as a freestanding tower.

65. R.D. Barnett, 'The Siege of Lachish', *IEJ* 8 (1958), pp. 161-64 (162).

66. Ussishkin's understatement that his own studies were 'basically an elaboration of Barnett's work' ('The "Lachish Reliefs" and the City of Lachish', *IEJ* 30 [1980], 174-95 [175]) reads more like a *captatio benevolentiae*. As a matter of fact, the better part of Barnett's insights had been anticipated by Tufnell.

67. Barnett, 'Siege', p. 162.

68. Barnett, 'Siege', Pl. 30.B; see Yadin, *Art of Warfare*, II, pp. 436-37; Reade, *Assyrian Sculpture*, p. 65 fig. 69.

the temporal telescoping of successive events and thus appears even more surrealistic than the ancient original.<sup>69</sup> Barnett opined that the city appeared on the relief as if viewed from the southwest, where the British excavators had indeed found remains of the battle. He wondered 'whether any trace of this great siege-mound was found in the course of excavation',<sup>70</sup> suggesting that a glacis of red earth rising against the west wall of the bastion could represent all that was left of it, but he rightly stated that this hypothesis could 'only be confirmed or refuted by new excavation'.<sup>71</sup>

*D. Ussishkin: The Siege-Ramp, the Palace-Fort and 'A Certain Perspective'*

Luckily, this task was taken up by D. Ussishkin, whose excavations and restoration work between 1973 and 1994 on behalf of Tel Aviv University and the Israel Exploration Society have managed to resolve numerous problems raised by earlier excavations and subsequent scholarly discussions. Today, Lachish stratum III (see plan fig. 5a) is firmly and definitely identified as the city destroyed by Sennacherib and has become the major chronological cornerstone for the archaeology of Iron Age Judah.<sup>72</sup> The nature of its fortifications has been clarified, Barnett's just-mentioned hypothesis refuted and the Assyrian siege ramp precisely located at the southwest corner of the city, where the ascent to the bastion and city gate together with a natural saddle allowed the Assyrians to launch their attacks closest to the walls and gate but also to retreat with maximum facility.<sup>73</sup>

69. Judahites leaving for exile calmly descend from gateway to bastion while soldiers of both parties are shooting arrows or throwing stones above their heads. Defenders on the inner wall are much too far removed from the battle that their actions would have any influence on the course of events. As for the the Judahite chariot and weapons which must represent spoils taken from the city, most probably the palace-fort compound, they seem to come out of nowhere or even worse, from the midst of the Assyrian attacking force.

Another modern artist's reconstruction, prepared by H. J. Soulen under the guidance of G.E. Wright, was not available to me: H.W.F. Saggs, 'The March of Empires', in *Everyday Life in Bible Times* (Washington, DC: National Geographic Society, 1967), pp. 258-59 (quoted after Ussishkin, 'Lachish Reliefs', p. 182 n. 23).

70. Barnett, 'Siege', p. 162.

71. Barnett, 'Siege', p. 163.

72. See L.L. Grabbe's introduction to this volume, above pp. 3-20 ('Archaeology and Sennacherib', esp. the section on Lachish and the intermediate conclusions).

73. According to Ussishkin, it was Yigael Yadin who first suggested this location of the siege-ramp in 1973 (see '[First] Preliminary Report' [below, n. 76]; *idem*, 'Assyrian Attack' [below, n. 79]). See further I. Eph'al, 'The Assyrian Siege Ramp at Lachish: Military and Lexical Aspects', *TA* 11 (1984), pp. 60-70.

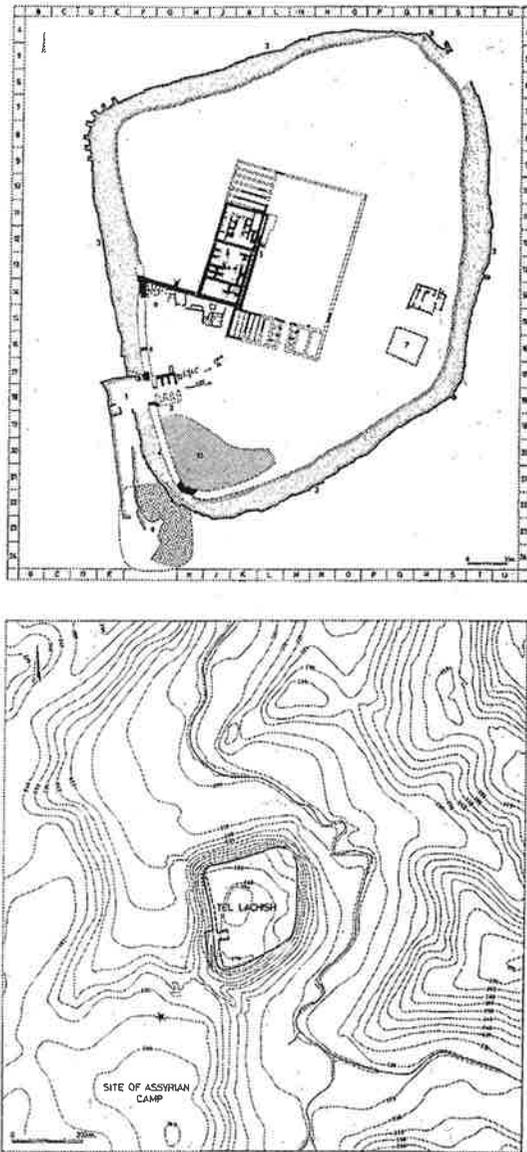


Fig. 5. Plan of Lachish stratum III according to D. Ussishkin's excavations (a) and general plan of the Lachish surroundings (b); the asterisk indicates the putative spot from where Sennacherib is thought to have followed the battle.

That this corner is the highest point of the city's defences partly results from the fact that the Judahite defenders had thrown up a huge interior counter-rampart against the city wall in order to protect it from the assault of the Assyrian battering-rams. All this and many more details surrounding the Assyrian attack and Judahite defence have been clearly expounded by Ussishkin in a number of preliminary publications, which hopefully will soon be superseded by the forthcoming final report.

In the course of his archaeological work and in line with his long-standing acquaintance with North-Syrian and Assyrian architecture and monumental decoration, Ussishkin took growing interest in Sennacherib's Lachish reliefs and, as a result, has published more extensively than anyone else on this particular series of sculptures. His studies go far beyond the simple juxtaposition of archaeological evidence and iconographical analysis. They include a completely new edition of the room XXXVI reliefs together with new drawings by Judith Dekel (see below, figs. 9a-c for some sections) in a monograph that remains the essential reference on the subject. Ussishkin also presented the history of the sculptures discovery and the architectural context in which they had been found<sup>74</sup>, to some extent paving the way for the systematic study of the whole palace by J.M. Russell.<sup>75</sup> The following paragraphs summarize Ussishkin's interpretation of the Lachish siege scene as first published in two seminal articles in 1978<sup>76</sup> and 1980,<sup>77</sup> then expanded and slightly adapted in his lavishly illustrated 1982 book,<sup>78</sup> and finally supported with additional observations in another two articles published in 1990<sup>79</sup> and 1996.<sup>80</sup> When reading these

74. On this issue, which cannot be pursued further in the present article, see the basic study by G. Turner, 'The State Apartments of Late Assyrian Palaces', *Iraq* 32 (1970), pp. 177-213 (200-202); *idem*, 'The Architecture of the Palace', in Barnett *et al.*, *Sculptures*, I, pp. 20-39 (27-30). That Hezekiah's tribute and the spoil of Lachish should have been stored in this room, as hypothesized by Ussishkin (*Conquest*, pp. 69/71), is pure speculation. We know enough of Assyrian palaces, magazines and administrative practices to infer that weapons, furniture and other useful items among foreign booty were concentrated in central magazines and partly redistributed to courtiers, officials and other favourites.

75. See references quoted above, n. 12.

76. Ussishkin, 'Excavations at Tel Lachish, 1973-1977. [First] Preliminary Report', *TA* 5 (1978), pp. 1-97 (67-74).

77. Ussishkin, 'The "Lachish Reliefs" and the City of Lachish', *IEJ* 30 (1980), pp. 174-95.

78. *The Conquest of Lachish by Sennacherib* (Publications of the Institute of Archaeology, 6; Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1982).

79. Ussishkin, 'The Assyrian Attack on Lachish: The Archaeological Evidence from

publications in a line, one can follow the evolution of Ussishkin's theory in accordance with the progress of excavations. From one stage to another, he continuously put his own hypotheses to the test of growing archaeological evidence, thus providing us with a model of critical scholarship. On the other hand, it seems that some basic premises of his theory did not change over a period of almost twenty years; some of these will be questioned below.

For the sake of convenience, we shall follow the path of arguments taken in the 1982 book version and supplement observations from articles wherever necessary. Fig. 6, which is based on a montage of the whole series published in the book,<sup>81</sup> may help the reader to follow the details of the argument. The book starts with a brief outline of 'The historical evidence' (i.e. textual information from inscriptions and the Bible: Part I, pp. 13-18), then turns to 'The archaeological evidence' (Part II, pp. 19-58) and finally addresses 'The Lachish reliefs' (Part III, pp. 59-126). The archaeological evidence plays a pivotal role in this development, which is understandable from the point of view of an archaeologist. However, this setting also implies that the reader is already well aware of what he might look for when he comes to the sculptures, a procedure which recalls Layard's account and many later approaches to the reliefs and which is likely to induce methodological fallacies into the iconographical analysis.<sup>82</sup>

the Southwest Corner of the Site', *TA* 17 (1990), pp. 53-86. The original Hebrew version of the latter article was published in the Yadin Memorial Volume, *Eretz-Israel* 20 (1989), pp. 97-114.

80. Ussishkin, 'Excavations and Restoration Work at Tel Lachish 1985-1994: Third Preliminary Report', *TA* 23 (1996), pp. 3-60.

81. Note that Ussishkin's book contains figures which represent various stages in the execution of the drawings. Our fig. 6 is based on the overall montage of the unshaded drawings on p. 77, fig. 65 of the book. Although this montage is certainly wrong (see below, p. 270, on montage C), it has been used here in order to highlight the problems involved in Ussishkin's hypothesis. The composite drawings published in Ussishkin, 'Lachish Reliefs', p. 179 fig. 3, and *idem*, *Conquest*, p. 121 fig. 93 come closer to target (see discussion below, pp. 271-73). My own montage in fig. 7 is based on Dekel's shaded drawings of the individual slabs (*Conquest*, figs. 67-69), which can easily be checked against the photographs.

82. Note that Ussishkin's 1980 article followed another path, starting with an examination of the Lachish reliefs (pp. 176-81) before turning to a comparison with the archaeological evidence concerning the city and the siege. The first section concentrated on the technical question of the slabs' arrangement. The only interpretative question discussed in this section concerns the relationship between the impalement scene at the bottom of slab 8 and the row of prisoners leading from slab 8 to 11. Ussishkin assumed 'that the three impaled prisoners shown at the bottom of the siege ramp

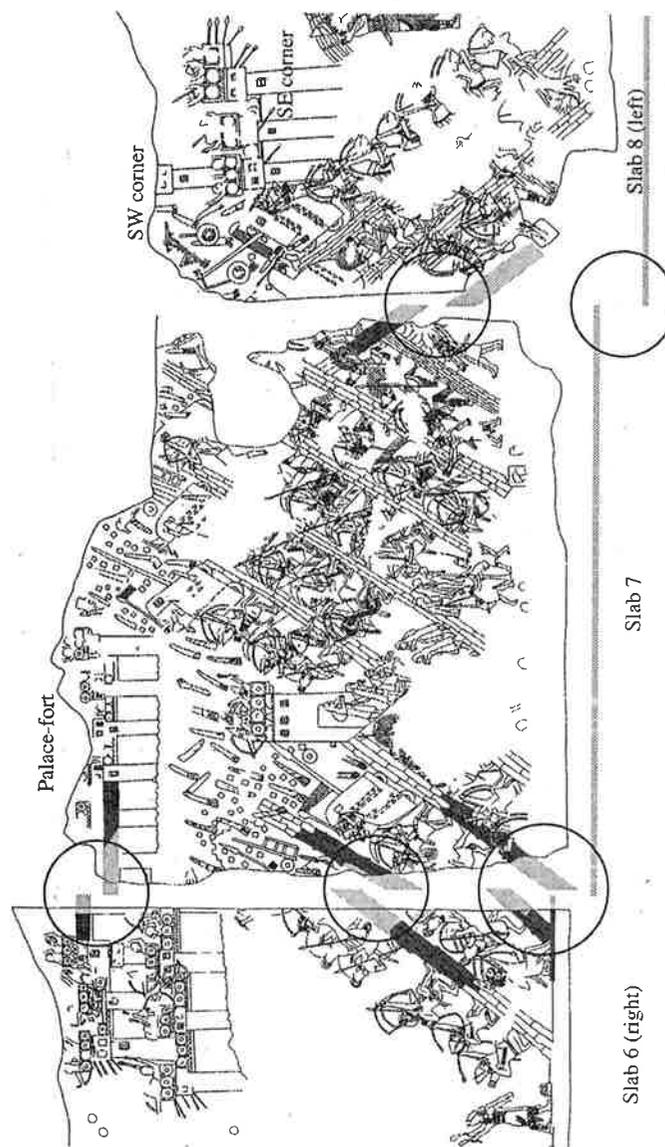


Fig. 6. New drawing of the siege scene by Judith Dekel, assembled as published in *Conquest*, fig. 65. Note that this drawing does not include restorations. Encircled areas highlight errors in the assemblage. Labels identify structures according to D. Ussishkin's theory.

To be fair, we must stress however that after recalling the excavation of Sennacherib's palace and the architectural context of the Lachish reliefs, Ussishkin offers a largely descriptive iconographical commentary (pp. 72-118) which is a mine of insightful observations without precedent in the scholarly literature on the Lachish reliefs.

Ussishkin's most original thesis is expounded in his final section, entitled 'The Lachish reliefs and the city of Lachish' (pp. 118-26). The main point of the thesis is announced in the first paragraphs of this section:

Lachish provides us with a unique opportunity of comparing a Neo-Assyrian stone relief depicting in detail an ancient city with the site of the same city whose *topography and fortifications* are well known to us... With the data of the *renewed excavations* at our disposal, it... becomes apparent that the reliefs *portray* the city not only from a certain direction but *from one particular spot*. The various features of the city are depicted according to the usual rigid and schematic conventions of the Assyrian artists, but they are shown *in a certain perspective*, roughly maintaining the proportions and relationships of the various elements as they would appear to an onlooker standing at one specific point.<sup>83</sup>

Ussishkin even ventures to precisely locate this spot, about 200m from the southwest corner of the city (see fig. 5b).<sup>84</sup> He then proceeds 'to compare the topographical and archaeological data as observed from our selected vantage point to the features of the city as shown on the reliefs'.<sup>85</sup> The gatehouse, which appears as an isolated tower on slab 7,<sup>86</sup> is identified

are associated with the line of deportees rather than with the attack and siege ramp' and that 'the impaled prisoners are apparently irrelevant to the scene of the storming of the city' (p. 181; cf. *Conquest*, p. 102). I tend to consider the scene as a kind of double-duty element, which belongs to both phases of the event. As a demonstrative operation conspicuously placed in the central axis of the city (which is itself the central element of the reliefs that ties together attack and submission), it is meant to mark the point where resistance is about to be definitely broken. Moreover, it stresses the contrast of destinies met by those who oppose the Assyrian power and those who acknowledge the bliss of submission to the Assyrian king.

83. Ussishkin, *Conquest*, pp. 118-19 (emphasis added).

84. On fig. 5b, the spot is marked by an asterisk.

85. Ussishkin, *Conquest*, p. 120.

86. Note however that this impression is based on a wrong interpretation of the image: since the latter shows Judahites leaving the gate, it clearly implies some connection between the city's habitation quarters and the 'tower'. The Assyrian artist had no interest in representing this particular connection, since his main emphasis in this area was to render the heat of the battle. According to Assyrian conventions, the very peculiar wavy line below the wall segment shown above the 'tower' cannot represent

with Starkey's bastion, or outer gate, which could indeed appear as a massive tower to an ancient onlooker. The path descending from the gate to the right must be the roadway that descends from the outer gate to the southwest corner of the mound, even though the actual roadway does not follow a zig-zag line as the Judahites' procession.<sup>87</sup> Most important for Ussishkin's point is the identification of the large structure above the city gate:

Apparently this building should be interpreted as the palace-fort, even though its architectural details are rendered exactly like those of the city walls, and soldiers (?) seem to be standing on the battlements. Nevertheless, the structure is clearly placed beyond the scene of the battle, and there are no enemy arrows like those penetrating the city walls stuck into its walls. The battering ram shown below the structure is attacking a feature rendered as a single, angled line, probably representing the city wall. The missiles raining down from it—the flaming torches, square stones, broken ladders and round shields—are all carved below the structure and are clearly dissociated from it. Assuming that the structure represents the formidable palace-fort, we may speculate that it rose to a much higher level in the missing upper part of Slab III [= slab 7].<sup>88</sup>

We shall come back to this latter 'speculation', but cannot avoid quoting here a passage which preceded it in Ussishkin's 1980 article before being excised from the 1982 book version:

Our suggestion that the palace-fort is shown in the relief is partly based on the assumption that the palace-fort *must* have been represented in the scene. Even today, when only the substructure of the edifice still stands, the palace

the (lower) city wall as maintained by Ussishkin (*Conquest*, p. 121). Rather, it corresponds to the outlined master sketch prepared before the actual carving of the slabs, as may be concluded from a comparison with the similar wave line visible between the city wall and the 'scaley mountain' on slab 6. On slab 7, the space below the wave line was reserved for crumbling bricks and falling torches. This emphasis on the battle prevented the artist from outlining the physical connection between the 'tower' and the (outer) city wall.

