SENNACHERIB'S CAMPAIGN IN JUDAH: THE CONQUEST OF LACHISH[1]

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ABSTRACT

The conquest of Lachish in 701 B.C.E. by the army of Sennacherib, king of Assyria, forms a significant event in the history of the Near East, the history of the kingdom of Judah, and the history of the biblical world. Five different sources, which complement one another, combine to present us with a clear and vivid picture of the events at Lachish: (1) the detailed descriptions in the Old Testament of the Assyrian campaign in Judah; (2) the annals and other inscriptions of Sennacherib; (3) the city level attacked by the Assyrians which was studied in the excavations; (4) the remains of the battle uncovered in the excavations; and (5) the series of reliefs describing the siege of Lachish erected by Sennacherib in his royal palace at Nineveh. This is in fact a unique case in which a major battle of the biblical period can be studied and reconstructed to a significant degree. Much information was obtained in the intensive archaeological excavations which have taken place at Lachish since 1932. Groups of scholars and students from UNISA took part in the excavations of Tel Aviv University each season between 1976 and 1989. They were organised and led by Prof. Ian Eybers until his untimely death in 1981 (Fig. 1). Many of the South African participants were directly involved in uncovering significant remains associated with Sennacheib's attack on Lachish.

THE ASSYRIAN CAMPAIGN

In 705 B.C.E. Sennacherib ascended to the throne of Assyria, which at that time was the largest and most powerful kingdom in the Near East. The young king was soon faced with a revolt organised by Hezekiah, king of Judah. An alliance against Assyria was formed between Judah, Egypt and the Philistine city-states in the Coastal Plain,

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[1] The present paper, which summarises the Assyrian attack on Lachish, is a revised version of earlier studies (see Ussishkin 2013; 2014b). It follows my presentation on this subject at a combined meeting of OTSSA and SASNES held at Dinokeng Game Reserve in September 2015, which took place at the kind invitation of Prof. Coenie Scheepers of UNISA.

possibly with Babylonian support. Sennacherib met the challenge. In 701 B.C.E. he marched to Phoenicia, Philistia and Judah, and succeeded in re-establishing Assyrian supremacy in those regions (Fig. 2).

The Assyrian inscriptions, primarily the annals of Sennacherib, present a summarised account of the campaign and its achievements (e.g., Oppenheim 1955:287–288). This description includes the route the Assyrian army took from Assyria to Judah, the invasion of Judah and the submission of Hezekiah. In the description of the events in Judah, only Jerusalem is mentioned. The invasion of Judah is mentioned in two more brief inscriptions and in the Letter to the God, which tells of the conquest of Azekah and another city, perhaps Ekron in Philistia. The biblical sources (2 Kgs 18–19; Isa 36–37; 2 Chr 32; also Micah 1) deal mainly with the invasion of Judah, particularly the events in Jerusalem.

Based on these written sources it seems that the main course of the campaign can be reconstructed in different ways (see, e.g., Gallagher 1999; Rainey & Notley 2006; Cogan 2014). The following reconstruction seems to me the most plausible. Sennacherib and his powerful army marched on foot from Nineveh, the capital of Assyria to the Phoenician cities situated along the Mediterranean coast. Sennacherib received there the tribute of various vassal kings and continued his advance southwards to Philistia. He then defeated in open battle a large Egyptian expeditionary force, and re-established Assyrian rule in Philistia.

At this point Sennacherib turned against Judah and its ruler Hezekiah (Fig. 3). It is clear that upon arriving in Judah, Sennacherib focused his attention primarily on the city of Lachish rather than on the capital Jerusalem. Lachish was the most formidable fortress city in Judah, and its conquest and destruction was the paramount task facing Sennacherib when he came to crush the military power of Hezekiah. In fact, the conquest of Lachish was of singular importance and a great Assyrian military achievement as indicated by the Lachish reliefs, to be discussed below.

The Old Testament informs us that Sennacherib encamped at Lachish and established his headquarters there during his sojourn in Judah (2 Kgs 18:14, 17; Isa 36:2; 2 Chr 32:9). He conquered and destroyed 46 Judean cities and from Lachish he

sent a task force to challenge Hezekiah in Jerusalem. Eventually, as related in both the Old Testament and the Assyrian annals, Jerusalem was spared, and Hezekiah, who came to terms with Sennacherib, continued to rule Judah as an Assyrian vassal, and paid heavy tribute to the Assyrian king.

BIBLICAL LACHISH: THE JUDEAN FORTRESS CITY

Turning to Tel Lachish (in Arabic Tell ed-Duweir), the site of the biblical city, we see that it is one of the largest and most prominent mounds in southern Israel (Fig. 4). The mound is nearly rectangular, its flat summit covering about 72 dunams, which is approximately 18 acres. The slopes of the mound are very steep due to the massive fortifications erected here in the Bronze and Iron Ages.

