

## Sennacherib

**Sennacherib**- King of Assyria and Babylonia (705–681 B.C.), son of Sargon II and father of Esarhaddon. He besieged Jerusalem in the days of Hezekiah. Sennacherib left copious records of his reign (cf. ARAB, II, §§ 115–198), the final edition of his annals being known as the Taylor Prism (DOTT, Plate 4), and a better copy known as the Oriental Institute Prism (cf. Luckenbill, ANET, pp. 287f).

### I. Military Campaigns

Sargon II was killed in battle at Tabalu, N of the Taurus Mountains, in the month of Ab, 705 B.C., and on the twelfth of the same month his son Sennacherib ascended the throne of Assyria. Since Sennacherib was well trained, both in military and in administrative matters, the transition of government was seemingly smooth and no insurrections broke out. Nevertheless Babylon was always a problem for Assyria.

Merodach-baladan, king of Babylon (721–710), had fled when Sargon invaded Babylon (710 B.C.), but apparently had been allowed to continue as ruler of the province of Bit-Yakin. When SARGON died MERODACH-BALADAN initiated a number of efforts at revolt. Elam obviously was involved, for with its help Merodach-baladan seized the throne from *Marduk-zākir-šumi* who had reigned but a month (703 B.C.). It is likely that Merodach-baladan sent envoys to Hezekiah at this time (2 K. 20:12); he may have made some overtures also to Egypt as well as to several city-states in Hatti (Syria).

Sennacherib reported that in his first campaign he marched on Babylon, and at Kish (about 20 km [12 mi] SE of Babylon) he inflicted a terrifying defeat. Merodach-baladan saved his life by fleeing. Sennacherib continued on, plundering the treasury at Babylon and much of *Bīt-Yakin*, a region at the northern end of the Persian Gulf (ARAB, II, §§ 234f, 257–267, 270–76, 301–303, 345). He placed Bel-ibni, a Babylonian who had served in the palace at Assyria (ARAB, II, § 263), on the throne as king of Babylon (702–700 B.C.), and carried back to

Nineveh much booty and many captives (see ARAB, II, §§ 234, 261, 267, 272).

With Sennacherib's attention on Babylonia it was obviously the time for revolt in other regions. Accordingly, Sennacherib's second campaign was against tribes E of the Tigris (ARAB, II, §§ 236–38, 277–282, 304–308, 346). Again he brought back much plunder and many captives. The Medes bought him off by paying tribute.

In his third campaign (ca 701 B.C.) Sennacherib moved against the west. He captured the city-states from Tyre to Sidon (cf. ARAB, II, § 239; DOTT, pp. 66 and 68 n a; ANET, p. 287), and continued down the coast putting cities of the Philistine Plain and Shephelah under tribute. According to his rather full account (ARAB, II, §§ 239f, 309–312; ANET, pp. 287f; DOTT, pp. 64–69; *CPOT*, 340–44), he forced Hezekiah to release Padi, the king of Ekron who had been loyal to Assyria and restored him to his throne; and he captured 46 of Hezekiah's strong, walled cities, plundered them, and gave them to the kings of Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron, and Gaza. Hezekiah he shut "like a caged bird" in Jerusalem, imposed a heavy tribute (30 talents of gold, 800 talents of silver, all kinds of palace treasures, his daughters, palace women, male and female singers), and carried 200,150 persons in addition to many animals to Nineveh. For the problem of harmonizing Sennacherib's account with the biblical accounts, see IV below.

From his records we know that Sennacherib conducted at least eight campaigns. The fourth and sixth, like the first, were against *Bīt-Yakin*. The fifth campaign was against tribes in the mountains E of the Tigris (ARAB, II, §§ 244f, 293–98, 316f), accounts of which contain some of the fine descriptive writing for which Sennacherib is noted. The seventh campaign was against Elam, principally to secure the loyalty of the border cities (ARAB, II, §§ 248–251, 354f).