87. According to later excavations, it even seems that the level IV-III roadway did not follow the straight line of the present ascent roughly following the stratum II roadway but proceeded closer to the mound, turning into a southeasterly direction at the southwest corner (see Ussishkin, 'Assyrian Attack', p. 65; *idem*, 'Third Preliminary Report', pp. 38-40).

88. Ussishkin, *Conquest*, pp. 120-21, cf. p. 102. On the space between the 'structure' and the 'tower', see the previous footnote. Regarding enemy arrows sticking in walls, note that they only appear at the city's two extremities.

fort is the most impressive structure on the mound, and we can only imagine its formidable appearance when it was complete.<sup>89</sup>

It is obvious that in this instance Ussishkin followed a *petitio principii* based on pure imagination in the face of the huge podium preserved on the tell!<sup>90</sup> The omission of the ominous passage from the book demonstrates that Ussishkin must have been conscious of the argument's relative weakness. It is unfortunate that he did not substantiate his intuition through a systematic study of Assyrian pictorial conventions for representing heavily fortified cities with citadels and palace-forts. This would almost certainly have led him to consider more seriously the now-destroyed upper part of the relief (see below). Instead he tried, in a mixture of imagination and positivism, to reconcile his theory with the extant reliefs alone.

Turning then to the siege ramp to the right of the city gate, Ussishkin reports on new discoveries at the southwest corner of the mound. Again, he stresses his argument beyond the reasonable, insisting boldly on a quasi-proportional representation even though he had repeatedly stressed before that the Assyrian artists who designed the sculptures were not used to strict perspective:

*From our vantage point*, located nearly opposite the southwest corner of the mound, this ramp appears relatively large in relation to the other features of the city; in the relief it gives the same impression. *From our perspective (sic)*, the palace-fort and the outer city-gate appear to the left of the southwest corner and the siege ramp, exactly as depicted by the Assyrian artist. Furthermore, the left-hand side of the siege ramp reaches the bottom of the roadway leading to the outer city gate, and they appear similarly in the relief and *from our angle of vision*.<sup>91</sup>

Ussishkin rightly felt that his suggestion would stand or fall to the extent that it could take into account the 'left' part of the siege ramp depicted on the reliefs, which he originally thought had been directed against the outer gate. However, Barnett's hypothesis that the earthen glacis against the outer gate represented the remains of this ramp had been proven wrong by the new excavations which established its character as a constructional fill linked to the bastion. Ussishkin acknowledged in 1982 that 'no other

89. Ussishkin, 'Lachish Reliefs', pp. 188-89 (emphasis added).

90. Note that the 1978 preliminary report on the excavations only referred to the reliefs when discussing the outer gate or bastion ('[First] Preliminary Report', p. 63) and the siege ramp (pp. 71-74), not yet in the section on the palace-fort and annexed buildings (pp. 27-41). These were only later inserted in the argument.

91. Ussishkin, *Conquest*, p. 125 (emphasis added).

remains can be ascribed to such a siege ramp at present, and only future excavations can establish its presence or absence'.<sup>92</sup> Since then, such excavations have indeed taken place around the outer gate, although not exclusively focused on the siege ramp issue, but 'no indications for a second Assyrian siege ramp laid against the city gate have thus far been found'.<sup>93</sup> It is unfortunate that this clear discrepancy between the pictorial and the archaeological record still did not lead Ussishkin to revise his theory on vantage point and perspective.

Wishful thinking is at work with regard to another feature shown on the reliefs. On the upper left corner of slab 8 as preserved, one can clearly recognize the traces of three chariots flying through the air and possibly burning, presumably being thrown against the Assyrian attackers—most notably a battering ram depicted just below—by Judahite defenders standing on the 'upper' city wall. According to Ussishkin,

The vehicles are rendered in a schematic though detailed manner, each represented by one wheel with a thick felloe and six spokes, and a yoke with attachments for harnessing two animals... The fact that several identical vehicles are shown here suggests that these were not various carts of the peasants of Lachish but war chariots that may have belonged to the royal Judean garrison stationed at Lachish.<sup>94</sup>

Although respectable evidence for a royal Judahite garrison possibly including chariotry was uncovered after 1982,<sup>95</sup> Ussishkin's iconographical argument cannot be accepted, since the tiny, dismembered chariot depictions simply do not allow for a distinction between horse-driven chariots or oxen-driven carts. One can notice, however, that the relatively primitive wooden stacks visible on the yokes have nothing in common with the elaborate yoke of the Judahite ceremonial chariot which appears on the same slab among the spoil, a chariot conceived to be driven by a team of four horses.

More important from the point of view of the archaeologist, the main difficulty for Ussishkin's theory relates to the city's main fortifications. Slab 8 clearly depicts two walls, even if the 'wall' segment above the gate-house 'tower' on slab 7 should be identified with the palace-fort. As for slab 6, two walls are evident, although the upper 'wall' could, in a 'reading'

92. Ussishkin, *Conquest*.

93. Ussishkin, 'Third Preliminary Report', p. 46.

94. Ussishkin, *Conquest*, p. 105.

95. Ussishkin, See esp. 'Assyrian Attack', pp. 81-84; 'Third Preliminary Report', pp. 33-37.

sympathetic with Ussishkin's hypothesis, theoretically be regarded as the last segment of the palace-fort.<sup>96</sup> As was mentioned earlier, Tufnell and Barnett had no difficulties with the two walls since Starkey's excavations had apparently discovered remains of such a pair. Ussishkin's excavations established instead that the putative 'outer wall' was 'merely a strong revetment retaining the bottom of a glacis, which in turn supported the base of the city wall itself'.<sup>97</sup> How then should one understand the two walls depicted on the reliefs?

At this point, Ussishkin definitely became prisoner of his own premises and his explanations become particularly convoluted. Considering the city's right end on slab 8, he slips into the mind of the Assyrian artist looking from the presumed vantage point:

A single tower rising high above the latter wall segment was interpreted as representing an inner city wall, but it seems more likely to have belonged to the now-missing wall segment originally depicted above the siege ramp. This segment of wall was portrayed at a higher elevation than that of the structure to its left, interpreted by us as the palace-fort. From our vantage point the city appears in a similar way. In the southwest corner it rises higher than other parts of the wall, and as the observations of the Assyrian artist were presumably made from a point directly opposite this corner, the fortifications here would have appeared to him to loom even higher. The segment of wall shown in the relief at the right-hand edge of the city must therefore represent the city wall at the southeast corner, which from our angle of vision—and the Assyrian artist's—would appear roughly level with the palace foundations and the top of the siege ramp, and lower than the fortifications at the southwest corner.<sup>98</sup>

To think that a portion of the city-wall would run higher than the city's citadel and to look at two walls clearly depicted one above the other as two different corners of the mound's fortifications—separated in reality by a horizontal distance of roughly 225m—is to stretch one's imagination and interpretative premises beyond reasonable argument. The apparently ingenious explanation completely ignores the pictorial situation on the city's left hand on slab 6, which shows the two walls one above the other in an almost identical disposition as on slab 8 to the right.

96. Strangely enough, Ussishkin did not prefer this straightforward explanation to his own, which he expressed with much reservation, namely that the Assyrian artist should have taken the buttresses which reinforce the revetment at the northwestern angle of the mound for an outer wall (*Conquest*, p. 126).

97. Ussishkin, *Conquest*, p. 125.

98. Ussishkin, *Conquest* (emphasis added)

Let us sum up: Ussishkin's main thesis (visualized in fig. 6)<sup>99</sup> is that the Lachish relief 'portrays the besieged city as seen from one particular point'<sup>100</sup>. We have mentioned several difficulties of this theory, climaxing in the just-noted, utterly implausible interpretation. Having had the chance to work with Ussishkin in the field at Lachish and having experienced him as an always acute and often very critical scholar, I cannot deny my amazement and wonder about the reasons for his stubborn attachment to such a problematical theory. True, it was somewhat fashionable in the late 70s to locate Assyrian military camps, and Ussishkin had at that time already offered his suggestion concerning the Assyrian camp near Jerusalem.<sup>101</sup> However, his Lachish theory implies more than just a matter of location, and with all due appreciation, I suspect that the motives prompting this interpretation lie somewhere beyond scholarship. The deeper reasons driving Ussishkin's clinging to the very spot from where the Lachish reliefs were designed may be hidden in the answer he gave to his own question, 'Why was this spot chosen by the artist from which to draw the city and immortalize the battle?':

Our selected vantage point is located just in front of the presumed site of the Assyrian military camp, between it and the city... We should like to offer the suggestion that *this is the very spot where Sennacherib, the supreme commander, sat on his nimeru-throne* and conducted the battle. Consequently, we assume that the relief presents the besieged city *as seen through the eyes of the monarch* from his command post.<sup>102</sup>

This is language of commemoration which expresses military fascination and identification with the victor. It comes as no surprise that Ussishkin's

99. See above, n. 81.

100. Ussishkin, *Conquest*, p. 126.

101. D. Ussishkin, 'The 'Camp of the Assyrians' in Jerusalem', *IEJ* 29 (1979), pp. 137-42; cf. *idem*, 'The Water Systems of Jerusalem during Hezekiah's Reign', in M. Weippert and S. Timm (eds.), *Meilenstein* (Herbert Donner Festschrift; Ägypten und Altes Testament, 30; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1995), pp. 289-307 (290-92). A. Zertal, who acted as area supervisor in the Lachish excavations, claims to have discovered an Assyrian camp at el-Qa'adeh in the neighbourhood of Samaria during his Manasseh survey. See his 'The Heart of the Monarchy: Patterns of Settlement and Historical Considerations of the Israelite Kingdom of Samaria', in A. Mazar (ed.), *Studies in the Archaeology of the Iron Age in Israel and Jordan* (JSOTSup, 331; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), pp. 38-64 (57-58).

102. Ussishkin, *Conquest* (emphasis added), continuing with an observation on Sennacherib himself depicted on the right wall of room XXXVI of his palace, as if he were looking across towards the siege scene on the broad wall.

latest preliminary report should announce the erection, by the National Parks Authority, of a visitors' centre 'opposite the southwest corner of the mound', designed to receive a copy of the Lachish reliefs and to become the future starting point of guided tours to the site.<sup>103</sup> The procedure recalls some major achievements of Yigael Yadin, 'soldier, scholar, and myth-maker of modern Israel'<sup>104</sup> and one of Ussishkin's most influential teachers, of whom the latter had been a close collaborator at Hazor, Megiddo, in the Cave of the Letters and at Masada<sup>105</sup> and whom Ussishkin repeatedly challenged in later years. We cannot overlook the parallels drawn between the siege ramp of Masada and Lachish in some of Ussishkin's writings,<sup>106</sup> still less his early-stated opinion that

our siege ramp is (a) the most ancient siege ramp so far discovered in the Near East; (b) the only archaeologically attested Assyrian siege ramp and (c) the only such ramp to have been 'photographed' in detail by a contemporary artist.<sup>107</sup>

Much has been written about the modern Israeli 'Masada complex', and we must certainly be careful not to project this concept into too many issues.<sup>108</sup> Still, one cannot but be struck by the fact that Ussishkin's theory, incidentally grown out of some basic intuitions of Yadin, should materialize over the years in an achievement comparable to Yadin's at Masada, but related to heroic events which preceded Masada's putative mass suicide by centuries.

*Intermediate Conclusion: Agreements and Disagreements Between Reliefs, Topography and Archaeological Record*

For the sake of convenience, let us briefly summarize the major agreements and disagreements between the city's depiction on the room XXXVI sculptures, the topography of Tell ed-Duweir, and the archaeological record of its stratum III: The topography of Lachish undoubtedly fits the picture

103. Ussishkin, 'Third Intermediate Report', p. 53.

104. Cf. N. A. Silberman, *A Prophet from Amongst You: The Life of Yigael Yadin: Soldier, Scholar, and Mythmaker of Modern Israel* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1993).

105. On Yadin and Ussishkin, note Silberman, *Prophet*, pp. 232, 248, 251-54, 265-67.

106. E.g., Ussishkin, '[First] Preliminary Report', p. 73; *idem*, 'Assyrian Attack', p. 77. Note also Ussishkin's involvement at Beitar, where a famous siege took place towards the end of the Bar Kokhba revolt.

107. Ussishkin, '[First] Preliminary Report', pp. 73-74.

108. See R. Alter, 'The Masada Complex', *Commentary* 56 (July 1973), pp. 19-24; B.R. Shargel, 'The Evolution of the Masada Myth', *Judaism* 28 (1979), pp. 357-71.

much better than the one of Tell el-Hesi. As a matter of fact, image and topography concord with regard to an impressively high and well-fortified tell with very steep slopes. Because of this peculiar topographical situation, simultaneous multiple attacks against different sections of the city would have been almost impossible. Interestingly enough, the seven siege planes running against the city from the left and the three from the right form a kind of triangular 'rammer' field which opens one large breach into the lower and upper walls of the city; in contrast, the gate tower shows no sign of destruction. This seems to indicate that only one single siege ramp is actually depicted, as was first suggested by Ruth Jacoby (see below). Her interpretation would concord with the archaeological evidence and make an end to any speculation concerning a second siege ramp laid against the outer gate bastion. Moreover, the pointed top of the siege planes' imagined triangle would lie in a now destroyed segment above the right half of slab 7. I shall argue below that the original reliefs probably showed the citadel or palace-fort of Lachish at that very spot; if correct, this assumption would allow to register another concordance between image and archaeologically recorded reality. (Note, however, that the agreement would be limited to the mere existence or depiction of a citadel; in contrast to Ussishkin's theory, the citadel would not be positioned according to a quasi-perspectival view from a particular spot opposite the siege ramp, but roughly in the centre of the town or slightly off-centre to the right, which heightens the visual impact of the massive attack brought against it mainly from the left.)

As for the *disagreements* between the image and the archaeological record, they are at least as important and numerous as the positive correlations. The most conspicuous disagreement concerns the number of walls—as long as the two walls depicted on the reliefs are regarded as two different fortified city walls, probably thought to run parallel around the mound with apparently no physical connection between them. True, as a result of the just-mentioned breaches, neither the 'lower' nor the 'upper' wall run straight over the whole breadth of the figured city. Still, it seems most reasonable to consider the relative position of the two walls at the two extremities as an almost symmetrical arrangement, which should be and has been understood since Layard's harmonizing drawing as two parallel walls. Whether the wall-like structure on the upper left of slab 7 represents a segment of the city-wall or the palace-fort (as supposed by Ussishkin), the representation of straight wall segments and regularly spaced towers in any case does not reflect the archaeologically recorded evidence but merely follows an ancient Near Eastern pictorial convention. A further disagree-

ment exists between the zig-zag roadway leading downwards from the gate tower to the bottom of slab 7 and the actual roadway leading to the gate of Iron Age Lachish which followed the mound without any unnecessary bend in a south-southeasterly direction, roughly parallel to the outer revetment wall.<sup>109</sup>

Taken together, these observations seem to indicate that while the Assyrian artists probably had some knowledge or information concerning the topography and architecture of 701-BCE Lachish, they did not aim at a quasi-photographic portrayal of the city. Their particular rendering of 'Lachish' on the reliefs is apparently determined by standard pictorial conventions and constraints of compositional balance and does not support Ussishkin's theory of a quasi-perspectivic portrayal from one particular viewpoint.

#### *A Formal Critique of Ussishkin's Theory*

##### *R. Jacoby: Identification Markers and Pictorial Conventions*

Surprisingly, Ussishkin's theory that the Lachish reliefs provide an architectural portrait of the city in a quasi-perspectival manner as seen from a particular spot has not been challenged in any detail except for a short but important article by R. Jacoby, a younger student of Yadin's, entitled 'The Representation and Identification of Cities on Assyrian Reliefs'.<sup>110</sup> Following a detailed examination of 108 cities appearing on Assyrian reliefs in her MA thesis, Jacoby states that as a rule the depictions of cities should be regarded as 'simplified, generalized portrayals with no pretensions to accuracy'.<sup>111</sup> She cites interesting cases where one and the same city appears in several depictions on Assyrian monuments but is never represented in the same way. We should not therefore expect topographical and architectural accuracy from Assyrian artists in general.<sup>112</sup> On the other hand, Jacoby

109. See Ussishkin, 'Attack', p. 65.

110. See *IEJ* 41 (1991), pp. 112-31; the Hebrew version of the article, grown out of Jacoby's M.A. thesis, was published in *Eretz-Israel* 20 (1989), pp. 188-97. Note also the cautious remarks by Russell, *Palace*, p. 207 ('I am not sure this hypothesis is defensible'). According to Russell, 'Ussishkin's recent excavations at Tell ed-Duweir... have provided convincing evidence that Sennacherib was concerned with spatial verisimilitude not for its own sake, but rather as a means of constructing the image of a very particular place' (*Palace*, p. 205).