Extensive excavations were carried out at Lachish in the past by three expeditions, and a fourth expedition has started an excavation project a few years ago. The first excavations were conducted on a large scale by a British expedition, directed by James Starkey, between 1932 and 1938. The excavation came to an end when Starkey was murdered by Arab militants. The detailed excavation reports were later published by his assistant, Olga Tufnell (Tufnell, Inge & Harding 1940; Tufnell 1953; Tufnell et al. 1958). In 1966 and 1968 Yohanan Aharoni conducted a small excavation, limited in scope and scale, in the Solar Shrine of the Persian period (Fig. 5, no. 11; Aharoni 1975). Thirdly, systematic, long-term and large-scale excavations were directed by me on behalf of Tel Aviv University between 1973 and 1994 (Ussishkin 2004; 2014a). Recently, excavations at Tel Lachish have been renewed by Yossi Garfinkel of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and Michael Hazel of the Southern Adventist University in Tennessee.

Lachish was continually settled between the Chalcolithic period in the fourth millennium and the Hellenistic period in the third century B.C.E. Our concern here, however, is the city of Levels IV and III, dated to the ninth and eighth centuries B.C.E. respectively.

At the beginning of the ninth century B.C.E. one of the kings of Judah constructed here a formidable fortress city, turning Lachish into the most important city in Judah after Jerusalem. I assume that the fortress city was built by either Asa (908–867 B.C.E.) or Jehoshaphat (867–846 B.C.E.), but with the lack of inscriptions it is impossible to say more. The fortress city continued to serve as the main royal fortress of the kings of Judah until its destruction by Sennacherib in 701 B.C.E. In archaeological terminology this fortress city is divided into two successive strata, labelled Level IV and Level III.

The plan in Fig. 5 shows the outlines of the fortress city, and the illustration in Fig. 6 portrays a reconstruction of Lachish from the west on the eve of Sennacherib's conquest in 701 B.C.E.

The nearly rectangular fortress city was protected by two city-walls – an outer revetment surrounding the site at mid-slope, and the main city-wall, extending along the upper periphery of the site. The massive outer revetment was uncovered in its entirety by Starkey. Only its lower part, built of stones, was preserved. It probably served mainly to support a rampart or glacis, which in turn reached the bottom of the main city-wall. The massive main city-wall was built of mudbrick on stone foundations. Being more than 6 m or about 20 ft thick, its top provided sufficient, spacious room for the defenders to stand upon and fight.

A roadway led from the south-west corner of the site to the city-gate (Figs. 5, 6). The city-gate complex included two gates – the outer gate connected to the outer revetment (Fig. 5, no. 1) and the inner gate connected to the main city-wall (Fig. 5, no. 2), and an open, spacious inner courtyard between the two gates.

The city-gate is the largest, strongest and most massive city-gate known today in the Land of Israel. Most impressive is the back corner of the gate complex, now partly restored. The massive corner, built of huge stone blocks, originally rose to a height of nearly 10 m or 30 ft. We started at the time to reconstruct the gate but this project was stopped for the time being due to lack of funds (Fig. 7). In recent years, the Nature and Parks Authority continued the reconstruction work in parts of the complex.

From the inner gate a roadway led to the huge palace-fort complex which crowned the centre of the summit (Fig. 8). The palace-fort served as the residence of the royal Judean governor and as the base for the garrison. This building is undoubtedly the largest and most massive edifice known today in Judah. Very little is known about the building proper as only its foundations below floor level have been preserved. The structure of the foundations resembles a big box rising above the surrounding surface. Some parts of the exterior walls of the foundation structure were exposed in the excavations. These walls are about 3 m or 9 ft thick. The spaces between the foundation walls were filled with earth and the exterior walls were supported by an earth rampart. The floor of the building extended at the top of the foundations, and nothing of the superstructure remains today. It can be safely assumed that a magnificent, monumental edifice rose at the time above these foundations. (For a detailed discussion of the complex see Ussishkin 2004/II:768–870.)

A deep well, which formed the main water source of the settlement, was located near the city-wall in the north-east corner of the site (Figs. 5, no. 8; 9). Apparently it provided sufficient quantities of water during times of peace and siege alike. The upper part of the well was lined by stone blocks and the lower part was hewn in the rock. It was 44 m or 130 ft deep and still contained water when Starkey uncovered it. Significantly, in the earlier part of the twentieth century C.E., as in the past, Arab villagers in the Lachish region still drew water from similar wells.

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

An impressive assemblage of pottery was retrieved in the houses of Level III. Many vessels could be restored from the fragments dispersed on the floors of the houses. Sometimes the broken vessels kept their shape when smashed, thus making the restoration work much easier. This assemblage of pottery apparently dates to the last decade of the eighth century B.C.E., and thus serves as a typological marker for establishing the date of other, undated Judean sites.