The eighth campaign was also against Elam (ARAB, II, §§ 252–54, 352, 356f). In this campaign the battle of Halule took place (ca

690 B.C.), certainly one of the bloodiest waged by Sennacherib, the description of which is breathtaking (cf. ARAB, II, §§ 253f). On his return Sennacherib sacked Babylon, diverted the canals to flood the city “that in days to come the site of that city ... might not be remembered” (ARAB, II, § 341). Sennacherib thereafter called himself “king of Sumer and Akkad” (cf. J. Oates, *Babylon* [1979], p. 120), not “king of Babylon,” for he had not taken the hands of Marduk. In fact, Marduk had been carried to Asshur. It was as though Sennacherib deliberately broke the traditional importance of Marduk and Babylon. The Babylonian Chronicle, following the account of the capture of Babylon, records, “During eight years there was no king in Babylon” (col 3, line 28; Rogers, p. 215) — which would be the years 689–681. The King List from Asshur, however, lists Sennacherib as “king of Assyria and Babylon” (col 4, line 12; ARAB, II, §§ 1188, p. 425; ANET, p. 273).

There are other, undated military actions to be accounted for: an expedition against Arabia (ARAB, II, § 358); a siege of Lachish recorded on wall reliefs at Nineveh (ARAB, II, § 489; AAAO, Plate 101) and mentioned in the OT (2 K. 18:13–19:8); an attack on Egypt, if Herodotus’s account is to be believed (Herodotus ii.141); a revolt and a palace coup which resulted in the assassination of Sennacherib (recorded by his son Esarhaddon, ARAB, II, §§ 501–506; ANET, pp. 289f). The problems will be considered in IV below.

## II. Building Projects

As soon as Sennacherib became king, he began his building projects at Nineveh, which had lain in ruins for years. Using captive Chaldeans, Arameans, Manneans, and peoples from Cilicia (ARAB, II, § 364), he built the “Palace without a Rival,” apparently having decided even while his father was ruling from *Dūr-Šarrukin* (Khorsabad) to abandon that location. He razed the former palace, the foundations of which had been cut away by the raging waters of the Tebiltu when it was in spate (ARAB, II, § 365). Then he changed the course of the river, and

using great boulders and stone slabs built a seawall to prevent future erosion while enlarging the area (ARAB, II, § 385). Backfilling this wall, he built a larger, higher platform for the palace, 440 by 700 cubits (about 220 by 350 m [725 by 1155 ft]), using the “great cubit” which was about 10% larger than the standard cubit; cf. ARAB, II, § 388). Excavations showed that the palace measured 180 by 190 m (× ft; cf. EncBrit [1970], XVI, 528 [M. Mallowan]). The palace consisted of more than 80 rooms, with 9,800 feet of stone slabs, inscriptions, and low-reliefs, including the famous reliefs depicting the siege of Lachish, that lined the walls. The roof consisted of great cedar beams from the Amanus Mountains; the doors of great panels of cedar wood. Colossal bulls, lions, cows, and sheep were placed at strategic locations.

The Khosr river also emptied into the Tigris near Nineveh; this was dammed and used to irrigate the parks and orchards which Sennacherib installed. To augment the waters of this river, he dug eighteen canals (ARAB, II, § 332). From a dam at Bavian (M. Beek, *Atlas of Mesopotamia* [1962], Map 11) he brought water by a canal 50 km (30 mi) long. To slow down the waters he formed a swamp and set out a cane-brake, turning the area into a preserve for wild animals (ARAB, II, § 401). The modern course of the Khosr is about 1350 m (4500 ft) from the ancient city walls.

The circumference of the city he enlarged from 9,300 cubits to 21,815 great cubits (12 km [7.5 mi]; ARAB, II, § 396); after the excavations, G. Smith reported that the circumference of the wall was 8 mi (12.8 km), which is in reasonable agreement with Sennacherib’s figures (ISBE, IV [1929], 2148). A wide moat (100 great cubits [50 m, 165 ft]) surrounded the wall (ARAB, II, § 474).

Sennacherib brought trees and plants from distant places to create a great park “like unto Mt. Amanus” (ARAB, II, § 376). He straightened and widened the *suqs* (market streets) (ARAB, II, § 474), built a royal road 52 great cubits wide (26 m [86 ft]) (ARAB, II, § 475), which he made to pass over a bridge built of burnt brick

and white limestone (ARAB, II, § 381). All of this was largely completed by the third year of his reign, for inscriptions containing the records are dated in the eponymy of Nabuilu (702 B.C.) and in the eponymy of Mutunu (700 B.C.). Sennacherib made Nineveh's splendor to rival that of ancient Babylon.

There were further building projects at Asshur (ARAB, II, § 452ff), at Tarbasi (modern Sherif Khan; ARAB II, § 480), and other places.