111. Jacoby, 'Representation', p. 112.

112. Even depictions of Nineveh and some outstanding buildings of the capital may be inaccurate; see J. Reade, 'Assyrian Illustrations of Nineveh', *Iranica Antiqua* 33 (1998; David Stronach Festschrift), pp. 81-94.

rightly holds that 'the scenes were meant to be recognized'<sup>113</sup>—not least, we may add, because specificity helped to validate the veracity of the pictorial narrative and the king's effective claim for authority.<sup>114</sup> How then would ancient onlookers have identified the cities represented? According to Jacoby, identification was achieved by the following means:

- (1) an epigraph
- (2) physical characteristics of the city's inhabitants (e.g. hairstyle, beards, headdress and clothing)
- (3) the type of booty carried by the vanquished citizens
- (4) topographical and vegetative details
- (5) outstanding structures, such as a palace, a temple or a monument.<sup>115</sup>

Jacoby cites examples for all these categories which demonstrate that the various means each had a different potential for precise identification. In my opinion, the last-mentioned category should be divided into two sub-categories, depending on whether a relief shows a unique feature or whether particular structures (such as shields hung up on the parapets of city walls and towers) serve to specify regional characteristics. Moreover, topographical details can be very specific (e.g. when a town is situated on an island or divided into several settlement units) or more generic (e.g. scaling for the depiction of hills and mountains). Finally, Assyrian reliefs sometimes show singular details of the battle course which probably allude to very specific events. We might thus establish a kind of hierarchy of features and organize them according to their identifying potential:

feature	identifies
(1) singular detail of battle depiction	specific event
(2) epigraph	specific event or location
(3) singular architectural features or a monument	city ( <i>ālu</i> )
(4) characteristic topographical features (e.g. island)	city or region
(5) type of booty carried by the vanquished	city, region or country ( <i>mātu</i> )
(6) characteristic features of the city's inhabitants	country or area (e.g. Hatti) <sup>116</sup>
(7) typical architectural features	country, area or 'cardinal quarter' ( <i>kibru</i> )
(8) topographical and vegetative details	area or 'cardinal quarter'

113. Jacoby, 'Representation', p. 122.

114. On the relation between growing geographical specificity and royal ideology, see the studies mentioned above, n. 60.

115. Jacoby, 'Representation', pp. 114-16.

116. Except the epigraphs, this is the best-studied category which has, however, its particular tricks: one has to bear in mind that the development of Assyrian palace art shows progressive precision over time with regard to the distinction of dress,

Turning to the room XXXVI reliefs, Jacoby asks whether it would be possible 'to identify the city portrayed on the relief as Lachish in the absence of the inscription'<sup>117</sup> and discusses three major features of the depiction, namely the two city walls, the gate, and the siege ramp, none of which according to her analysis would allow for a definite identification. In her opinion, 'It appears that one should not expect the details of the fortification depicted on the relief to correspond to the results of the archaeological excavation', and

Since Lachish was not mentioned in the annals and was not incorporated in a general description of the field campaign, and since its relief occupied a separate room in Sennacherib's palace, we would not have been able to determine its identity were it not for the inscription.<sup>118</sup>

I generally agree with Jacoby, although her argument would have to be refined, taking into account the chronological development of Assyrian monumental art which arrived at increasing differentiation over the decades from the reigns of Tiglath-Pileser III to Ashurbanipal. The basic problem is how to distinguish between specific and generic markers, an operation which necessitates comparison of a given scene with the total corpus of siege scenes and leaves considerable uncertainty due to the fragmentary state of the corpus. In contrast, Ussishkin's too narrow correlation of iconography and archaeology rests upon his arbitrary isolation of two different sets of data, the room XXXVI reliefs and the results of the Lachish excavations. In the preceding section, we have already formulated a number of critical arguments against his interpretation of the reliefs on internal, iconographical grounds, limiting our discussion to a critique of his own argument. Opening up the iconographic horizon along the lines of Jacoby's study leads to the inevitable conclusion that Ussishkin's interpretation cannot be upheld.<sup>119</sup>

particularly in the case of Western peoples, while inhabitants of various regions in the Zagros mountains and beyond remain depicted in the same, more stereotyped manner.

117. Jacoby, 'Representation', p. 122.

118. Jacoby, 'Representation', pp. 130-31.

119. I intentionally leave open the issue of quasi-perspective and deep space in Assyrian art, which is not addressed by Jacoby but would necessitate a lengthy discussion. Dismissing the capacity of Assyrian artists to approach the problem of directional view altogether would be too easy a way to dispense oneself of critical argument. As a matter of fact, Sennacherib's reliefs show nascent tendencies towards quasi-perspective, as has been stressed by a number of scholars. See Russell, *Palace*, ch. 9; *idem*, 'Sennacherib's Lachish Narratives', pp. 57-65, for a recent assessment.

To my knowledge, Jacoby is the first scholar to have remarked that the ten siege planes 'opened up like a fan' should be understood as *one single siege ramp*.<sup>120</sup> On the other hand, my impression is that she somewhat shot beyond target when considering the depiction of the room XXXVI city to be just a generic and conventional one. Comparison with other city depictions clearly shows that the 'Lachish' picture has conspicuous peculiarities, some of which are likely to relate to a particular topographical and architectural reality.<sup>121</sup> In my opinion, this holds true for the gate tower projecting out of the city's fortifications, and probably also for the two walls although, as we have seen, these do not exactly fit the archaeological evidence on the site. Moreover, it seems most probable to me that the palace-fort, which was such an important structure in the stratum-III town, was indeed represented in the now lost upper third of slab 7. Such correlations hint at the strong probability that the depiction of 'Lachish' is more than a purely conventional one but implies definite knowledge about particular features of the 701 BCE town's fortifications and monumental architecture.

A major question is of course from what kind of 'sources' such knowledge derived. Since we do not have any evidence for Assyrian artists working in the field during military campaigns, the most likely explanation seems to be that the artists who designed the reliefs had access to textual information, probably contained in field diaries and syntheses such as must have been used for the redaction of 'letters to the gods' and related reports.<sup>122</sup> Such primarily text-based data processing may explain the depic-

However, I think that the main issue is not one of perspective, but one of data processing, namely whether pictorial sketches were taken in the field (let alone from a single spot) or not and whether the artists relied on pictorial or on textual sources when designing the reliefs.

120. 'The artist's intention was not to reproduce in the relief an exact replica of reality, but rather to portray in great detail the Assyrian siege technique in all its variations' (Jacoby, 'Representation', p. 130).

121. Cf. Russell, *Palace*, 209: 'it is clear that the Lachish shown in the relief is intended to be recognizable'; *idem*, 'Sennacherib's Lachish Narratives', p. 72: 'The visual record of this success was presented in a way that would ensure *maximum recognizability*, through highly specific costumes and scenery; and *verisimilitude*, through exploitation of perspective effects in a unified field' (emphasis added).

122. Cf. Russell, *Palace*, pp. 28-30 and pp. 208-209. It is well-known that Lachish is not mentioned in Sennacherib's annals, which rather insist on the destruction of a great number of towns and Hezekiah's having been caught up in Jerusalem (see below, pp. 293-303). The same holds true for at least five other towns represented on Sennacherib's reliefs. Consequently, Sennacherib's reliefs cannot derive directly from annals and other preserved monumental inscriptions.

tion of 'Lachish' with two walls: in verbal terms even a strong revetment wall for a glacis still is a *wall*, which would be represented by the artists according to their standard pictorial conventions for a wall typical of Levantine cities, namely with shields hung up on the parapets and—obviously—defenders, particularly so if the artists had not been eyewitnesses of the actual siege on site.<sup>123</sup>

We should keep in mind that the issue of identification, which is at the heart of Jacoby's critique, is neither the only nor always the major problem involved in the historical interpretation of the reliefs. The room XXXVI sculptures would yield important information on Assyrian and Judahite history even if we did not know that the city depicted is meant to represent Lachish. Let us therefore leave now the matter of archaeology and identification and return to the reliefs themselves. Before having a closer look at their composition and some peculiar features depicted, we must start once more with the basics: a series of heavily fragmented slabs.

123. The same conclusion was already reached independently by Russell, *Palace*, p. 208; *idem*, 'Sennacherib's Lachish Narratives', p. 64: 'This is the sort of discrepancy one would hardly expect to find in a drawing made on the spot, but which might occur in a written description being translated into visual terms. In this latter scenario, it is easy to imagine "wall" in a written description being translated in its most familiar (and formidable) visual form, that is, a towered fortification, even if this convention does not in fact correspond to the appearance of the original'. Note the doubts expressed by J.E. Reade, review of Russell, *Palace*, *ZA* 84 (1994), pp. 303-304, who refers to an information from S. Parpola concerning 'an Assyrian letter that mentions a drawing of a fortress made on leather' without, however, specifying its purpose. The letter has since been edited by A. Fuchs and S. Parpola, *The Correspondence of Sargon II. III. Letters from Babylonia and the Eastern Provinces* (SAA, 15; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2001), p. 95 no. 136. The reason why the 'fortress' in question, located in the province of Lahiru in Babylonia, was sketched is unclear, but it may well be connected with the letter-writer's plan to establish an Assyrian garrison in it. There is really no hint that his sketch would serve for artists concerned with the design of palace reliefs. Note, however, that Reade has repeatedly stated his sympathy for a hypothesis expressed long ago by T. Madhloom with regard to the pair of Assyrian scribes often depicted on sculptures and wall paintings. One of the two regularly holds a scroll instead of a tablet; according to Madhloom (*Chronology*, p. 122), this figure could represent a draughtsman, on whose copies the sculptors would have relied. As against this interpretation, the man with the scroll is never shown standing in front of a city but he exclusively registers booty and captives; moreover, the pair of scribes may occasionally consist of only tablet-writers. The traditional interpretation of the man with the scroll as a scribe writing in Aramaic provides a better explanation for the pictorial evidence.

### Heavily Fragmented Slabs

It is well-known that the reliefs of room XXXVI consisted originally of a series of at least 17 slabs of various dimensions, all measuring c. 264–274 cm<sup>124</sup> in full height but ranging from c. 61 cm (slab '16') to 239 cm (slab '5') in width depending on space restrictions and the raw material which the Assyrian sculptors had at their disposal.<sup>125</sup> The original slabs joined very neatly, and numerous details show an overlap from one slab to another. However, when going through Hodder's sketches which may be considered the most problem-orientated, and thus relatively critical record of the reliefs' state of preservation at the time of their discovery (fig. 1),<sup>126</sup> one is struck by the great number of individually registered fragments (556 items), which does not include a considerable number of smaller pieces that apparently went unrecorded. More intriguing is the fact that whereas the upper ends of extant reliefs and drawings follow a very irregular course, as one would of course expect given the vicissitudes of time, the lateral margins of the slabs were always drawn by Hodder with a ruler, which conveys the impression that at the time of their discovery, the joins between the slabs were all perfectly neat. This impression is certainly wrong; there is no reason why the joins would have been better preserved than the actual slab surfaces at places where the latter are worn or even destroyed. Comparison of Hodder's drawings with extant slabs (and to some extent also with Layard's drawings, e.g. fig. 2) show that in some instances his straight edges do not reflect the real boundaries of the sculptures at all.<sup>127</sup> Published photographs of the original slabs demonstrate that physical joins between the slabs are occasionally preserved; however, they do not always conform to Hodder's sketches. Numerous gaps remain, many of which have been plastered during restoration since 1856. This situation is particularly vexing in the most sensitive case of slabs 6-7 and 7-8. Whether the edges were already damaged at the time of the discovery or only later when the slabs were dismantled, or both, it is obvious that the correct horizontal

124. Compare Barnett *et al.*, *Sculptures*, I, p. 104 no. 437b: 264.1 cm, to Ussishkin, *Conquest*, pp. 72 and 76: 'Height of left side (original height of relief): 2.74 m... Height of right side: 2.63m.' I have not checked the original.

125. Barnett *et al.*, *Sculptures*, I, pp. 101-105, II Pl. 322 count 16 slabs, 12 of which are extant, but the sketch shows actually 17 slabs. The difference goes back to Layard's early plans. Layard's slabs 5-13 actually comprise 12 instead of 9 slabs, see synopsis in Barnett *et al.*, *Sculptures*, I, p. 105. Ussishkin (*Conquest*, p. 71 fig. 61) leaves open the number of slabs preceding the ones actually preserved.

126. But see above, n. 20.

127. Ussishkin, *Conquest*, figs. 62, 64 and 65 allow a convenient comparison.

positioning of adjoining slabs represents a major preliminary issue that must be addressed before attempting any plausible 'narrative reading' of the overall composition, and particularly of the siege scene. As a matter of fact, most studies on the Lachish reliefs have ignored this problem, taking for granted the restoration displayed in the British Museum or, worse, the plates published by Layard (fig. 3) and later copies thereof.<sup>128</sup>

Moreover, earlier studies have not always recognized the fact that the central siege scene running over slabs 6-8, and particularly slab 7, is only preserved to roughly two-thirds of its original height, with minimal parts on both edges of slab 7 rising to c. 52-56 per cent of the original height (compare fig. 8). However difficult, a cogent interpretation of the series has to take into account the now-missing upper portions. As mentioned above, Ussishkin speculated that the palace-fort, which he erroneously identified with an upper wall feature on the left of slab 7, could have extended into this now-lost part of the relief. Jacoby seems to be the first scholar to have explicitly remarked that the ten siege planes 'all point to one spot no longer visible on the relief'.<sup>129</sup> If we consider comparable siege scenes where citadels rise to almost the total height of sculptured slabs in rooms XII, XIV and XLIII,<sup>130</sup> it is reasonable to surmise that at least the upper third of slab 7 originally showed the Lachish citadel, i.e. the palace-fort of stratum III. Fig. 7 is an attempt to visualize this hypothesis, which will be supported by the following discussion.

#### Reassembling the Slabs

Ussishkin has rightly stressed that any plausible interpretation of the pictorial narrative requires the correct assembling of the slabs, and particularly of slabs 6-8. His own attempt, however, presents two major difficulties: first, it is intimately linked to his theory of quasi-perspectival view, particularly to an identification of the palace-fort on the upper edge on the left hand of slab 7 which cannot be upheld; second, despite a detailed account of the reliefs' present state of preservation and the difficulties involved in reassembling the slabs,<sup>131</sup> it is startling that he has published no less than five slightly divergent montages of slabs 6-8, four of them appearing in one and the same book:

128. Ussishkin (esp. *Conquest*, p. 72) is a notable exception.

129. Jacoby, 'Representation', pp. 126-27. I shall elaborate below on this observation, which I also made independently when studying the reliefs in London in 1983.

130. See Barnett *et al.*, *Sculptures*, II, Pls. 151, 168-69, 374-75.

131. See particularly Ussishkin, *Conquest*, p. 72.

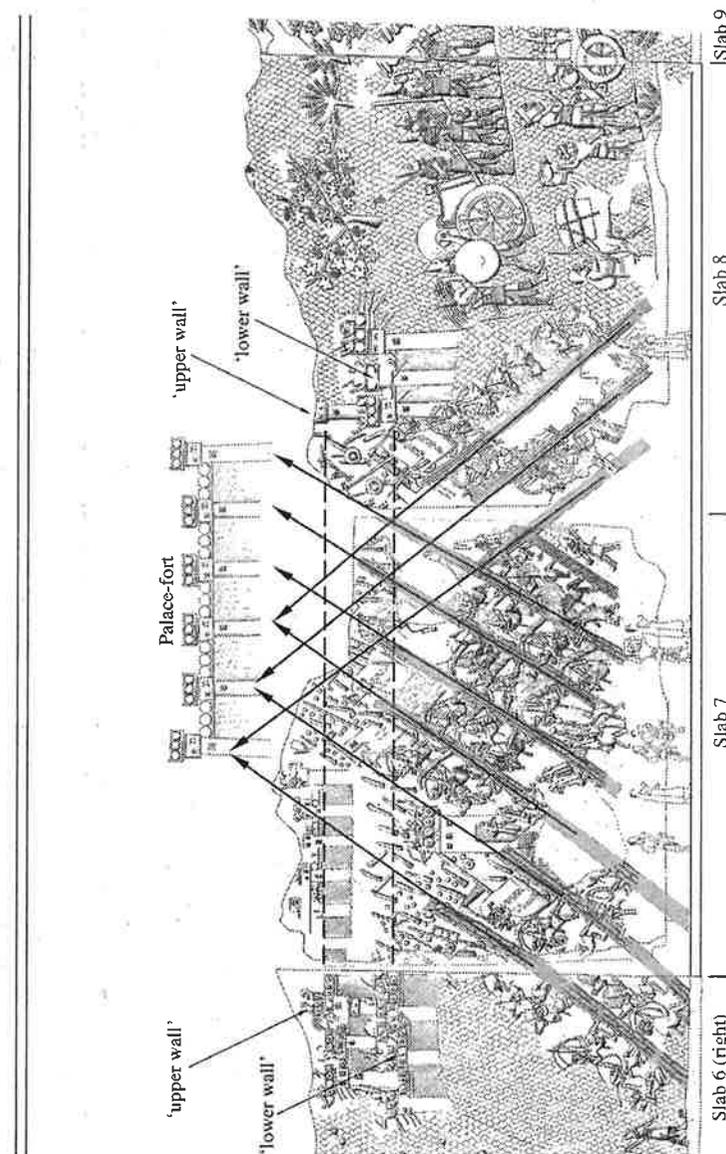


Fig. 7. Tentative reassemblage of slabs 6-9, with selective restorations including the now-missing citadel (Ch. Uehlinger, assisted by J. Egger).