One group of pottery vessels – the royal Judean or *lmlk* storage jars – is of special importance (Fig. 10). These are large storage jars, uniform in shape and size, which were manufactured in one production centre by the Judean government, apparently as part of the military preparations made before the Assyrian invasion (see recently Ussishkin 2011). These jars were used to store oil or wine. They are known from various sites in Judah, including Jerusalem, but mainly from Lachish. Their handles were stamped (Fig. 11). The stamps included a four-winged or a two-winged emblem – apparently royal Judean emblems – and an inscription in ancient Hebrew characters. It reads "*lmlk*" that is "belonging to the king" and the name of one of four towns in Judah: Hebron, Sochoh, Ziph or *mmšt*. These towns must have been associated with the manufacture or distribution of the storage jars, or with the produce stored in them. Some of the jars were also stamped with a "private" stamp bearing the name of the potter or an official, like the one in Fig. 11 stamped with the name "Meshulam son of Ahimelech".

LACHISH: THE REMAINS OF THE ASSYRIAN SIEGE

When Sennacherib arrived at the head of his army in Lachish, he did not have to deliberate at length on where to direct the main attack on the city. The obvious answer was dictated by the topography of the site and the surrounding terrain. The city was enveloped by deep valleys on nearly all sides, and only at the south-west corner did a topographical saddle connect the mound with the neighbouring hillock (Fig. 12). The fortifications at this corner were especially strong, but nevertheless, the south-west corner of the site as well as the nearby city-gate were the most vulnerable and most

logical points to assault.

Upon arrival at Lachish the Assyrian army must have pitched its camp, as was the practice in the Assyrian campaigns. It must have been a large camp, providing facilities for the expeditionary force and accommodating the king's retinue and headquarters. I believe that the site of the camp can be fixed with much certainty on the hillock to the south-west of the mound, where the modern Israeli village Moshav Lachish is now located (Fig. 12). This hillock is relatively high and its summit broad and flat. It is situated a short distance from the mound exactly opposite the place where the main attack was to take place, not far from the city-wall but beyond the range of fire of the defenders. Unfortunately, all remains of such a camp, if still preserved, would have been completely eradicated when the houses and farms of Moshav Lachish were constructed sixty years ago.

The excavations in the south-west corner were started in 1932, when Starkey cleared the face of the outer revetment around the entire mound. Large amounts of stones were uncovered at this spot, and the digging extended down the slope as more stones were removed. As the excavations developed, the saddle area at the foot of the south-west corner and the roadway leading up to the city-gate were cleared of many thousand tons of fallen masonry. Starkey believed that these stones collapsed from above, from the strong fortifications at the south-west corner destroyed during the Assyrian attack.

In 1983 we resumed the excavation of the south-west corner. It soon appeared that the stones encountered by Starkey were irregularly heaped against the slope of the mound rather than fallen from above, and hence it became clear that they form the remains of the Assyrian siege-ramp. The excavations at our trench enabled us to reconstruct the Assyrian attack to a large degree (Ussishkin 1990; 2004/II:695–767).

A general picture of the area which portrays the features discussed above is shown in Fig. 13. On the left side of the picture the roadway leading to the city-gate can be seen, and in the centre our trench. Below the trench the siege-ramp can be seen, with Starkey's excavation looking like a disused quarry.

At the bottom of the slope the siege ramp was studied (Fig. 5, no. 9). Although removed to a large degree by Starkey it could still be studied and reconstructed. At its bottom, the siege-ramp was about 70–75 m or 210–225 ft wide, and about 50–60 m or about 150–180 ft long. The core of the siege-ramp was made entirely of heaped boulders which must have been collected in the fields around. We estimated that the stones invested in the construction of the ramp weighed 13 000 to 19 000 tons.

The stones of the upper layer of the siege-ramp were found stuck together by hard mortar, forming a kind of stone-and-mortar conglomerate, which was preserved at a few points. This layer was the mantle of the ramp, added on top of the loose boulders in order to create a compact surface which was necessary to enable the attacking soldiers and their siege machines to move on solid ground. The top of the siege-ramp was crowned by a horizontal platform; it was made of red soil and was sufficiently wide, thus providing even ground for the siege-machines to stand upon.

To end the discussion of the siege-ramp it has to be emphasised that the siege-ramp at Lachish is, first, the earliest siege-ramp so far uncovered in archaeological excavations, and, second, the only Assyrian siege-ramp which is known today.

Above the siege-ramp were uncovered the fortifications of the south-west corner which were especially massive and strong at this vulnerable point (Figs. 5, 14). The outer revetment formed here a kind of tower; it was built of mud-brick on stone foundations and stood about 6 m or 18 ft high, preserved nearly to its original height. The "tower" was topped by a kind of balcony protected by a mud-brick parapet, on which the defenders could stand and fight.