### III. Literary Ability

Sennacherib's ability to paint graphic pictures is evidenced in many of his inscriptions. The account of the siege of Jerusalem has so often been quoted that only a brief portion will be repeated: "As for Hezekiah the Judean who did not submit to my yoke, 46 of his strong, walled cities, as well as the small cities in their neighborhood, which were without number, by escalade and by bringing up siege engines, by attacking and storming on foot, by mines, tunnels, and breaches, I besieged and took ... . Himself like a caged bird I shut up in Jerusalem, his royal city" (ARAB, II, § 240; cf. ANET. pp. 287f).

Of the campaign in the hills E of the Tigris he described his experiences: "I had my camp pitched at the foot of Mt. Nipur and with my picked bodyguard and my relentless warriors, I like a strong wild-ox went before them. Gullies, mountain torrents and waterfalls, dangerous cliffs, I surmounted in my sedan chair. Where it was too steep for mv chair, I advanced on foot. Like a young gazelle I mounted the high peaks in pursuit of them" (ARAB, II, § 244).

His descriptions of the battle of Halule contains these graphic words: "Like a lion I raged. I put on (my) coat of mail. (My) helmet, emblem of victory, I placed upon my head. My great battle chariot, which brings low the foe, I hurriedly mounted in the anger of my heart. The mighty bow which Assur had given me, I seized in my hands; the javelin, piercing to the life, I grasped" (ARAB, II, § 253; the account continues in § 254).

To read his records is also an education in the materials used in building, the locations from which these materials were brought, and even some of the methods used. For example: "Beams of cedar, the product of Mt.Amanus, which they dragged with difficulty out of (those) distant mountains, I stretched across their ceilings (?). Great door-leaves of cyprus, whose odor is pleasant as they are opened and closed, I bound with a band of shining copper and set them up in their doors" (ARAB, II, § 366). "With the keen understanding which Ea lord of wisdom gave me, I made clay molds for all the copper work" (ARAB, II, § 431). To fashion the colossal lions, "open at the knees, which no king before my time had fashioned" (ARAB, II, § 412), he gives the following method: "I built a form of clay and poured bronze into it, as in making half-shekel pieces" (ARAB, II, § 413).

### IV. One or Two Invasions of Judah?

The theory that Sennacherib made two invasions into southern Palestine, one in 701 B.C. and the other in 688/87 B.C. has been debated for a century or more (cf. H. H. Rowley, *Men of God* [1963], pp. 98-132, in which he defended the one-invasion view). L. L. Honor presented the evidence for both theories in *Sennacherib's Invasion of Palestine* (1926, repr 1966). W. F. Albright espoused the two-invasion view (JQR, 24 [1934], 370f) and continued to hold it despite criticism (cf. FSAC, p. 314 n 53), as did his student J. Bright, BHI, [3rd ed 1972], pp. 298-309). B. S. Childs reviewed the evidence without drawing a conclusion (*Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis* [SBT, 2/3, 1967]).

The argument for one campaign may be summarized briefly: Sennacherib's accounts mention only one campaign, and the OT likewise mentions only one campaign (2 K. 18:17-19:37). The basis for the two-campaign theory is found in Sennacherib's Lachish reliefs, Lachish not being mentioned in his campaign of 701 B.C.; the biblical mention of the occupation of Lachish, a battle with Tirhakah of Egypt (2 K. 19:8f), and the juxtaposition of Sennacherib's

hasty retreat and his assassination (19:35–37), which does not fit with an invasion in 701 and the assassination in 681 B.C. Further, the fact that Isa. 36:1–22 closely parallels the account in 2 Kings, except that it omits 2 K. 18:14–16 — which is precisely the portion that most closely parallels Sennacherib’s account — suggests to some scholars that two invasions have been merged in the account in 2 Kings. In sum: Sennacherib’s first invasion resulted in the siege of Jerusalem, the payment of tribute by Hezekiah, etc., as presented in Sennacherib’s third campaign and in 2 K. 18:13–16; in the second invasion Egyptian forces came to the aid of Hezekiah and a crisis developed in the Assyrian camp, described in Herodotus as mice eating the leather of their weapons (ii.141; LAP [2nd ed, 1959], pp. 213f), and in the Bible as an act of “the angel of the Lord” that resulted in the death of 185,000 Assyrian soldiers and Sennacherib’s hasty retreat (2 K. 19:35f).