(A) 'Lachish Reliefs', p. 179 fig. 3 is a much reduced montage of Judith Dekel's shaded drawings of slabs 6-8. It restores some missing details but leaves considerable gaps between the three slabs, which are shown without any physical connection. The assemblage is essentially based on connecting siege planes (cf. our own fig. 7).

(B) *Conquest*, p. 73 fig. 62 (drawings) shows only the relevant margins and fills in missing details by clearly marked hypothetical restorations. The latter do not always correspond to those suggested on the more detailed drawings of individual slabs, *ibid.* pp. 80-84 figs. 67-69. The assemblage is again based on connecting siege planes, which are now drawn out.

(C) *Conquest*, p. 77 fig. 65 above (drawing) shows the whole series of slabs without restorations. For the sake of clear argument, a portion of this montage was used as a starting-point for our fig. 6 (see p. 253), although the montage is obviously wrong: the siege planes between slabs 6-7 and 7-8 do not connect, and the plinth of slabs 5-6 runs more than a centimetre above the one of slabs 9-10 etc. (when calculated for the actual reliefs, this would make a difference in level of almost 20 cm!).

(D) *Conquest*, p. 77 fig. 65 below presents a photo-montage of the extant reliefs in the British Museum. This montage is even more problematic since it inevitably includes the BM plaster restorations. I also wonder whether the photographs actually follow a single scale (slab 7 appears to be slightly too small). While the siege planes connect between slabs 6-7, they do not follow between 7-8, and the whole series of slabs 8 etc. is positioned far too low when compared to slabs 5-7.

(E) *Conquest*, p. 121 fig. 93 is yet another drawing with discrete restorations, running from slab 6 right to slab 8 left; this drawing is similar but not identical to (A).

The point here is not to quibble over this or that restored detail or erroneous assemblage nor to put slander on Ussishkin's and Dekel's generally admirable work. Putting together drawings and photographs such as to allow a continuous 'reading' on one single foldout plate had never been done before and must have been a headache for the two authors, who certainly spent considerable time in moving up and down their photographs and drawings of individual slabs. Moreover, minor distortions are inevitable for optical reasons as long as a montage is based on conventional photog-

raphy. Finally, the differences involved generally measure a few centimetres; still, since slabs 6-8 include very tiny details these differences inevitably matter. It is noteworthy that both Ussishkin's theory and his location of the palace-fort would be impossible on the basis of his own montages C (fig. 6) and D, since on these the putative palace-fort to the left of slab 7 appears on a lower level than the 'upper wall' on slab 6.<sup>132</sup>

An improved reassemblage of the slabs should ideally be based on a new, independent recording with the help of electronic devices that could avoid or compensate optical distortions. Within the limits of this article, I can but outline the principles which would then determine the reassemblage of slabs 6-8 (compare figs. 6 and 7). The starting point is the well-preserved join of slabs 8 and 9, where two ground-lines and several overlapping details (a soldier carrying a stand, a Judahite cart) allow for a precise relative positioning of slab 8. Since the plinth of slabs 9 etc. must have been roughly on a level with the one visible at the bottom of slabs 5-6, the major difficulty is then to determine the correct position of slab 7, which has no physical join at any point with its neighbours. The most reliable criterion is provided by the course of the first and second siege plane on the left, which runs across slabs 6-7; to this we may add the first of the right-hand siege planes visible on slab 7, which is the implied ground-line for two pairs of kneeling archers approaching left on slab 8. Since the connecting siege-planes on both sides run diagonally, the *vertical* position of slab 7 will depend on how much *horizontal* space we allow for the gaps between the slabs. The answer will have to be determined on the following premises: first, the restoration and insertion of battering rams, soldiers etc. in the gaps must start from preserved traces and accord in proportions with comparable, fully preserved examples mainly on slab 7. Of course it must also fit the overall composition. To judge from fig. 2, this principle already guided Layard's drawing (note, e.g. the restored battering-ram and archers appearing in figs. 2 and 3 on siege-planes 1 and 2 from the left); as we have seen, his restorations must have relied on his field drawings, but he could not check them against the originals. Second, in order not to prejudicate the question of whether the fortification segment on slab 7 should be regarded as part of the 'upper wall' or as an independent structure, our reassemblage should provisionally ignore the

132. One wonders whether montages C and D are based on the assumption (of some independent assistant?) that the wall segment on slab 7 should be the straight extension of the 'upper wall' segment on slab 6. Note that this assumption had already led Hodder's attempt at producing a satisfactory join between the two slabs (see above, fig. 1).

problem whether or how the horizontal wall segments of slabs 6 and 7 fit together. Third, it should allow for sufficient space at the bottom of slab 7 in order to accommodate the procession of Judahites leaving the town through the gate tower, descending to the bottom of slab 7, then turning right and proceeding in a continuous flow along the plinth of slab 7 before joining the lower register of slabs 8 etc. Of course, our reassemblage should also take into account the probable presence, at the bottom of slab 7, of a plain plinth similar to the ones preserved on slabs 5-6 and 9-13. Finally, although the individual slabs slightly varied in height, an upper edge and plinth of slab 7 may be tentatively restored in order to visualize the extent of once sculptured surface which is missing today.

Fig. 7 presents the hypothetical and provisional result of such a reassemblage based on the manipulation—*faute de mieux*—of Dekel's remarkable drawings of the individual slabs. The restoration was executed on the computer by a member of our Department, Dr Jürg Eggler, working under my supervision and according to the just-mentioned principles. For the sake of convenience, the main features defining the reassembled composition have been marked on the figure; hypothetical restorations are drawn out in lighter tone so as to allow their distinction from features preserved on the extant reliefs. The resulting picture confirms earlier observations about the quasi-symmetrical status of the walls visible on either side of the city; both sides show a 'lower' and an 'upper wall', with corresponding wall segments placed at about the same height. Moreover, although the fortification segment preserved on slab 7 (Ussishkin's 'palace-fort') does not extend in a straight line the 'upper wall' segment of slab 6 (as erroneously suggested by figs. 1 and 4), it may still be regarded as part of the 'upper wall'. Layard had already noted (see his drawing and plate in figs. 2 and 3) that on the left side of the city the two walls do not run horizontally but slightly raise their course towards the centre of the mound. Consequently, tower 3 of the 'lower wall' on slab 6 rises higher than towers 1 and 2, the difference corresponding roughly to the height of a balcony. The same situation prevails for the 'upper wall'. It therefore comes as no surprise that the wall segment on slab 7 should be placed somewhat higher than the one on slab 6. The situation does neither require nor allow Ussishkin's thesis that the segment preserved on slab 7 should represent an independent structure. Instead, the gradual rise of wall segments serves to stress the overall height of the city fortifications. As for the highest point of the besieged town (the expected citadel), it must obviously be looked for somewhere else, more to the right. Our restoration takes into account—for the first time, as far as I can see—that the ultimate target of the attack

along the siege ramp, visualized in our figure by diagonal arrows extending from the siege planes, must have been a fortified citadel located in the upper right part of slab 7.<sup>133</sup> This restoration may look daring, but it seems obvious that the bricks, torches, ladders, carts and men visible on the extant slabs must be thrown or fall from some place above. Moreover, it would have been pointless to represent no less than four (perhaps even five) battering-rams running straight into the open breach of the city's fortifications if their ultimate target were not such a massive structure situated somewhere beyond the city walls.

As we have seen, the ten siege-planes running against, through and over the city's fortifications may be understood as parts of one single siege ramp. Their fan-like appearance together with the extension of the 'upper wall' may help to secure the restoration of the missing citadel. The latter's location was not determined by a quasi-perspective view of an artist working on-site, but resulted instead from the general layout of the siege scene along the wall, which in turn depended on a number of formal constraints (see below). We should not deduce from the fact that some of the siege-planes run against the hypothetical citadel that the palace-fort of stratum III and the fortified enclosure on the mound had been assaulted in the actual battle course by Sennacherib's battering-rams. Incidentally, no remains of a siege ramp built against the palace-fort or the enclosure have been located on the mound, although it is of course probable that the enclosure and palace-fort may have served as a kind of ultimate bastion for the town's last defenders. The depiction of battering-rams running across two parallel city walls against the citadel rather stresses the intensity of the Assyrian onslaught against the massive enemy fortifications, whose importance in turn serves to celebrate the heroic character of the Assyrian onslaught.<sup>134</sup>

In conclusion, the overall picture obtained by our restoration and hypothesis strongly favours Jacoby's opinion according to which the Assyrian artists who designed the Lachish series did not represent the actual attack as seen from a certain spot but according to their own, well-established compositional rules and pictorial conventions.

133. For comparison, see n. 130 and a citadel appearing on top of another (Palestinian?) city on slab 23 (respectively 28) of throne-hall I, Barnett *et al.*, *Sculptures*, II, Pls. 46-47; Russell, *Final Sack*, pp. 110-12 Pls. 72-74 (= below, fig. 12).

134. The closest parallels from Sennacherib's palace are again Barnett *et al.*, *Sculptures*, II, Pls. 151, 374-75; contrast Pl. 471.

*From Battle to Monument: Building up a Pictorial Discourse*

Traditional historical research usually moves backwards from sources to events and asks for factual substance behind the sources. Not surprisingly, the Lachish reliefs have generally been addressed in this traditional perspective, which uses archaeological, textual and pictorial sources like windows to the past. In the case of pictorial narrative such as the Assyrian palace reliefs, relating particular events (Braudel's *histoire événementielle*), it is naturally tempting for historians to look at them as if they were precisely such windows that allow for an almost photographic restitution of past reality.

More recent insights in historical hermeneutics and refined studies on ancient historiography have considerably modified historical methodology, taking into account the problems of data processing faced by ancient authors, whether scribes or artists. In order to understand the meaning and function of ancient documents, we need to consider the way information was registered, stored, transmitted and eventually rendered in a particular document, which could claim more or less authority. In the case of Assyrian palace reliefs, the issue of data processing is particularly vexed by the probable intersection of verbal and visual information and media. When analyzing pictures such as the room XXXVI sculptures, historians have to consider the procedures of data processing and social communication involved in the commissioning of the task, namely to represent an historical event and its significance on the walls of a major palace suite. True, much of what we can know of these procedures derives from indirect evidence and argument. Still, a hypothetical account of how the Lachish reliefs came into existence may prevent us from too naive and historicist readings of their subject matter.<sup>135</sup>

As argued above with reference to the two fortified walls depicted on the reliefs, the primary recording of data by Assyrian expedition members was probably limited to textual media (field diaries and memos which were then elaborated into syncretical, more or less embellished presentations leading up to the 'letters of the gods'). Occasionally, missing but required data may have been supplemented through active memory by officials who had participated in a campaign. At some point of the redactional process

135. Note the suggestion by Russell, 'Sennacherib's Lachish Narratives', p. 72 that the prominent placement and treatment of the Lachish episode may be explained by the fact that the room XXXVI reliefs were executed from c. 700 onwards, i.e. shortly after what Sennacherib must have perceived as the last great triumph achieved during his most recently completed campaign.

leading from diaries to the 'letters of the gods', but apparently before the data processing entered the subsequent stage of annalistic redaction, information was handed over to officials responsible for the choice of subjects to be selected for the reliefs. The king himself most probably was involved on several stages of the procedures, acting himself as the definite authorizing instance. Once the general topic and the space to be devoted for it were selected, senior designers must have conceived the way in which the particular event would be rendered on the walls. For that purpose, they had to transpose the verbal (textual and possibly oral) record into another medium, namely pictorial narrative.

Before even addressing issues of subject matter, the designers faced formal constraints, most notably architectural context, which conditioned the space available for the reliefs, and sometimes they would have to take into account the future function of a particular room. Further constraints were put on their design when they considered the problem of layout and macro-syntax.<sup>136</sup> While clearly to be 'read' from left to right, the programme of room XXXVI's pictorial narrative (see fig. 8) obviously aims at a certain symmetry, starting and ending with static processions of horsemen and chariotry<sup>137</sup> and focusing on the intense, almost ecstatic attack of the city in the centre of the room. Ussishkin and Russell have rightly stressed that slab 7 is placed in the centre of the room's southwest (main long) wall. The actual siege scene could probably be seen across the preceding room(s) and doorway(s). On this wall, emphasis is on reversal, with slabs 5-6 showing orderly placed Assyrian attackers while on slabs 8-9 booty and captives are led away. The city itself shows an almost symmetrical disposition, slightly off-centre towards the right in accordance with the general movement of the scenario. While the walls on the left side (slab 6) are manned with defenders, those on the right (slab 8) show Judahites raising their arms in a gesture of surrender (and praise?). The compositional axis is stressed by the people leaving the gate tower following a zig-zag line alongside a famous detail, which shows three naked enemies being impaled by a pair of Assyrian soldiers.<sup>138</sup> Once a visitor had entered the room and considered the 'film' of attack, onslaught and submission, he

136. For the arrangement of slabs along the walls of room XXXVI, compare the sketch provided by Russell, *Palace*, pp. 200-201, fig. 108.

137. See above, n. 18, on the subject matter of slabs 1-4. For the general principles governing narrative composition in Sennacherib's palace, see Reade, 'Narrative Composition', pp. 86-95; Russell, *Palace*, ch. 9 ('space and time').

138. See above, n. 82.

would follow the trail of captives and booty that would lead him towards the Assyrian king, conspicuously enthroned in the centre of the northwest (main short) wall and conveniently placed on eye-level.

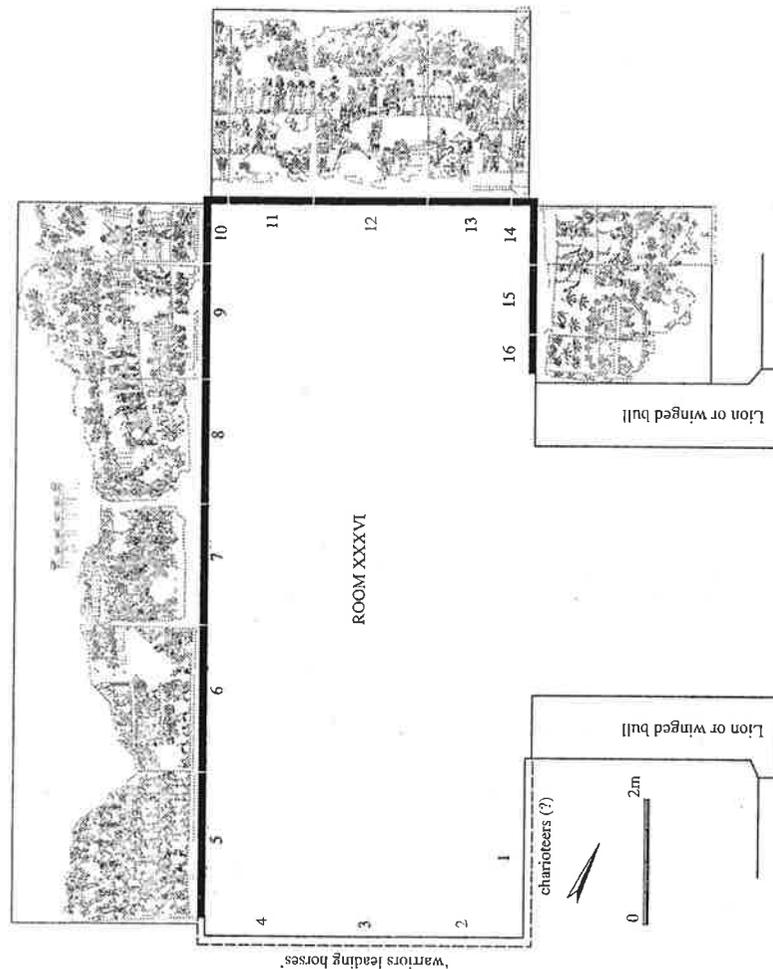


Fig. 8. The Lachish series in its architectural context (room XXXVI).