The main city-wall extended above and behind the balcony of the "tower" of the outer revetment. The main city-wall was preserved at this point nearly to its original height – almost 5 m or 15 ft. A sloping stone glacis, well preserved, covered the façade of the wall (Fig. 15).

Once the defenders of the city saw that the Assyrians were constructing a siege-ramp in preparation for storming the city-walls, they started to lay down a counter-ramp inside the main city-wall (Figs. 5 no. 10, 14). They dumped here large amounts of mound debris taken from earlier levels, which they brought from the north-east side

of the mound, and constructed a large ramp, higher than the main city-wall, which provided them with a second, inner new line of defence.

As a result of the construction of the counter-ramp, the south-west corner became the highest part of the mound. It undoubtedly was a prominent rampart, its apex rising about 3 m or 10 ft above the top of the main city-wall. Some makeshift fence or wall, perhaps made of wood, must have crowned the rampart, but its remains were not preserved. Our soundings in the core of the counter-ramp revealed accumulation of mound debris containing much earlier pottery, as well as limestone chips, which was dumped in diagonal layers.

Significantly, once the Assyrians reached the walls and overcame the defence, they extended the siege-ramp over the ruined city-wall – we called it the "second stage" of the siege ramp – to enable the attack on the newly-formed, higher defense line on the counter-ramp. The boulders of the second stage of the siege-ramp can be seen in the picture in Fig. 15, in the section at the left side of the trench, dumped against the façade of the main city-wall.

Turning to weapons and ammunition used in the battle I shall first introduce the siege-machine, the formidable weapon used by the Assyrians to destroy the defence line on the walls. No less than seven siege-machines arrayed for battle on top of the siege-ramp and near the city-gate are portrayed in the Lachish reliefs (Figs. 16, 23). The South African artist Gert le Grange, who joined the excavations with the UNISA group, prepared an excellent, detailed reconstruction of such a siege-machine (Fig. 17). It is largely based on details of the Assyrian relief shown in Fig. 16. In le Grange's reconstruction, the machine moves on four wheels partly protected by its body, which is made in six or more separate segments for easy dismantling and reassembling. The ram, made of a wooden beam reinforced with a sharp metal point, is suspended from one or more ropes, like a pendulum, and several crouching soldiers are moving it backwards and forwards. The defenders standing on the wall are throwing flaming torches on the siege-machine. As a counter measure, an Assyrian soldier is pouring water from a long ladle on the façade of the machine to prevent it

from catching fire. Le Grange did not forget to add a cauldron containing water beside the soldiers.

Significantly, this reconstruction emphasises the fact that the fight between the two sides took place at very close quarters, something very difficult for us to imagine at the present time when long-range guns and missiles form the main weapons.

Two more unique finds are apparently associated with the attempts of the defenders to destroy the siege-machines. The first one includes twelve "perforated stones" which were discovered at the foot of both city-walls (Fig. 18). These are large perforated stone blocks, with a flat top, straight sides, and an irregular bottom. Each of them is nearly 60 cm or 2 ft in diameter and weighs about 100 to 200 kg. Remains of burnt, relatively thin ropes were found in the holes of two of the stones.

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

The second find is a segment of an iron chain, being 37 cm long and containing four long, narrow links, which was uncovered in the burnt mudbrick debris in front of the outer revetment (Fig. 19). The defenders probably used the iron chain to unbalance the siege-machines; we can assume that they lowered the chain below the point of thrust of the ram, in order to catch the shaft of the ram when it reached the wall, and raise it up.

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

The Lachish reliefs display Assyrian archers supporting the attack on the walls, and indeed close to one thousand arrowheads were discovered in the excavation of the south-west corner (Fig. 20; see Gottlieb 2004). The arrowheads are not uniform in size or shape, and different types are represented. Almost all of them were made of iron, and a few were made of bronze or carved from bone. In some cases the ashen remains of the wooden shafts of the arrows could still be discerned when exposed in the excavation. Most of the arrowheads were uncovered in the burnt mudbrick debris in front of the city-walls. Apparently these arrows were shot by Assyrian archers at warriors standing on the balconies on top of the walls. The discovery of so many arrowheads in such a small area shows how concentrated the Assyrian fire power was. Many arrowheads were found bent – an indication that they were shot at the walls with powerful bows from close range.

THE LACHISH RELIEFS

A few years after the campaign in the Levant and the subjugation of Judah Sennacherib constructed his royal palace at Nineveh, at that time the capital of Assyria (see map in Fig. 2). The palace is known today as the South-West Palace. A detailed description of the construction, size, magnificence, and beauty of this extravagant edifice is recorded in Sennacherib's inscriptions; he proudly called it the "Palace without a rival". The palace was largely excavated in 1850 C.E. by Sir Henry Layard on behalf of the British Museum in London. Layard prepared a plan of the building and uncovered a large number of reliefs cut on alabaster slabs which adorned the walls (see Layard 1853).