Leaving aside the difficulties in the biblical text — such as whether Lachish (2 K. 18:14ff) was occupied by Sennacherib in 701 or later, the shift of scene from Lachish to Libnah (19:8), the promise of Isaiah that Sennacherib would not come to the city (19:32) contrasted with the account of the siege and the payment of tribute (18:13–18) — as matters to be discussed in commentaries, one must consider the historical and archeological data. Unless one dismisses the biblical account as historically worthless and Herodotus as hopelessly confused, these historical data must be somehow integrated into Sennacherib’s accounts.

Two studies have undertaken this task. W. H. Shea took up three sets of data from Assyria, Palestine, and Egypt that appear to support a second invasion. From Assyria, Shea cited a text concerning the siege of Azekah and other Philistine cities that refers to “Anshar my lord.” Shea noted that the use of Anshar as a supporting deity is not found until after the destruction of Babylon in 689 B.C. Further, Isaiah’s reference to Sennacherib’s feats in hydraulic engineering (2 K. 19:24, reading *māšôr* as [Mt.] Musri; cf. ARAB, II, § 401) has to

be later than the event, which is dated in 694 B.C. (cf. H. Tawil, JNES, 41 [1982], 195–206).

From Palestine, Shea introduced the Adon Papyrus, found at Saqqârah, which appears to be an appeal from Adon, the ruler of Ekron, for Egyptian support in the face of an Assyrian invasion. Since Adon refers to “the king of Babylon,” this would require a date after 689. The evidence is supportive but not fully convincing.

From Egypt a text formerly attributed to Sheshonq I is now attributed to Tirhakah. It refers to an earlier debacle in Asia, probably Palestine, which could have been his defeat by Sennacherib, but it must be dated later than 701, for evidence from Egypt places the reign of Shabaka 713–699. Since the reign of Shabataka (Shebitku) must therefore be after 699, he could not have sent Tirhakah into battle prior to that date. Tirhakah’s campaign and battle with Sennacherib, therefore, could not have been in 701, but requires a later date.

R. W. Younker’s approach is quite different. He reasoned that if Sennacherib conducted two campaigns into Judah, archeological evidence of two campaigns should exist, either in sites where two destructions or occupations are attested, or in sites where the destruction or occupation is dated to the earlier or the later invasion. He found nine such sites. Of these, six witness to two destructions in the late 8th or early 7th cent; Tel Lahav, Tel ’Erani (= Libnah?), Tell Beit Mirsim (Ashan?), Tel Beersheva, Arad, and Tell ez-Zakariyeh (Azekah). The other three sites, Tel Migne (Ekron), Tel Batash (Timna), and Lachish, yield evidence of only one destruction, later than 701 B.C. The evidence therefore supports the conclusion that Sennacherib conducted two campaigns into Judah.

It is not yet possible to claim that the basis for two campaigns is beyond dispute; hence J. Bright’s statement is still valid: “Though new evidence may alter the picture, and though dogmatism is certainly to be avoided, a two-campaign theory seems at present to satisfy the evidence best” (BHI, 3rd ed, p. 309).

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## V. Death

According to Esarhaddon's records, his father Sennacherib had named him over his brothers as successor. "To gain the kingship they slew Sennacherib their father" (ARAB, II, § 502).

Esarhaddon was on a campaign in Hanigalbat, and he hastened back to secure the throne.

According to the Babylonian Chronicle, Sennacherib was murdered by "one" of his sons (DOTT, p. 72). This has sometimes been taken to contradict the biblical account, which names Adrammelech and Sharezer as the assassins (2 K. 19:37). Esarhaddon's words, "they slew" (cf. ANET, p. 288), should settle the matter. Details given in the biblical account are otherwise not known.

**Bibliography.**—W. F. Albright BASOR, 130 (Apr. 1953), 8–11; W. H. Shea, JBL, 104 (1985) 401–418; K. A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and OT* (1966), pp. 82–84; D. D. Luckenbill, *Annals of Sennacherib* (1924); C. van Leeuwen, "Sancherib devant Jérusalem," *Oudtestamentische Studien*, 14 (1965), 245–272; S. H. Horn, AUSS, 4 (1966), 1–28; CAH, 3 (1st ed, 1925), 61–79; R. W. Younger, BASOR, forthcoming; R. Rogers, *Cuneiform Parallels to the OT* (1912).

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