It should be evident from this brief sketch alone that the layout of the whole scene owes much more to the intentional *mise en scène* trying to make the best of the architectural context than to the knowledge gathered from putative eyewitnesses on real topography around 701-BCE Lachish. The next stage in the shaping of the series would then be to define the details. On this level, scaling does not seem to have been considered a major problem since the scale of people is simply defined according to the requirements of compositional complexity. As for pictorial micro-syntax and 'vocabulary', they were conditioned by pictorial conventions more than anything else. Assyrian soldiers usually operate in pairs, who may be replicated in order to emphasize discipline and coordination; too stereotyped rows may occasionally be broken up by slightly irregular features (e.g. individual kneeling archers on the central row of attackers on slabs 5 etc.). The main purpose of the composition was now to display the whole spectrum of weaponry and stratagems that the Assyrian army could employ in order to overwhelm its opponents. Movement and onslaught could be translated by the sequential juxtaposition of marching, descending, kneeling (slabs 5-6), or kneeling, rising and running (along the siege planes on slabs 6-8). Finally, some stock material could be used to fill in compositional blanks (e.g. the pair of stone slingers turned right on the right-hand bottom of slab 7, who do not even have a recognizable target). In conclusion, it is clear from this very brief exercise that the input of historical and artistic imagination within the constraints of pictorial conventions was considerable. Hence we should thus definitely abandon any naive approach to these reliefs as 'windows' to an ancient event.

#### 'Reading' and Decoding the Pictorial Discourse

What then, can the historian gain from these sculptures? The most elementary insight, in my opinion, is that they represent an ancient Assyrian *interpretation* of the events at least as authoritative as annals and other monumental inscriptions. As such, they deserve the same serious interest and study as the texts. Their pictorial discourse may be subjected to a similar kind of rhetorical and ideological analysis as the inscriptions.<sup>139</sup>

139. See Irene J. Winter, 'Royal Rhetoric and the Development of Historical Narrative in Neo-Assyrian Reliefs', *Studies in Visual Communication* 7/2 (1981), pp. 2-38; R. Lamprichs, *Die Westexpansion des neuassyrischen Reiches: Eine Strukturanalyse* (AOAT, 239; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker/Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1995).

The historical information contained in and retrievable from the reliefs may concern all three of Braudel's levels of history, including events, social history (*histoire conjoncturelle*) and *longue durée* (much of which is actually geography),<sup>140</sup> although they certainly operate best on the first and second levels. With regard to the first level, history of particular events, it should be noted that not everything on the reliefs is determined by convention and stereotype. As a matter of fact, the *variety* of scenes and situations depicted on Sennacherib's sculptures as well as the variety of individually characterized cities are amazing when compared to the reliefs of his predecessors or even Ashurbanipal and even more so when compared to Egyptian examples of pictorial historical narrative.<sup>141</sup> It is highly improbable that such variety could be arbitrarily handled in antiquity. Rather, one must recognize that Sennacherib's sculptures more than any others<sup>142</sup> conceal (or try to reconstitute) aspects of 'individual', specific historical events and situations. The basic task for the historian who aims at learning about the *histoire événementielle* is thus to identify and to distinguish such particular details from the more conventional and stock motifs, keeping in mind that the clear distinction between these categories is sometimes hampered by the fragmentary nature of the evidence, since major parts of the sculptures have not been preserved or excavated.

Limits of space do not allow to develop this task much further here. However, I should like to point out a few features on slabs 8-12, depicting the procession of spoils and captives towards Sennacherib and the Assyrian camp (fig. 9a-c), which I consider particularly interesting in this respect. All have already been discussed by other scholars, but some details apparently went unnoticed in earlier studies.

#### *Distinctions among Captives and Defenders*

Following early observations by Layard, Tufnell drew attention in 1953 to the different 'sections of the population' represented on the Lachish reliefs among both defenders and captives:

140. Compare Uehlinger, 'Bildquellen' (above, n. 3).

141. On the latter, see now Susanna C. Heinz, *Die Feldzugsdarstellungen des Neuen Reiches: Eine Bildanalyse* (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Denkschriften der Gesamtakademie, 18; Untersuchungen der Zweigstelle Kairo des Österreichischen Archäologischen Instituts, 17; Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2001).

142. Except perhaps the different versions of Ashurbanipal's famous, almost cartoon-like Ulai battle series.

The artist has differentiated between the leaders of the city and the rank and file, a distinction which would be accounted for if the governor and his military and civil staff were appointed from Jerusalem. That the civil population joined the troops in defence of the city is shown by the presence on the battlements of men with turbans...<sup>143</sup>

In his 1958 article, Barnett again distinguished two groups among the Judahites advancing towards Sennacherib (fig. 9a-b): some men are bare-headed and wear long tunics, while others have the peculiar Judahite scarf and a short garment. The latter seem to go free; the former, according to Barnett,

are singled out for particular displeasure and are beheaded or flayed alive. Why this difference of dress and treatment? Surely the men in the long dresses with curly hair who have so incensed Sennacherib must be Hezekiah's men, the Jews who influenced the city to resist, while the men with the peculiar head-dresses are native inhabitants of Lachish.<sup>144</sup>

Barnett then refers to the exiled Judahites' destiny in Assyria, recalling the depiction of Judahite workmen in court VI and corridor XLIX<sup>145</sup> and of Judahite elite soldiers along the so-called ramp to the Ishtar temple.<sup>146</sup>

Although Barnett's distinction and interpretation have been followed by a number of scholars, a close look at the sculptures shows that the matter is not quite as straightforward as it seemed. True, the two major categories of Judahite men can easily be distinguished (although we should not overlook cases of overlap and slight irregularity<sup>147</sup>). But the differences

143. Tufnell, *Lachish III*, p. 62.

144. Tufnell, *Lachish III*, p. 163; Barnett is followed by Wäfler, *Nicht-Assyrier*, pp. 52-53.

145. See now Barnett *et al.*, *Sculptures*, II, Pls. 96-97, 101, 104, 106, 112, 114, 122, 414, 418-422; on their identification as Judahites, see Wäfler, *Nicht-Assyrier*, pp. 57-60. Had these Judahites been 'evidently reckoned by the Assyrians amongst the Philistines', as maintained by Barnett ('Siege', p. 164), they would have been represented otherwise!

146. See now Barnett *et al.*, *Sculptures*, II, Pls. 473, 485-89. For recent commentaries on the contrasting careers of Judahite exiles, see S. Stohlmann, 'The Judean Exile after 701 B.C.E', in W.W. Hallo, J.C. Moyer and L.G. Perdue (eds.), *Scripture in Context II. More Essays on the Comparative Method* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983), pp. 147-75 (162-66); Uehlinger, 'Bildquellen', pp. 57-61.

147. As noted by Ussishkin, *Conquest*, p. 109, the man leading the bullock cart on slab 10 wears the short garment but no headdress; instead, his beard and hair are rendered in exactly the same way as for the men in the long tunic. Since he is the first in the row of people departing to exile, and all men preceding him are bare-headed, this may well be an error of execution limited to this slab. Among minor irregularities, one may note differences in the execution of hair and beard among both categories of Judahite men: perfectly curled finish, simple straight hatching, or beard only outlined (note also the just grown-up, beardless youngster leading the camel).



Fig. 9a. Booty taken from the city, Judahite captives leaving for exile, Assyrian soldiers flaying two men.

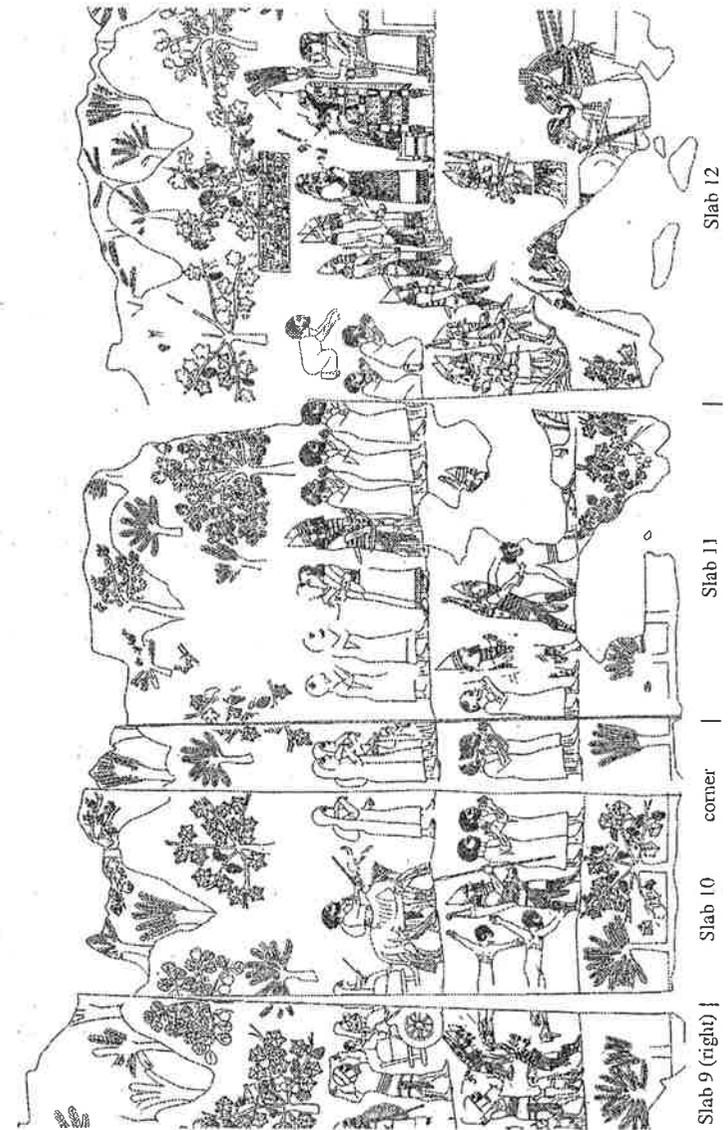


Fig. 9b. Judahite captives leaving for exile, Assyrian soldiers putting to death Judahite prisoners, Judahite leaders advancing towards Sennacherib.

in treatment do not really follow the lines of this major distinction, since the two men who are being stabbed on the lower register of slab 11 undoubtedly wear the short garment (but no scarf). Two other Judahites who are being flayed on the overlap of slabs 9 and 10 are naked and may have belonged to either of the two groups.<sup>148</sup> On the other hand, none of the men clad in long garments are actually being tortured. Nevertheless, they should not be considered a completely homogenous group since they proceed in several sub-units: (1) a group of six, probably leaders, three of whom prostrate themselves in front of the king while three others are still approaching with hands raised in a gesture of supplication; (2) a pair of two, approaching the two scribes who register the booty together with three women and a child—these may be understood as heading the procession leaving for exile; and (3) a group of five is shown between two scenes of torture on the lower register. While groups 1 and 2 are clearly meant to remain alive, the latter's destiny may seem to be undecided; still, the message of the three groups considered together and of the bottom sequence is quite clear: the right to survive of group 3 will also depend on loyal cooperation with Assyria. As for Barnett's suggestion that all these men represent the 'men of Hezekiah'<sup>149</sup> from Jerusalem, it cannot be substantiated from the sculptures, which only point to a higher status of these people who probably represent senior officials of the Judahite administration based at Lachish. Whether they came from Jerusalem or elsewhere<sup>150</sup> cannot be told from the sculptures but only from text-related, general considerations about the composition and organization of Judahite state officials. In my opinion, the three sub-groups rather exemplify three types of possible 'careers' for foreign leaders in captivity: (1) transfer from former service to loyal submission to the Assyrian king, which may even have allowed the pursuit of a career at home; (2) exile together with other people of the land; or (3?) punishment in the case of definite refusal to submit.

148. Note, however, an observation by Pauline Albenda that flaying was a punishment often reserved for important people; see her 'An Assyrian Relief Depicting a Nude Captive in Wellesley College', *JNES* 29 (1970), pp. 145-50 (149, 150 n. 27).

149. The term is taken from Prov. 25.1.

150. If the physiognomy of these men should contain negroid features this would pertain for all male Lachishites. One cannot accept therefore Albenda's identification of the men wearing long tunics with Egyptian/Kushite foes, even less with captured charioteers, *pace* Albenda, 'Egyptians in Assyrian Art', *Bulletin of the Egyptological Seminar* 4 (1982), pp. 5-23 (10); also Reade, *Assyrian Sculpture*, p. 66. Note that the Egyptian forces who were instrumental in the battle at Eltekeh are conspicuously absent from the room XXXVI reliefs.

Who then is slayed and put to death by the Assyrian soldiers? The answer to this question has to consider a peculiar distinction made by the artists among the city's defenders. Tufnell correctly noted the presence of Judahite 'civilians' or militia (auxiliaries?) alongside helmeted soldiers among the defenders of Lachish. Interestingly enough, both groups wear the characteristic Judahite scarf, but in the case of the soldiers the latter is partly covered by a pointed helmet.<sup>151</sup> This detail together with the depiction of unarmed natives leaving the town indicates that the Assyrians correctly perceived the double status of Lachish as a civilian city and a major, well-armed Judahite military garrison. The proportion of soldiers and militia/auxiliaries on the walls is roughly one of 2:3. As far as I can recognize, the sculptures imply a kind of labour division between helmeted soldiers and auxiliaries: while almost all of the former have bows (only one helmeted Judahite standing on the gate tower uses a sling), the latter are slingers or simply throw stones by hand (but one auxiliary posted on the 'lower' wall exceptionally draws a bow). The extant reliefs do not allow recognition of which group is throwing the torches, wheels and carts. Still, they make it very clear to the onlooker that the Assyrians intentionally distinguished among various categories of Judahite defenders. The helmets of regular soldiers and the swords and spears among the spoils taken from the city imply the recognition that Judahite weaponry was quite developed and posed a serious threat to Assyria.

Once we turn to the outcome of the battle, we recognize again soldiers and civilians among the people standing on the city wall and raising their arms in a gesture of surrender. However, the long row of people leaving the city through the gate tower down to the very bottom of slab 10 and then moving right towards the king (or the pair of scribes) does not comprise a single Judahite soldier, but is exclusively formed by civilians, men, women and children. I have already pointed out that their leaving the gate tower and the impalement scene lie on the axis of the whole composition.<sup>152</sup> The juxtaposition expresses a clear alternative: to live or to die—the former actually meaning surrender and exile. One cannot but be struck by the structural parallelism between this rhetoric and the one deployed by

151. Incidentally, the Judahite helmet seems to conform quite well to the standard helmet of Assyrian soldiers, although the small dimensions of the figures representing defenders do not allow to be more specific on this point.

152. See above, n. 82.

Rabshakeh's speech in 2 Kgs 18.31-32a, according to which the king of Assyria will bring submissive Judahites into another land that they may live.<sup>153</sup> Note that the whole row of people leaving for exile (originally more than fifty adult individuals) includes only three Assyrian soldiers, all of them on slab 9 (fig. 9a). Two appear in the upper register of the booty procession; one holds his mace upside down<sup>154</sup> so as to minimize the coercive aspect of this exodus. Another Assyrian soldier appears in the lower register, where the row of calmly walking captives somehow clashes with the flaying scene. In strong contrast to most depictions of departing captives on Sennacherib's sculptures, where Assyrian soldiers regularly inflict various kinds of bad treatment to captives, the Lachish exodus shows neither pushing nor beating, no tearing of hair or beards and not even a menacing attitude from Assyrians who accompany the captives. In contrast to the heavy siege and battle scenes, the row of exiles stresses non-violence and almost voluntary submission. For this reason, the flaying and stabbing of two pairs of Judahites on slabs 10 and 11 (fig. 9b) cannot relate directly to the submissive captives leaving for exile. We may hypothesize instead that the tortured belong to the vanquished military defenders of Lachish. Consequently, we should better distinguish three rather than two groups among the Judahites: high officials, soldiers and auxiliaries, and civilians.

#### *Spoils from the Citadel*

To the right of the surrendered city, eight Assyrian footsoldiers carry away a number of weapons and prestige objects which are certainly meant to come from conquered Lachish (fig. 9a): from left to right, a bundle of six swords,<sup>155</sup> two relatively large, bossed shields, three spears, a light eight-

153. I do not think that there is any direct connection between the sculptures and the biblical text, which plays on inner-biblical topoi and must be understood in terms of Judahite authorship and audience. Still, the text may sharpen our understanding of the reliefs' rhetoric which promises life in the lap of families to civilians who choose life. Compare W.R. Gallagher, 'Assyrian Deportation Propaganda', *SAAB* 8 (1994), pp. 57-65.

154. The soldier does certainly not hold 'a short sword, its sharpened end threatening the captives who walk before him' as maintained by N. Na'aman, 'The Debated Historicity of Hezekiah's Reform in the Light of Historical and Archaeological Research', *ZAW* 107 (1995), pp. 179-95 (192).