The stone slabs depicting the conquest of Lachish were erected in a special room, known as Room XXXVI, located at the back of a central ceremonial suite in the palace. It seems that the whole room – and possibly the entire suite – was intended to commemorate the conquest of Judah and the victory at Lachish (see Ussishkin 1980; 1982; 2003).

According to Layard, Room XXXVI was 38 ft wide and 18 ft long (Fig. 21). Its walls were probably entirely covered by the Lachish reliefs. The stone slabs of the relief on the left side of the room were left by Layard on the site and were thus lost, while the rest of the series, comprising twelve slabs, was transferred by him to the British Museum in London and is presently exhibited there. The length of the preserved series is about 19 m or 57 ft. It seems that the missing part of the series was about 8 m or 24 ft long. Accordingly, the entire series depicting the conquest of Lachish must have been about 27 m or 81 ft long. This is the longest and most detailed series of Assyrian reliefs depicting the storming and conquest of a single fortress city. The missing relief slabs were not documented, and the only hint as to their content is Layard's remark that "the reserve consisted of large bodies of horsemen and charioteers". Further along, in consecutive order from left to right, are shown the attacking infantry, the storming of the city, the transfer of booty, captives and families going into exile, Sennacherib sitting on his throne, the royal tent and chariots, and finally the Assyrian military camp.

Significantly, the section portraying the storming of the city was placed in the centre of the rear wall of the room, opposite the monumental entrance. Given good lighting conditions, anyone who passed through the entrance could see the storming of Lachish facing him as he entered the room.

Surveying some details of the relief series from left to right, we first see the infantry, composed of slingers and archers, attacking the walls of the besieged city (Fig. 22). The soldiers are shown against a uniform background resembling scale armour or fish scales, the same background that characterises the entire series. It is possibly meant to represent a stony landscape, like the rocky small hillocks typical of the Lachish region. Two grape vines and a fig tree can be seen at the top, easily recognisable by their typical leaves and fruits.

Next is shown the central scene, the attack on the city-walls, schematically portrayed on three adjoining stone slabs (Fig. 23). The city-gate is shown in the centre, being attacked by a siege-machine (Figs. 16, 23). Refugees are shown carrying their belongings and leaving the city through the gate. On both sides of the besieged city are

depicted the city-walls. Judean warriors stand on the walls and on the balcony on the roof of the gate and shoot at the attacking Assyrians. The siege-ramp is shown to the right of the gatehouse. Altogether, as mentioned above, seven siege-machines are attacking the walls – five on top of the siege-ramp, and two attacking the city-gate, possibly positioned on a second siege ramp built against the gatehouse. The royal Assyrian reliefs usually portray one, and in a few cases two siege-machines attacking the walls of a besieged city. The Lachish relief is unique in showing no less than seven siege-machines taking active part in the battle.

A very interesting detail is shown above the right side of the siege-ramp (Fig. 24). Three burning chariots or carts are being thrown down from the city-wall on the attacking Assyrians and their siege-machines. Additional vehicles were possibly portrayed above the left side of the siege-ramp, in that part of the relief which is missing today. The vehicles are rendered in an identical though schematic manner, each represented by one wheel with a thick felly and six spokes, and a yoke with attachments for harnessing two animals. Tongues of flame indicate that the vehicles were set on fire before being thrown over the parapets. The fact that several identical vehicles are shown here suggests that these were chariots of the Judean garrison. Since these chariots could not be used as such in the besieged city, they were set afire and hurled down by the defenders in a desperate attempt to repulse the enemy and burn down the siege-machines.

Further to the right are shown Assyrian soldiers carrying booty (Fig. 25) as well as the deported or punished inhabitants of the city. The portrayed booty probably contains the symbols of state that formed part of the Judean governor's official equipment and were stored in the palace-fort (Ussishkin 2003). The first soldier holds a sceptre with its round top pointing downwards, no doubt deliberately. The second and third soldiers each carry a large ceremonial chalice or incense burner which is probably made of copper or bronze. The fourth soldier holds a chair, most likely the governor's throne. The following two soldiers pull a chariot which must have been the official vehicle of the governor, this being the only Judean chariot from the biblical era known today. Finally, three soldiers carry spears, shields and swords.

As noted by the British scholar Richard Barnett (1958) the artist makes a clear distinction between most of the inhabitants of Lachish, who were deported, and some who were severely punished. A few of those are being stabbed by the Assyrian soldiers or flayed alive, and three prisoners are impaled on long sticks near the roadway leading down from the city-gate (Fig. 26). This particular site of execution was probably chosen so that all captives and deportees leaving the city would be forced to see them. The three impaled captives are naked and their heads sag forwards indicating that they are already dead. In my view, the prisoner on the right is wearing a plumed helmet, an indication that he was the Judean governor. If so, he was impaled wearing his official helmet, together with his two deputies, in front of the city-gate.