155. See most recently A. Maeir, 'The "Judahite" Swords from the "Lachish" Reliefs of Sennacherib', *Eretz-Israel* 25 (1996), pp. 210-14 (hebr., engl. summary p. 96\*).

spoked chariot with yokes for a team of four horses,<sup>156</sup> a throne with armrests, and two large incense-burners. I shall concentrate on the significance of the latter. To my knowledge, it was Y. Aharoni who first suggested that these stands were cult vessels from a local shrine.<sup>157</sup> His proposal has been taken up by N. Na'aman who used this interpretation of the pictorial evidence to question the historical reliability of Hezekiah's cultic reform mentioned in 2 Kgs 18.4, 22.<sup>158</sup> According to Na'aman, the reliefs depict 'three kinds of objects which are mentioned many times in Assyrian royal inscription booty lists: cult vessels, the treasures of the palace and weapons',<sup>159</sup> consequently, the two incense burners should have belonged to a sanctuary.

I agree with Na'aman that the two stands were probably made of bronze. However, I doubt that the relatively small selection of objects should really represent three different predefined categories chosen according to established conventions. Why should these spoils not represent a single, coherent group of objects taken from the governor's main offices in the palace-fort? Since no other objects of clearly cultic use appear among the spoils, the stands may well have belonged to the same 'civil' ceremonial context as the armchair, the chariots and the weapons. On the other hand, one can certainly not exclude the possibility that the stands might indeed have belonged to a 'chapel' within the palace-fort.

More recently, Na'aman has used the same group in an attempt to substantiate biblical information on the aniconic character of Judahite Yahwism.<sup>160</sup> According to Na'aman,

The cult vessels on the Lachish reliefs must have come from a cult place that was built in Lachish and functioned until 701 BCE, when the Assyrians destroyed the city and despoiled its treasures. Why did the artist omit the cult statue(s) from the booty? Cult images, symbolizing (*sic*) the surrender of the city's god(s) to the gods of Assyria, were more important and pictorial than bronze incense burners. If such graven image(s) had been taken

156. Barnett *et al.*, *Sculptures*, II, Pl. 341 provides a good close-up.

157. See Y. Aharoni, *Investigations at Lachish. The Sanctuary and the Residency* (Lachish V; Tel Aviv: University of Tel Aviv, 1975), pp. 42-43.

158. In Na'aman, 'Debated Historicity', pp. 191-93.

159. Na'aman, 'Debated Historicity', p. 193.

160. Na'aman, 'No Anthropomorphic Graven Image. Notes on the Assumed Anthropomorphic Cult Statues in the Temples of YHWH in the Pre-Exilic Period', *UF* 31 (1999), pp. 391-415.

from Lachish's cult place, they would have been shown at the head of the booty procession, as in some other reliefs of Sennacherib. It seems that no graven cult image was found in the sacred site, and the artist depicted the most impressive booty taken: a pair of bronze incense burners similar to the depiction of the menorah and cult vessels on the Arch of Titus.<sup>161</sup>

One should be well aware that this argument essentially precedes *e silentio* and must therefore be considered with great caution. Na'aman's answer to his question why the artist should not have shown one or several cult statues as part of the booty allows only one definite answer: because the Assyrians apparently did not capture figurative divine statues from conquered Lachish. We cannot infer however the precise reason for this. It may of course have been the case that no actual cult statue was found in the sacred site, as speculated by Na'aman. However, we should remember that while dozens of spoil processions are recorded on Assyrian reliefs, only a relatively small number of them shows the deportation of cult statuary. The same situation prevails in the textual record: cult statues are rarely mentioned in the virtually hundreds of Assyrian booty lists, because deportation of cult statues was a peculiar method of subjugation which the Assyrian conquerors did not systematically engage. Leading captive foreign gods is not a stock motif in the Assyrian royal inscriptions, and we may be virtually certain that whenever this motif is used in texts or images, it relates to an actual historical event. That no cult statuary is shown among the spoils depicted on the Lachish reliefs thus follows the rule and is not an exception for Sennacherib's or other Assyrian palace reliefs. We cannot therefore conclude from this absence to the general absence of anthropomorphic cultic statuary from Lachish or from the town's sanctuary or *bamah*, which may or may not have been plundered by the Assyrians in 701 BCE.

#### *Sennacherib's Throne and Chariots*

The epigraph on slab 12 mentions Sennacherib's taking place in/on a *nēmedu* chair, and while we do not know exactly the lexical meaning of the term *nēmedu*<sup>162</sup>, we may be virtually certain that the throne depicted on slab 12 (fig. 9b and c) is just the *nēmedu* chair referred to.

161. Na'aman, 'No Anthropomorphic Graven Image', pp. 404-405.

162. See above, n. 44.

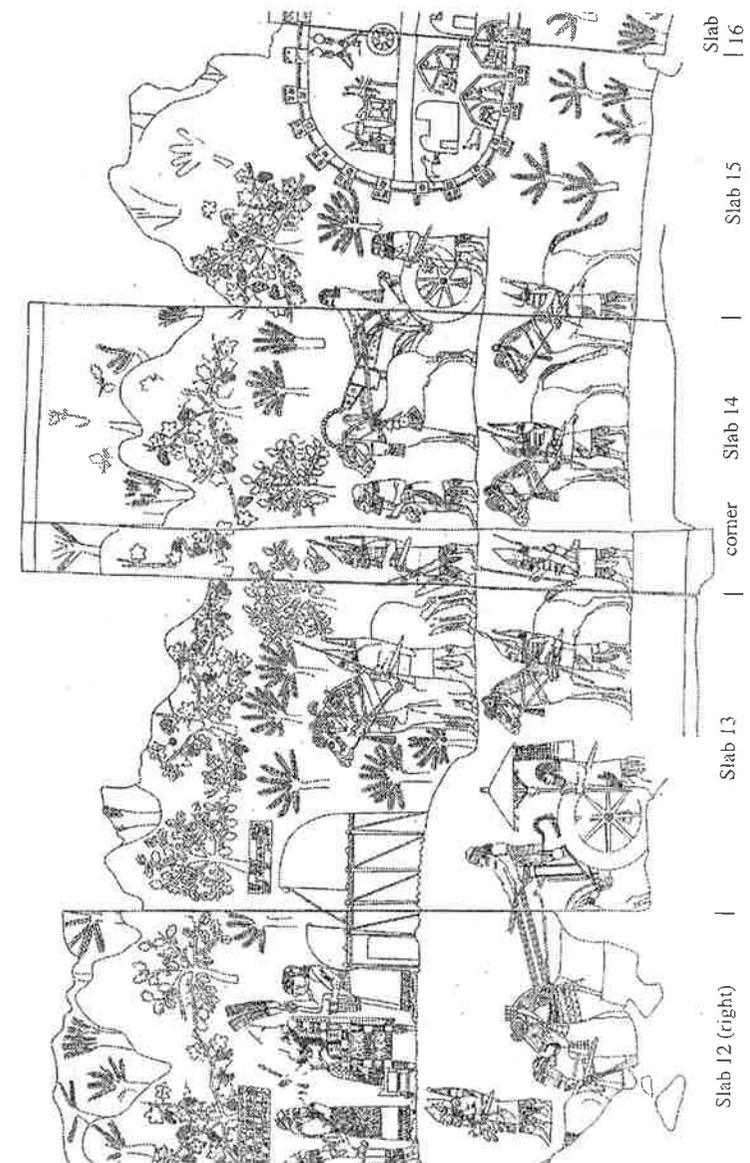


Fig. 9c. Sennacherib enthroned, his tent and chariots, horsemen and Assyrian camp.

This is not the place to study in depth the development of Assyrian royal furniture,<sup>163</sup> but one should note that some royal thrones represented on Sennacherib's sculptures show significant peculiarities when compared to earlier royal furniture. To put the matter squarely, Sennacherib's *nēmedu* chair, which is characterized by three rows of supporting anthropomorphic genies<sup>164</sup> compares more closely to some parts of divine Mulissu's throne, represented on the contemporary rock reliefs of Maltaï and Faïda,<sup>165</sup> than to the royal thrones of Tiglath-Pileser III or Sargon II. Although Sennacherib's is not strictly speaking a divine throne, it seems that his sitting on the *nēmedu* chair could be perceived as a quasi-divine, and certainly ever-protected manifestation of the royal persona, to which Sennacherib and his contemporaries may well have attached some kind of battle-winning significance.<sup>166</sup> Be this as it may, his sitting on the *nēmedu* throne represents the most obvious 'numinous' feature depicted outside the Assyrian camp on the Lachish series.

It is well-known that in contrast to earlier reliefs, no deity (Ashurnasirpal II), divine symbol (Shalmaneser III to Tiglath-Pileser III) and no divine standards (Sargon II) appear on Sennacherib's sculptures in immediate connection with actual battle scenes. One is tempted at first-hand to consider this development as a kind of 'secularizing' tendency. The gods' role in war is only hinted at on Sennacherib's reliefs,<sup>167</sup> and the major role is certainly taken by the king himself rather than the gods. However, Sennacherib too never appears directly engaged in battle as had been the case for certain reliefs of his predecessors. These changes in representation probably reflect actual practice and a different image attached to the royal persona, which must be understood as a direct consequence of the fatal

163. See Hrouda, *Kulturgeschichte*, pp. 67-69 for technical matters.

164. Good close-ups may be found, e.g., in Paterson, *Palace*, Pl. 78; Barnett *et al.*, *Sculptures*, II, Pl. 335; Reade, *Assyrian Sculpture*, Fig. 77 (colour).

165. See J. Börker-Klähn, *Alt Vorderasiatische Bildstelen und vergleichbare Felsreliefs* (Baghdader Forschungen, 4; Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1982), nos. 207-10.

166. Note the remarkable picture on slab I-7 of the king enthroned being carried on a platform over mountainous terrain: Russell, *Final Sack*, p. 86, Pls. 41-42 and discussion on p. 223 with reference to an inscription.

167. Note the consistent depiction of the chariots carrying the standards of Adad and Ninurta, used for divination in the camp. See Erika Bleibtreu, 'Kulthandlungen im Zeltlager Sanheribs', in I. Seybold (ed.), *Meqor Hajjim* (Georg Molin Festschrift; Graz: Styria, 1983), pp. 43-48; Beate Pongratz-Leisten, K. Deller and E. Bleibtreu, 'Götterstreitwagen und Götterstandarten: Götter auf dem Feldzug und ihr Kult im Feldlager', *Baghdader Mitteilungen* 23 (1992), pp. 291-356.

destiny met by Sennacherib's predecessor. Sargon had lost his life in battle, and the Assyrians had been unable to recover his body. In response to this curse-like event and its theological interpretation, the royal persona would never again be so openly exposed to physical danger during war. As a consequence, since the Assyrian artists could no more show the king actively engaged in the course of events, they now concentrated on another traditional scheme of royal iconography, namely the king's ceremonial appearances in his chariot or on his throne.

In order to properly assess this development, we should also consider the curious fact that Sennacherib's retinue on the Lachish reliefs comprises not only one, but two chariots (fig. 9c). The usual royal chariot followed by a man carrying the royal umbrella is shown immediately below the royal tent on slabs 12-13. This chariot is void of any particular figurative decoration. In contrast, another chariot, which appears to the left of the Assyrian camp on slabs 14-15 where it already attracted Layard's particular attention,<sup>168</sup> is richly adorned with figurative decorum (see fig. 10a-b). The fan-like so-called *Deichselzier*, left blank on the drawing of fig. 10b, may have shown the goddess Ishtar in frontal pose, flanked on both sides by the king in adoration;<sup>169</sup> another adoration scene appears in the center of the elliptical object extending from the yoke to the chariot-box, while the segment to the left shows a warrior-god drawing his bow in a nimbus, presumably Ninurta.<sup>170</sup> The horses' harness is more elaborate than any other on these slabs: the bites are stylized as miniature running horses (fig. 10b), and, confirmed by personal inspection, only these two chariot-horses have protective frontlets covering their forehead. The latter feature recalls a ninth-century fashion as does the archaizing chariot itself with its elliptical feature<sup>171</sup> and

168. See Layard, *Discoveries*, p. 151: 'One [of the royal chariots] had a peculiar semicircular ornament of considerable size, rising from the pole between the horses, and spreading over their heads. It may originally have contained the figure of a deity, or some mythic symbol'.

169. Layard's original drawing is fuzzy on this spot, but see the preceding note. Ishtar in frontal stance appears several times on the *Deichselzier* of Ashurbanipal's ceremonial chariot, which is a kind of synthesis of Sennacherib's two chariots depicted at Lachish.

170. See Barnett *et al.*, *Sculptures*, II, Pl. 346 for the drawing (= fig. 10a) and Pl. 348 for a close-up photograph; the drawing in Madhloom, *Chronology*, Pl. VI.2(= fig. 10b) is confirmed by personal inspection.

171. This is also attached to the two chariots carrying the standards of Adad and Ninurta which are stationed in the camp for the purpose of divination; note, however, that these chariots have eight-spoked wheels.

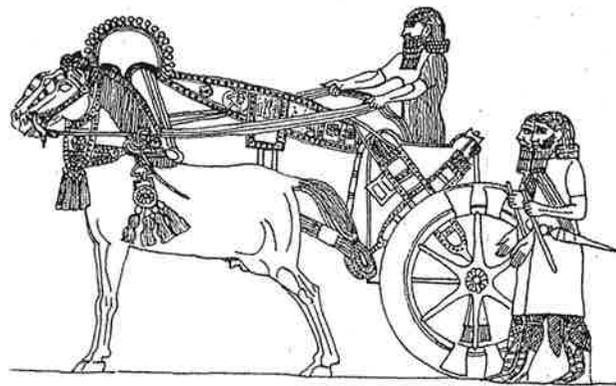
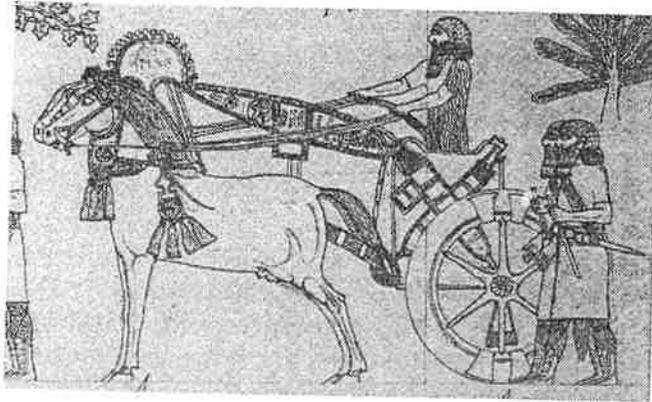


Fig. 10. Sennacherib's second chariot as drawn by A.H. Layard (top) and T. Madhloom (bottom).

six-spoked wheels.<sup>172</sup> In contrast to the other chariot, this one is fully furnished with weapons, only some of which (bow and arrows, but not the double-axe and the mace) would have been helpful in battle for any potential warrior using the vehicle.

The clearly archaizing and non-functional features make Ussishkin's suggestion that this second vehicle may be Sennacherib's battle chariot very doubtful.<sup>173</sup> Clearly, it must have fulfilled some ceremonial rather than

172. See Hrouda, *Kulturgeschichte*, pp. 95, 147.

173. See Ussishkin, *Conquest*, p. 118. Interestingly enough, Dekel's drawing of this

a practical function.<sup>174</sup> P. Calmeyer once hypothesized that the (empty) chariot represented the god Ashur,<sup>175</sup> and his intuition probably points in the right direction. Ashur does indeed seem to be the only possible candidate as divine owner of a chariot which combines features referring to several deities (Ishtar, Ninurta); moreover, he is the one who during Sennacherib's reign took over the old tradition of the heroic champion among the gods, originally related to Ninurta and then to Marduk and other gods, a tradition which since the third millennium had been consistently connected to a battle chariot carrying weapons and trophies.<sup>176</sup> Ashur's chariot is mentioned in ritual and theological texts from Assur and Nineveh,<sup>177</sup> and in a royal inscription from Nineveh (K 1356) describing a heroic scene applied on bronze bands on the doors of Sennacherib's Akitu festival house.<sup>178</sup> The latter must have shown a very unusual and unprecedented scene most typical of Sennacherib's reign, cultic policy and theology, namely the god Ashur drawing his bow against Tiamat, standing in his chariot led by Amurru. Line 26 of the inscription has given rise to contradicting interpretations:

chariot (cf. the enlarged detail p. 116) is very unprecise and misses any detail beyond rosettes.

174. Hrouda once opined that the chariot had been copied from earlier models of the time of Ashurnasirpal in an attempt at an almost scientific study of chariotry techniques (*Kulturgeschichte*, p. 147: 'um sich Klarheit über die Technik des Fahrwesens zu verschaffen')—an idiosyncratic hypothesis which could possibly work if such a chariot had been excavated among others in a workshop but which does certainly not explain its presence on a sculpture reporting the conquest of a distant Judahite town.

175. P. Calmeyer, 'Zur Genese altiranischer Motive. II: Der leere Wagen', *AMI* 7 (1974), pp. 49-77 (59-61).

176. See Ch. Uehlinger, 'Drachen und Drachenkämpfe im alten Vorderen Orient und in der Bibel', in B. Schmelz and R. Vossen (eds.), *Auf Drachenspuren. Ein Buch zum Drachenprojekt des Hamburgischen Museums für Völkerkunde* (Bonn: HoloS, 1995), pp. 55-101.

177. See G. van Driel, *The Cult of Aššur* (Studia Semitica Neerlandica, 13; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1969), pp. 70, 74-75, 86-87; W. Farber, review of van Driel, *BiOr* 30 (1973), pp. 433-36 (435); B. Menzel, *Assyrische Tempel* (Studia Pohl, Series Maior, 10; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1981), I, pp. 55-57, II, nos. 662-676, T 59, pp. 69-70.

178. The text is conveniently edited by Beate Pongratz-Leisten, *ina šulmi irub. Die kulttopographische und ideologische Programmatik der akītu-Prozession in Babylonien und Assyrien im 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.* (Baghdader Forschungen, 16; Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1994), pp. 207-208.

*šalam Aššur* (AN.ŠĀR) *ša ana libbi* (ŠA) *Tiāmat šalti illiku* (DU-ku)  
*šalam Sîn-aḫḫē-eriba* (dXXX-PAP.MEŠ-SU) *šar* (MAN) *māt* (KUR) *Aš+šur*

The image of Ashur who goes into the midst of Tiamat for battle,  
 the image of Sennacherib, king of Assyria.

Earlier readers had erroneously taken this line to indicate that the king had himself depicted standing in Ashur's chariot alongside the supreme god or even that he identified himself with the god, but such interpretations may today be safely laid to rest. Beate Pongratz-Leisten takes the line as a nominal sentence ('the image of Ashur is the image of [i.e. a work commissioned by] Sennacherib').<sup>179</sup> One wonders however why this note of authorship should appear precisely at that place, since the tablet mentions numerous other images commissioned by the king. Frahm therefore suggests that the two *šalam-X* clauses refer to two different images, an image of Ashur and another one, probably close by, of the king.<sup>180</sup> The latter would have appeared in the attitude of a worshipper similar to what we know from Bavian, Maltau and Faida or, for that matter, the furnishings of the archaizing chariot on the Lachish relief. We know that no other Assyrian king ever associated himself so closely with the god Ashur on public pictorial monuments as Sennacherib did so consistently.

In conclusion, the archaizing chariot on slab 12 probably represents the chariot of Ashur. Sennacherib apparently did not content himself when going to war (at least to the Western campaign of 701 BCE) with the chariots of Adad and Ninurta as his predecessors had done,<sup>181</sup> but took the risk of taking with him the chariot of the supreme god in order to symbolize and secure maximum divine support for his campaign.<sup>182</sup> Note, however, that the Lachish series is the only one which depicts this particular chariot. Together with Sennacherib's *nēmedu* throne, this feature contributes to highlighting the particular numinous significance of the situation and stresses the royal persona's numinous aura. We have already noted that the conspicuous architectural setting of room XXXVI demonstrates that the king regarded the conquest of Lachish as one of the most important victories of his reign, and certainly of the third campaign. The apparently

179. See her commentary, *šulmi irub*, p. 209.

180. *Einleitung*, p. 224.

181. See above, n. 167.

182. Judging from the reliefs of Ashurbanipal, the latter did not continue this questionable practice but limited himself to his own royal chariot, which he embellished and magnified with a *Deichselzier* depicting his main tutelary goddess Ishtar.

singular depiction of Ashur's chariot in this room confirms this assessment. According to the sculptures' message, not only was this victory the climax of the third campaign, but it seems that the king owed it to his intimate relationship to Ashur.

#### *Lachish and Jerusalem*

Having thus outlined but a few clues for a historical-critical understanding of the Lachish reliefs, let us conclude this article by considering an often-raised dilemma: If the victorious conquest of Lachish really did matter that much to Sennacherib, why are his inscriptions absolutely silent about this crucial event, concentrating instead on Hezekiah's surrender at Jerusalem? And since the latter episode is presented by the annals as the ultimate climax of Sennacherib's Western campaign, why should the subjugation of Jerusalem be absent from the pictorial record of Sennacherib's palace sculptures?

#### *A Depiction of Jerusalem in Sennacherib's Palace?*

Before offering some tentative suggestions, we should dismiss a number of all too simplistic solutions to the dilemma which represent desperate attempts at cutting through the Gordian knot rather than reasonable hypotheses. Probably the most daring, and unacceptable, thesis has recently been formulated by B. Oded, according to whom

the city in the 'Lachish Relief' is in fact Jerusalem with its double wall (see 2 Kings xxv 4; Isa. xxii 11; Jer. xxxix 4, lii 7), as it was sketched by the artist on the spot before the besieged capital. But since Jerusalem was not captured, the artist at Nineveh who carved the relief according to the drawing added some conventional features (such as deportees departing through the gate and captives being led from the city into the presence of the king), and on the epigraph...applied to the relief he wrote *Lakisu* (which had actually been conquered) instead of *Ursalimmu*.<sup>183</sup>

Ironically, this thesis rests on the assumption that Assyrian artists drew sketches of conquered cities in the field, a premise essentially developed by Ussishkin on the basis of his detailed comparison of the Lachish reliefs with the specific topographical and archaeological data of Lachish. We have argued above that this assumption cannot be upheld. Oded thinks of the planning and execution of the palace reliefs as quite an arbitrary

183. B. Oded, 'History vis-à-vis propaganda in the Assyrian Royal Inscriptions', *VT* 48 (1998), pp. 423-25 (423).

operation, which is highly doubtful once we take a close look at the care invested in the execution of the reliefs on all levels, from general planning to layout and detail. Moreover, Oded's thesis creates more problems than it resolves. According to Sennacherib's annals, Hezekiah did not submit as a result of an Assyrian attack against Jerusalem. Had the siege of Jerusalem been of the kind and intensity of that represented on the Lachish reliefs, Sennacherib and his scribes would not have contented themselves with the relatively pale description known from the annals. On the other hand, it is hard to imagine an Assyrian sculpture celebrating a heroic military victory if such an event had never actually taken place. Oded's hypothesis ignores the relative factual constraints imposed on the design of the palace reliefs, conventions and stereotypes notwithstanding. There is not a single positive argument which would allow us to identify the city portrayed in room XXXVI with Jerusalem.

Other scholars have looked elsewhere in Sennacherib's palace for a depiction of Jerusalem. One suggestion which has at times found some followers is E.A.W. Budge's identification of a besieged city called ]-*al-am-mu* depicted on slab 10 of room XIV<sup>184</sup> with Jerusalem on the basis of a restored reading [<sup>uru</sup>Ur-sa]-*al-am-mu*.<sup>185</sup> Although publicized for years by the relevant label in the British Museum and gladly taken up, for example, by Z. Vilnay in his search for pictures of Jerusalem through the ages,<sup>186</sup> the hypothesis has never been accepted in critical scholarship.<sup>187</sup> Grapevines, leaf trees and mountainous environment notwithstanding, iconography does not fit a location of that town in Palestine, since neither the architecture nor the besieged enemies' costume conform to the pictorial conventions that would have to be expected for the Judahite capital. Nor does the orthography of the label fit Jerusalem.<sup>188</sup> Today, most scholars identify the city of XIV-10 with a town called <sup>uru</sup>*Alam(m)u* located somewhere near Urartean Muşasir.

184. See Barnett *et al.*, *Sculptures*, II Pls. 168-69; for the epigraph, see also Russell, *Palace*, pp. 56, 158-59, 275; Frahm, *Einleitung*, p. 127 T 49; Russell, *Writing*, p. 287.

185. E.A.W. Budge, *A Guide to the Babylonian and Assyrian Antiquities, British Museum* (London: The Trustees of the British Museum, 1922), pp. 53-54.

186. Z. Vilnay, 'Pictures of Jerusalem and its Holy Places', *Eretz-Israel* 6 (1960), pp. 149-61 (149, 137).

187. See Wäfler, *Nicht-Assyrier*, pp. 281-82; Barnett *et al.*, *Sculptures*, I, p. 78 n. 2.

188. Assyro-Babylonian texts mentioning Jerusalem always spell the toponym with a short second vowel and an *i* as third vowel (*Ursalimmu*).

Many commentators think that the siege of Jerusalem was not represented on sculptures of Sennacherib's Southwest palace because that siege did not result in an ultimate conquest, and they speculate that the particular emphasis expressed in the Lachish series should in some way compensate for the absence of Jerusalem from the pictorial narrative because of Sennacherib's near-failure to subdue Judah's king and capital. We should be aware, however, that this *communis opinio* rests almost entirely on a partial interpretation of the events along the lines of later biblical tradition, which negate Sennacherib's ultimate victory and minimize the definitely humiliating aspects of Hezekiah's surrender to the Assyrian king.<sup>189</sup> To let biblical tradition condition so much our perception of the event and our interpretation of the primary evidence is problematic on methodological grounds. As long as our task is to understand the Assyrian side of the evidence, namely the design of Sennacherib's palace reliefs with a particular focus on the Lachish series as far as this article is concerned, we should better look for an explanation which builds upon the rules and conventions governing the planning and execution of the palace reliefs rather than follow the track of biblical tradition. A comparative study of all extant sculptures shows that in order to render a multiplicity of different events and situations that occurred in war, Sennacherib's artists developed an even greater spectrum of iconographical schemes than their predecessors. Massive onslaught and violent attack as depicted, for example, in the Lachish series, was but one possible scheme among others, which include long-distance siege, surrender without defence or battle, ranged battle or pursuit in open countryside, and other situations.

In the absence of field diaries or a 'letter to the gods' relating the event, we should take as our starting-point the peculiar report on the Jerusalem operation in Sennacherib's annals. Although scholars discuss the precise extent of the relevant passage:

As for Hezekiah the Judahite... I shut him up within Jerusalem, his royal city, like a bird in a cage, I surrounded him with earthworks, and made it unthinkable for him to exit by the city gate,<sup>190</sup>

it is quite obvious that when looking for possible depictions of this operation we should in no case expect a visual scenario of the Lachish type,

189. Only 2 Kgs 18.13-16 (the so-called A report) does not share this tendency.

190. Translation by M. Cogan, in W.W. Hallo and L.K. Younger (eds.), *The Context of Scripture. II. Monumental Inscriptions from the Biblical World* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2000), p. 303; compare W. Mayer's translation in the present volume.

which would rather correspond to Sennacherib's statement on how he besieged 46 other walled cities of Hezekiah. Instead, we have to look for a scenario depicting measures of prolonged siege and cutting off of communication routes as a prelude to a booty procession, but no actual battle.

It is interesting to note in this respect that a number of sculptures from the palace of Sennacherib show low fortified siege walls which are conspicuously built at considerable distance from enemy towns. They are generally manned by Assyrian guards and seem to serve a cut-off function rather than being instrumental for an attack, which may or may not be depicted depending on the actual course of events. Examples of such remote siege-walls include slabs IV-3-4,<sup>191</sup> IV-10 (no guards),<sup>192</sup> V-45-46,<sup>193</sup> X-11,<sup>194</sup> XII-12-13 (heavy siege and attack),<sup>195</sup> and LXVII-1<sup>196</sup> of the Southwest palace. Although not a total novelty, this scheme clearly was a particular favourite of Sennacherib's artists, as probably was the actual stratagem in the field.

Most of these slabs were already heavily damaged at the time of their discovery. Nevertheless, a number of them relate to Sennacherib's campaign to the west. For our purpose, the following examples from rooms IV and X are particularly interesting.

(A) *Room IV*. Although this was actually the first room discovered during Layard's initial expedition to Nineveh (1847),<sup>197</sup> Layard did not draw the sculptures which he considered to be too badly preserved. The room—a bathroom adjoining the throne-hall—was re-excavated by T. Madhloom in 1965 but had to await full documentation in J.M. Russell's monograph devoted to 'The Final Sack of Nineveh' in the wake of the 1991 war.<sup>198</sup> According to Russell, 'Room IV was decorated with two relief sequences that were apparently similar to one another. Both showed processions of people carrying things, but because of the loss or poor state of preservation of the upper parts of the slabs, it was not clear whether the subject was

191. Russell, *Final Sack*, Pls. 82-84, 258.

192. Russell, *Final Sack*, Pls. 94-95.

193. Russell, *Final Sack*, Pls. 182-85.

194. Barnett *et al.*, *Sculptures*, II, Pl. 143.

195. Barnett *et al.*, *Sculptures*, II, Pls. 144, 150-51.

196. Barnett *et al.*, *Sculptures*, II, Pl. 456.

197. See conveniently Barnett *et al.*, *Sculptures*, I, p. 55 for references; preliminary description in Russell, *Palace*, pp. 50-51.

198. See particularly Pls. 79-104 for photographs and drawings and pp. 227-29 for a catalogue of the room IV sculptures.

tribute or booty. Since no fighting was shown, and none of the figures appeared to be bound, tribute seems more likely'.<sup>199</sup>

*Sequence I* shows traces of a row of people including Assyrian soldiers above a distant-siege wall (erroneously described by Russell as a city wall). Judging from parallels, the row of people was leaving a besieged city which must have been depicted in the lost upper part of slabs 3-4. The row doubles on slab 4, and on slab 5 one can recognize men, women and children among the people who submit. On slab 6, the row leads up to the two Assyrian scribes who register booty and tribute, followed by officials and finally the king, who was probably depicted standing in his chariot on slab 7, followed by standing cavalry on slabs 8-9. According to the few preserved details which allow an identification of the enemies' dress, the latter cannot be identified as Judahites.

*Sequence II* shows two rows of men on a distant-siege wall (again misinterpreted by Russell as a city wall). They carry loads of tribute or booty towards a balance installed upon a tripod, where two scribes again register the income. Since some of the carriers are armed with swords, they must belong to the Assyrian army although they are at the same time controlled by more heavily armed senior soldiers. Apparently, they are foreigners taken into the Assyrian army who had perhaps to be prevented from looting. Their dress is occasionally reminiscent of the Judahite short garment and scarf,<sup>200</sup> but it more closely fits non-Judahite soldiers as depicted among the attacking bowmen on the Lachish series.

The representation of topography and vegetation points to some location in thickly wooded mountains. Room IV therefore related events of Sennacherib's second (southeastern mountains, Urartu) or fifth (Judi Dagh) campaign. There is no direct link with the third campaign to the West. Still, when imagining a depiction of the Jerusalem events, the room IV reliefs may inform our expectations regarding a possible pictorial scenario (remote siege and tribute).

(B) *Room X*. The sculptures of this room have been related by R.D. Barnett and others<sup>201</sup> to the subjugation of Šidqa of Ashkelon during Sennach-

199. Russell, *Final Sack*, p. 40.

200. Note especially Russell, *Final Sack*, Pls. 96-97, upper row.

201. R.D. Barnett, 'Lachish, Ashkelon and the Camel: a discussion of its use in Southern Palestine', in J.N. Tubb (ed.), *Palestine in the Bronze and Iron Ages: Papers in Honour of Olga Tufnell* (Institute of Archaeology, Occasional Publications, 11; London: Institute of Archaeology, 1985), pp. 15-30 (25-26); Barnett *et al.*, *Sculptures*, I, pp. 73-74.

erib's campaign to the West. Unfortunately, only a few sketches and descriptions by Layard are preserved, and they hardly allow a full understanding of the overall scenario of room X. However, the deportation of Sidqa's family gods may well be the subject of the lower register of slab 11 (see fig. 11), and possibly the now-lost adjoining slab 12, showing captives moving towards Assyrian officials [and the king], followed by Assyrian soldiers who carry three small statues of smiting gods.<sup>202</sup> Slab 7 depicted the Assyrian camp, which was identified by an epigraph. The upper register of slab 11 showed a remote-siege wall guarded by Assyrian soldiers and a row of people leaving for exile, coming out of a city which is again not preserved. One peculiar feature of the room X series is its division into two separate registers: the lower register clearly has its own visual horizon formed by hills and trees, which makes it a relatively self-contained narrative unit and somehow disconnects it from the upper register. It is thus unclear how the two registers relate one to another; they could represent two parallel events of a single episode or different episodes of a single campaign.<sup>203</sup> In the latter case, which would however be unusual in Sennacherib's palace, one might hypothesize that the upper register of room X could have represented the siege of Jerusalem, which together with the Ashkelon episode frames the report on Ekron and the battle of Eltekeh in Sennacherib's annals. We must recognize, however, that the few people leaving the town under remote siege on the upper register of slab X-11 do not look like Judahites in Layard's drawing.<sup>204</sup>

202. See Ch. Uehlinger, 'Anthropomorphic Cult Statuary in Iron Age Palestine and the Search for Yahweh's Cult Images', in K. van der Toorn (ed.), *The Image and the Book: Iconic Cults, Aniconism, and the Veneration of the Holy Book in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology, 21; Leuven: Peeters, 1997), pp. 97-156 (126-27); O. Keel and Ch. Uehlinger, *Göttinnen, Götter und Gottessymbole: Neue Erkenntnisse zur Religionsgeschichte Kanaans und Israels aufgrund bislang unerschlossener ikonographischer Quellen* (Quaestiones disputatae, 134; Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 5th edn, 2001), §257.