The inhabitants of Lachish are shown leaving the destroyed city to exile, taking their belongings with them, a tragic picture of entire families forced out of their homes (Fig. 27). The family shown here consists of two women, followed by two girls and a man leading a cart harnessed to two oxen. The cart is laden with household goods and tied-up bundles on which two small children, a boy and a girl, are sitting. The ribs of the oxen are emphasised, possibly to point out that they suffer from malnutrition. More families are shown in the continuation of the relief. The most impressive scene is the picture of the father who walks with his two little children and carries his belongings on his shoulders (Fig. 28).

The deportees are distinguishable by their appearance and dress. The women wear a long, simple garment. A long shawl covers their head, shoulders and back, reaching to the bottom of the dress. The men have a short beard and their heads are wound with scarves whose fringed ends hang down. Their garment has a fringed tassel hanging between the legs. Both men and women are barefooted.

The two processions, the one of Assyrian soldiers carrying booty, and the other of the deported inhabitants, face the Assyrian monarch sitting on his throne (Fig. 29). The cuneiform inscription, carved in the background of the relief, identifies the assaulted city as Lachish. The beautiful throne is richly ornamented and is specifically mentioned in the inscription; it was almost certainly brought to Lachish from Assyria. The throne has very high legs, and hence the feet of the king rest on a high footstool.

The high throne enabled the sitting monarch to look down from above at the people standing in front of him. Both the throne and the stool were decorated with beautifully carved ivories.

Facing the king stands a high official, possibly the Tartan, the commander-in-chief. He is followed by commanders of lesser rank, and two eunuchs holding fans stand behind the king's throne.

Behind Sennacherib's throne is pitched the royal tent, identified as Sennacherib's tent by a short cuneiform inscription. Beneath it is parked the ceremonial chariot of Sennacherib, its royal ownership attested by the soldier holding a canopy behind it. Further to the right is portrayed the king's retinue – dismounted cavalrymen and the king's battle chariot.

The Assyrian fortified camp marks the end of the relief series at the right-hand side. Elliptical in shape, it is depicted in the schematic Assyrian style, which combines a bird's-eye view of the fortifications with a frontal view of the tents and other elements inside the camp. The camp is surrounded by a protective wall with towers, and a wide thoroughfare crosses the camp from end to end.

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

It seems to me, following the initial study of Richard Barnett (1958), that the Lachish relief portrays the city from one particular spot. In the relief the various features of the city are depicted according to the usual rigid and schematic conventions of the Assyrian artists, but they are shown in certain perspective, roughly maintaining

the proportions and relationships of the various elements as they would appear to the onlooker standing at one specific point (Ussishkin 1980; 1982:118–126).

In the relief the city-gate complex is shown in the centre of the mound (Fig. 23). The onlooker faces the outer gate, while the roadway leading to the bottom of the mound extends to the right. The palace-fort, which was the most imposing building on the site, probably looms above the gatehouse. The main siege-ramp is shown to the right of the city-gate and the palace-fort. It is the largest feature in the scene, and its top is higher than that of the city-walls shown on both sides of the city.

In my view, the particular vantage point from which Lachish is portrayed is located to the south-west of the site, on the slope of the neighbouring hillock (this point is marked with an ✳ on the map in Fig. 12). At this particular point – as shown in the reconstruction prepared by Gert le Grange reproduced in Fig. 30 – we see the façade of the city-gate in the centre, with the roadway leading to the right. The palace-fort looms above the city-gate. The siege-ramp, being just in front and near this point looks much higher and much larger than the other features.

This theory was contested by several scholars, e.g., Ruth Jacoby (1991) and Christoph Uelinger (2003) who argue that the city is shown in the relief in a schematic manner and has to be differently interpreted. However, I hold to my view, although I cannot prove this case. The above particular point is located in front of the presumed site of the Assyrian camp (Fig. 12), between it and the city, and facing the main point of attack. I believe that this is the very spot where Sennacherib, the supreme commander, sat on his throne, conducted the battle and later reviewed the booty bearers and the deportees (Fig. 29). Consequently, I believe that the relief presents the besieged city as seen through the eyes of Sennacherib himself at his command post.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The archaeological data are insufficient to answer, even in general terms, three basic questions: (1) What was the size of the city's population at the time of the siege? (2) What was the size of the Assyrian army? (3) How long did the siege last?