203. The persistence in Sennacherib's palace of the two-register layout inherited from earlier tradition in a few rooms was already noted by Reade, 'Narrative Composition', pp. 88-90.

204. At the time of the discovery of room X (former Q), Layard had already discovered court VI (former I) and would probably have been familiar with the characteristics of Judahite costume (although it had not yet been recognized as distinctly Judahite at that time). On the other hand, the people leaving the town of X-11 appear very close to the broken end of the extant slab, and the details of their dress may have been hard to distinguish.

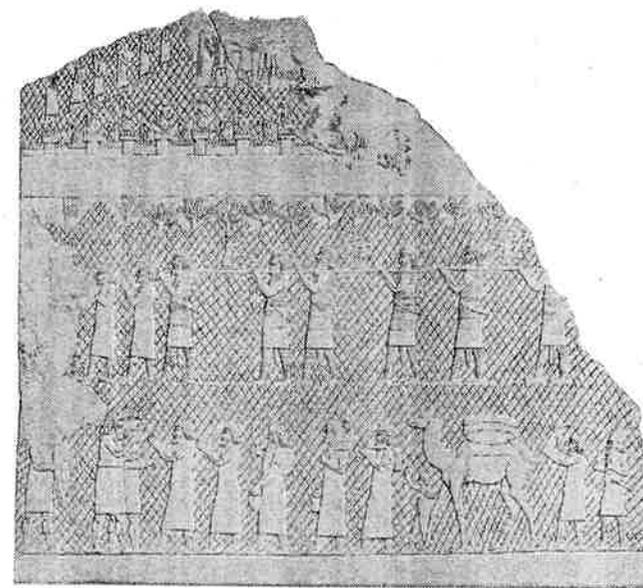


Fig. 11. Remote siege fortifications as depicted on slab X-12 (Ashkelon episode).

In addition to the above-mentioned sculptures showing remote siege-walls, a further relief from the throne-room most probably belongs to a series depicting Sennacherib's campaign against Philistia and Judah and may relate even more closely to the Jerusalem operation.

(C) *Room I (throne-room)*. This major reception-hall of the Southwest palace was lavishly decorated with an unusually elaborate pictorial narrative, which deserves a detailed study of its own and cannot be summarized here. Full documentation has again been provided by J.M. Russell's recent monograph.<sup>205</sup> Within the limits of this article, I can concentrate on one particular panel on the eastern wall which clearly belongs to a sequence related to the 701 campaign.<sup>206</sup> Slab I-28 (fig. 12)<sup>207</sup> shows an impressively

205. Russell, *Final Sack*, see pp. 36-39 for an overview, pp. 219-27 for the catalogue, and Pls. 24-76 for photographs and drawings. More photographs showing particular details appear throughout the book. For comparison and references to earlier studies, see also Barnett *et al.*, *Sculptures*, I, pp. 50-54, II, Pls. 30-47.

206. Frahm has convincingly demonstrated that the western wall shows events of the fifth campaign. Consequently, the sculptures in this hall cannot antedate 693 BCE; moreover, the throne-hall suite may now be understood as a full circle demonstration of Sennacherib's role as 'king of the four quarters'. See Frahm, *Einleitung*, pp. 124-25.

large city with numerous towers and several gates, a large city gate and a considerably smaller gate nearby. The city's fortified walls bear shields not unlike the walls of Lachish, but there is not a single defender standing on the battlements. The city is clearly not under attack; dismounted cavalrymen of the Assyrian army even have their faces turned away from it. They open the depiction of the Assyrian army entering a battle in open field which was the subject of the adjoining slabs to the left. Russell has tentatively suggested that the series could have depicted the battle of Eltekeh, which is indeed the only battle in open field that Sennacherib's annals report for the third campaign.<sup>208</sup>

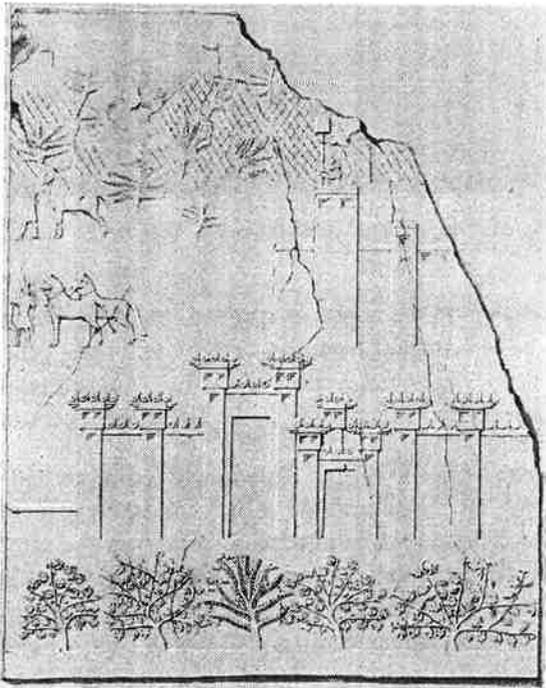


Fig. 12. City depicted in Sennacherib's throne hall, slab I-28 (Jerusalem?).

207. The slab is numbered 23 in Barnett's publication according to earlier plans.

208. *Final Sack*, p. 38. If correct, the still undeciphered epigraph on slab 27 (Layard's and Barnett's 24) would probably have identified Eltekeh. See Frahm, *Einleitung*, p. 125 T 42; Russell, *Writing*, p. 284 for attempts at interpretation.

For our purpose, it is the city that matters most. Above (i.e., inside) the city walls, a monumental building apparently founded on a kind of podium is shown; clearly a citadel, it has towers and walls with windows, but no shields appear on the battlements, and again there is no defender except a somewhat isolated-looking man standing on a tower and holding a standard or *vexillum*. The figure and his gesture are difficult to interpret; clearly a *vexillum* would make more sense in battle rather than here in an apparently deserted city. As for features of topography and vegetation, the city is framed by a horizon of wooded mountains at the upper end and an orchard of grapevines, fig and pomegranate trees at the lower end of the slab.

To my knowledge, no other sculpture among the preserved reliefs of Sennacherib would fit an identification with Jerusalem better than this. According to the annals, the major city involved in the Eltekeh battle was Ekron; however, since Ekron was attacked and severely punished after the battle, our pictorial source does not fit that episode. In contrast, Jerusalem was apparently never attacked. Although we should not link the annals and the sculptures too closely in order not to produce an 'interpretative short-circuit', one wonders whether the lonely man standing on a citadel tower should not be identified with Hezekiah the Judahite, 'shut up like a bird in its cage' in his capital city. There are arguments to question this interpretation—I cannot identify the details of the man's costume on published photographs, and according to W. Boutcher's drawing his head must have been damaged—but for the time being I cannot see any better alternative.<sup>209</sup> Incidentally, the third-campaign events represented in the throne-hall, although only a selection of the sequence known from the annals, would follow the same chronological and geographical order as the annals, namely Sidon!<sup>210</sup>—<Ashkelon>—battle of Eltekeh—<Ekron>—Jerusalem? (brack-

209. Since the battle of Eltekeh was related to the 'revolt' of Ekron, one should of course first consider Ekron as the most natural candidate to be depicted in this context, but the description of Ekron's destiny in the annals does not fit the picture at all.

210. Not Tyre, as maintained by R.D. Barnett ('Ezekiel and Tyre', *Eretz-Israel* 9 (1969), pp. 6-13 (6-7); *idem, et al., Sculptures*, I, pp. 52), nor Jafo as recently argued by W.R. Gallagher ('Room I, Slabs 14-18 of Sennacherib's Palace: Not a Depiction of Tyre', *NABU* 1997/2, pp. 52-53 no. 56; *idem, Sennacherib's Campaign*, p. 128). Jafo was but one of several minor towns conquered along the coastal plain and certainly too small a place to deserve such prominent treatment in Sennacherib's throne-hall. The identification of the city with Sidon is favoured by Matthiae, *L'arte degli Assiri*, p. 170 and fig. 8.17. In my opinion, the Luli and Sidon episodes as known from the annual recensions on the Rassam cylinder and Bulls 2 and 3 clearly fit the pictorial scheme

eted episodes were probably depicted in other rooms, see above on room X).

To sum up, while we have to admit that the available pictorial evidence from Sennacherib's Southwest palace is too poorly preserved as to allow an unquestionable identification of the Jerusalem episode, there are good reasons to suggest that the latter may have been depicted somewhere in the palace, and perhaps even in the throne-hall, the very centre of power. Consequently, we should not give too much weight to the above-mentioned *communis opinio* according to which the Lachish reliefs had to compensate Sennacherib's failure to conquer Jerusalem.

Moreover, regardless of whether the reliefs discussed in this section may directly relate to the Jerusalem operation or not, they can help us to perceive the nuances of Assyrian siege practices and their representation and may thus contribute to a better understanding of the Jerusalem paragraph in Sennacherib's annals. On the other hand, one should be cautious not to enter into a circular argument, since sculptures and annals do rarely run exactly parallel. Our suggestion concerning Jerusalem relies on the annals *faute de mieux*, since they are the only preserved Assyrian textual account of Hezekiah's submission. However, the identification of Jerusalem on slab I-28 cannot as yet be positively proven.

In conclusion, whether or not Sennacherib's army ever laid a siege against Jerusalem and, if yes, to what extent, are questions that will continue to require an answer from the textual rather than the pictorial record.

#### *Reasons Why a Siege against Jerusalem May Not Have Been Depicted in Sennacherib's Palace*

Present pictorial evidence can neither prove nor exclude the possibility that the siege of Jerusalem was depicted on one of Sennacherib's palace reliefs. As already mentioned, scholars have generally assumed that a siege of Jerusalem was *not* represented in the palace. To explain this (possible) absence may seem to be an exercise in 'virtual history' to some, and pure speculation to others. However, given the impact of the *communis opinio*

best, although they do not relate a formal siege and conquest of Sidon. Note, however, their distinction of Smaller and Greater Sidon, i. e., the harbour site from where Luli could flee and the town which first came under attack. Only the late source Bull 4, dated seven years after the events, has Luli ultimately flee from Tyre. See discussion in Gallagher, *Sennacherib's Campaign*, pp. 93-104.

that Sennacherib did not represent this event in his palace because it had been a failure, I cannot resist trying to offer a few alternative explanations.

- (A) The siege of Jerusalem and surrender of Hezekiah may have been omitted from the sculptures because the king himself did not participate in the operation.
- (B) The episode may be missing from the sculptures because it was essentially a post-campaign event, thus missing from the field diaries and possibly 'letter to the gods'. Since these were the primary source for the officials and artists who designed the palace decoration, the latter would have had no relevant information concerning Jerusalem at hand.
- (C) Another possible alternative, which is explored in more depth in W. Mayer's contribution to the present volume, is that the siege against Jerusalem was a minor operation in military terms, which made it unfit for inclusion into the heroic schemes of palace reliefs. From a military point of view, the major, even climactic events of the 701 campaign would have been the battle of Eltekeh and the conquest of Lachish.

However, the most important *caveat* against speculating on the reasons for Jerusalem's absence from the sculptures is that we actually do not know whether the episode was depicted somewhere in Sennacherib's palace or not. This is not to say that the *communis opinio* is necessarily wrong, but that it is based on insufficient evidence and argument.

#### *Conclusion: Towards a Historical-Critical Reading of Pictorial Sources*

Within the limited space of this article, I have tried to argue that historical research should take as much interest in a critical analysis of ancient pictures as in the exegesis of textual sources, particularly if the pictures' subject matter is actually 'historical narrative'. As fragmentary as they often are, Assyrian palace reliefs represent an essential, partially independent source for the understanding of past events, and particularly of their perception and interpretation by members of the Assyrian elite. Consequently, historical research should cease to ignore the rich potential of this primary source. At the same time, those historians who recognize the reliefs' potential should move beyond an often-practised positivistic approach which considers the sculptures as a kind of quarry for the search of ancient *realia*. Moreover, we should avoid misreading the sculptures as if they were

ancient documentary photographs or cartoons. Instead, these reliefs deserve to be analyzed as just another facet of ancient historiography, based on rules of visual rather than verbal rhetoric and communication.<sup>211</sup>

With regard to historical methodology, I hope to have demonstrated that the only thing which never fits the evidence are simplistic solutions. Problems abound everywhere—to start with the impossibility of getting back to Sennacherib's palace as it stood and to the original authors of texts and images. History-writing is basically a matter of data processing; consequently, historians more than other scholars should be aware of the many difficulties inherent in the recording, storage, transmission and restitution of historical data in ancient sources. In order to interpret ancient documents correctly, we have to consider these difficulties, regardless of whether we are dealing with texts or pictures. The Lachish reliefs even require a twofold historical-critical approach, since in addition to the problems of ancient Assyrian data processing, we have to take into account the fact that data recording and processing was also a major challenge for the nineteenth-century scholars who excavated and restored the series.

Still, if all these problems and necessary premises are taken into account, the historical-critical analysis of ancient pictorial sources may yield important complementary information not contained in any other medium or source category. In this article, I have suggested interpretations of a few features, scenes and episodes that may hopefully refine our perception of Sennacherib's campaign to the West in 701 BCE and its interpretation by contemporary Assyrian court officials and artists. Building up on previous studies by distinguished experts—among whom I would single out the work of A.H. Layard, D. Ussishkin and J.M. Russell—I have tried to evaluate the major problems involved in the study of the Lachish series and

211. This conclusion neatly joins Irene J. Winter's comments on the relationship of textual and visual source analysis: 'one simply cannot look at the verbal domains of information and not include the visual in the larger universe of cultural communication; and...one cannot restrict study of the visual to merely establishing chronology and articulating formal properties. Rather, the visual domain contains in it primary information, as well as unique structures of knowledge—oftentimes in parallel or complementary with, occasionally even quite distinct from, the textual record. Consequently, the visual needs to be studied with the full analytical arsenal available to us—art historical, archaeological, anthropological, and textual—and on its own terms' ('Art in Empire: The Royal Image and the Visual Dimensions of Assyrian Ideology', in S. Parpola and R.M. Whiting [eds.], *Assyria 1995: Proceedings of the 10th Anniversary Symposium of the Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project* [Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1997], pp. 359-81 [359]).

have offered some clues for an improved 'reading' of the sculptures from room XXXVI—sculptures which display the conquest of Lachish as one of the most important and perhaps even the major event of the third campaign. In response to a widespread *communis opinio* based on insufficient evidence and argument, I have also considered the possibility that Sennacherib's Jerusalem operation may well have been depicted somewhere in his palace, perhaps even in the throne-hall. While much of this remains in the realm of hypotheses, which will be improved, confirmed or rejected by future scholarship, our iconographical and at times iconological interpretation is not more speculative than any serious study and interpretation of the textual record. Hopefully then, this article may be read by some as an invitation to enter an area of research on the history of the ancient Near East, including the history of ancient Palestine, Israel and Judah, which to the disadvantage of our disciplines has not yet found the forum and attention it deserves.<sup>212</sup>

#### *Sources for Illustrations*<sup>213</sup>

1. Assembled and adapted from Barnett *et al.*, *Sculptures*, II, Pls. 327 (no. 429b) and 334 (no. 430b).
2. Assembled from Barnett *et al.*, *Sculptures*, II, Pls. 330 (no. 430a) and 332 (no. 431a).
3. Layard, *Second Series of Monuments of Nineveh*, Pl. 21.
4. Tufnell *et al.*, *Lachish III*, frontispiece of text volume.
- 5a. Ussishkin, 'Assyrian Attack', p. 55 fig. 2.
- 5b. Ussishkin, 'Assyrian Attack', p. 54 fig. 1.
6. Adapted from Ussishkin, *Conquest*, fig. 65.
7. Assembled and adapted from Ussishkin, *Conquest*, figs. 67-69.
8. Adapted from Ussishkin, *Conquest*, figs. 61 and 65.
- 9a-c. Adapted from Ussishkin, *Conquest*, fig. 65.
- 10a. Barnett *et al.*, *Sculptures*, II, Pl. 346.
- 10b. Madhloom, *Chronology*, Pl. VI.2.
11. Layard, *Second Series*, Pl. 50.
12. Russell, *Final Sack*, p. 111 Pl. 73.

212. I should like to thank my colleague Dr Jürg Egger (Fribourg) for his expert technical assistance in preparing the illustrations, and my assistant René Schurte for his proof-reading, which is reliable as usual.

213. Images of the slabs used by permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.