Regarding the number of defenders and inhabitants: there are various methods for estimating the size of the population in an ancient settlement (see Geva 2014). The adoption of each method will naturally result in different estimates. As mentioned above the size of the summit of Lachish was about 72 dunams, that is, about 18 acres. Based on a density coefficient (i.e., number of people per 1 settled dunam) of 25 persons to a dunam, we reach the estimate of circa 1 800 people. However, this method is meant to estimate the population in a regular settlement, while Lachish was a fortress city. Moreover, it is possible that the number of people in Lachish changed on the eve of the siege, either because people from the surrounding region took refuge there, or due to changes being made in the deployment of the Judean army.

As to the size of the Assyrian army encamped at Lachish, or the size of the force which took part in the attack of the city, no data is available. As to the question of how long the siege of the city lasted, it apparently was a brief siege, as the entire Assyrian campaign lasted for only part of one year. It seems that most of the time needed for the attack on Lachish was spent in laying the siege ramp, while the attack on the city walls was relatively brief. Israel Eph'al (1984:63–64) tried to calculate the time needed for laying the siege ramp, and suggested that it took 23 days. Recently Eph'al (2009) has estimated that it would have taken 500 porters 35 days working round the clock. However, much of the essential data needed for the calculations, such as the exact quantity of boulders dumped in the siege-ramp, the provenience of the boulders dumped at the siege ramp, the number of porters employed and delays caused by the defenders, can only be surmised.

One wonders what happened to the people deported by Sennacherib from Lachish and other settlements in Judah. We have one datum. In his inscriptions and reliefs Sennacherib describes the erection of the royal palace in Nineveh in the years after the third campaign. He mentions that captives from the conquered lands, including captives from Philistia and Tyre, took part in the construction work. The people of Judah are not specifically mentioned, since they may have been reckoned among the people of Philistia. A series of reliefs found by Layard in the palace depicts some aspects of its construction. In one scene we see the captives carrying huge stones and

piling them up; another relief shows a great bull colossus being dragged to the building site. In these reliefs we see the captives moving in rows, whether hauling stones or dragging a sculpture. The captives in each row are distinctly dressed, indicating that they represent different ethnic groups wearing the attire of their country of origin. The captives in one row are similar in appearance to the deportees depicted in the Lachish reliefs (Fig. 31). They wear a short garment held by a wide belt, with a fringed tassel. They have a short beard and their heads are bound by a scarf whose edges hang down and cover their ears. They differ from the men of Lachish only by wearing leggings and boots. Clearly, these are men of Judah, possibly the men of Lachish, who were deported to Nineveh and forced to hard labour in the construction of the royal palace.

Evidence of the terrible destruction wrought by Sennacherib's campaign in the Judean Shephelah and the northern Negev has been found in archaeological excavations and surveys. Excavations revealed that Beth-Shemesh, Tell Beit-Mirsim, Tel 'Eton, Tel Arad and Tel Beer-sheba were utterly destroyed. Yehuda Dagan's survey of the Judean Shephelah (2004) attested to dense and flourishing habitation in the eighth century B.C.E., which was severely compromised at the end of that century. Evidence from the seventh century was of a much more meagre population. As stated in the Assyrian inscriptions, large parts of the Judean Shephelah, probably including the region of Lachish, were transferred by Sennacherib to the Philistine kingdoms in the Coastal Plain, and 200 150 Judeans were deported.

After the storming and the destruction of Lachish Sennacherib remained encamped near the ruined fortress city (2 Kgs 18:14, 17; Isa 36:2; 2 Chr 32:9). From there Sennacherib sent a strong task force to Jerusalem, headed by three top officials – the Tartan, Rabsaris and Rabshakeh (the commander-in-chief, the chief eunuch, and the chief officer) – who conducted the negotiations with Hezekiah and came to terms with him. Hezekiah agreed to pay a heavy tribute and became a vassal of the Assyrian king. The story of these events and the salvation of Jerusalem is told in detail in both the Assyrian inscriptions and the Old Testament (2 Kgs 18–19; Isa 36–37; 2 Chr 32).

The nature of the goals of Sennacherib's campaign to Judah, and to what extent these goals were achieved, is a significant historical problem. Some scholars argue – following the biblical source – that Sennacherib had planned to take Jerusalem and depose Hezekiah. According to this idea, Sennacherib failed to do so as Jerusalem and Judah were saved and he returned to Nineveh empty-handed. According to another theory – which I believe is correct – Sennacherib had intended to crush the rebellion against Assyria and stabilise Assyria's supreme rule as far as the border of Egypt. This he intended to accomplish by exerting his authority over the local kings and strengthening their status as loyal vassals, not necessarily by annexing the region and turning it into a province. If that was the purpose of the campaign, then it was achieved in its entirety. The kingdom of Judah was severely punished and its king made subservient to Assyrian authority. The Assyrian takeover was carried out without taking by force the major city of Jerusalem, with all the problems and time that would have entailed.

The events in Lachish may be understood in the light of the above conclusions. Lachish was Hezekiah's key fortress city, and its garrison, I believe, included a chariot unit, possibly the sole one in the Judean army. Sennacherib preferred to attack and destroy Lachish before setting out against Hezekiah in Jerusalem. In so doing, it seems he had planned to achieve two goals: first, to destroy Hezekiah's main fortress city thus weakening the king's resistance and second, to demonstrate to him Assyrian military might, determination and ruthlessness. Lachish was destroyed despite its strong fortifications and garrison and its inhabitants exiled – making an example out of it as a warning and to instil fear. These goals were completely achieved, paving the way for Hezekiah's surrender to Sennacherib's officials who were sent to Jerusalem. The conquest of Lachish was the cardinal military event of Sennacherib's third campaign, an event that symbolised the crushing of the rebellion and the surrender of Philistia and Judah, and which became a landmark in the history of the Assyrian king's reign.

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Fig. 1. Scholars and students of UNISA travel in the morning from the expedition camp to the mound; front row, second from right: Prof. Ian Eybers; front row, first from left: the artist Gert le Grange
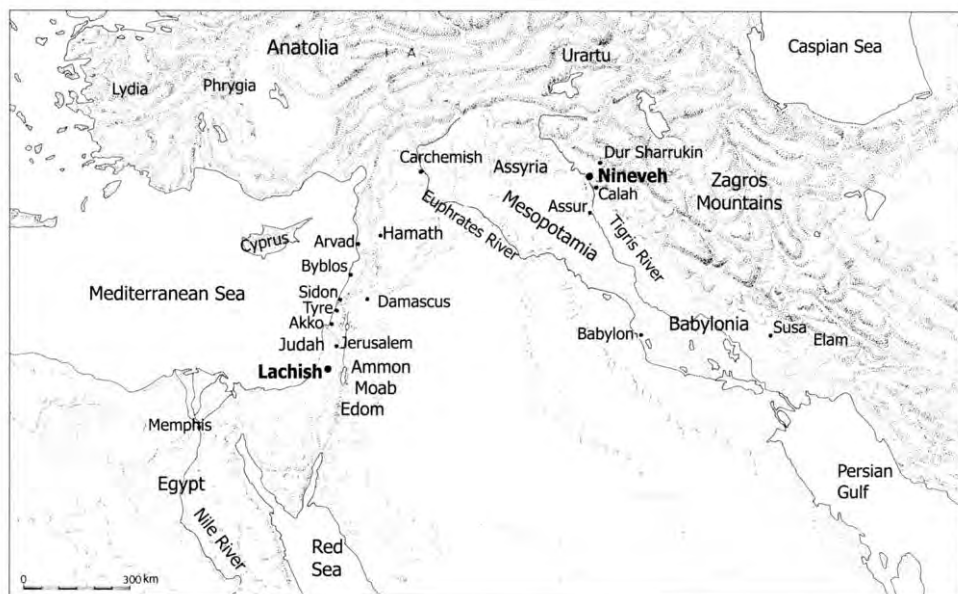
Fig. 2. The Near East at the time of Sennacherib
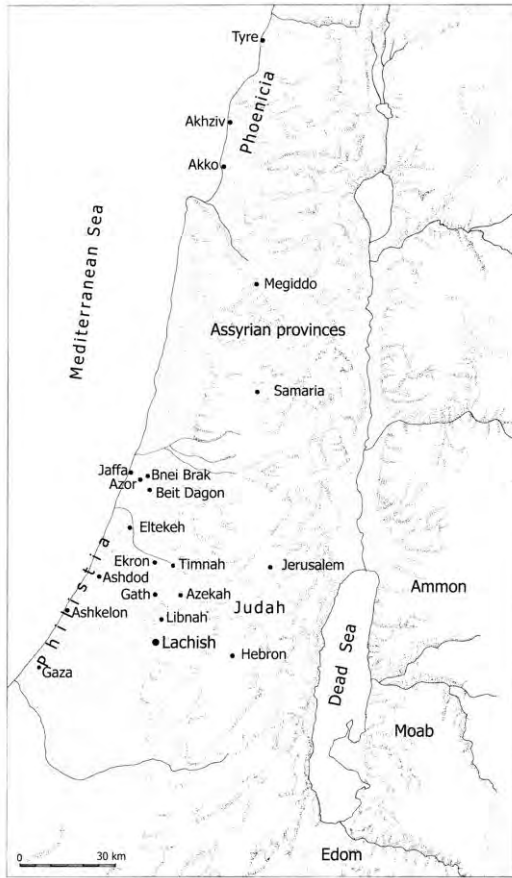
Fig. 3. The Land of Israel at the end of the eighth century B.C.E.

Fig. 4. Tel Lachish, from the north-east
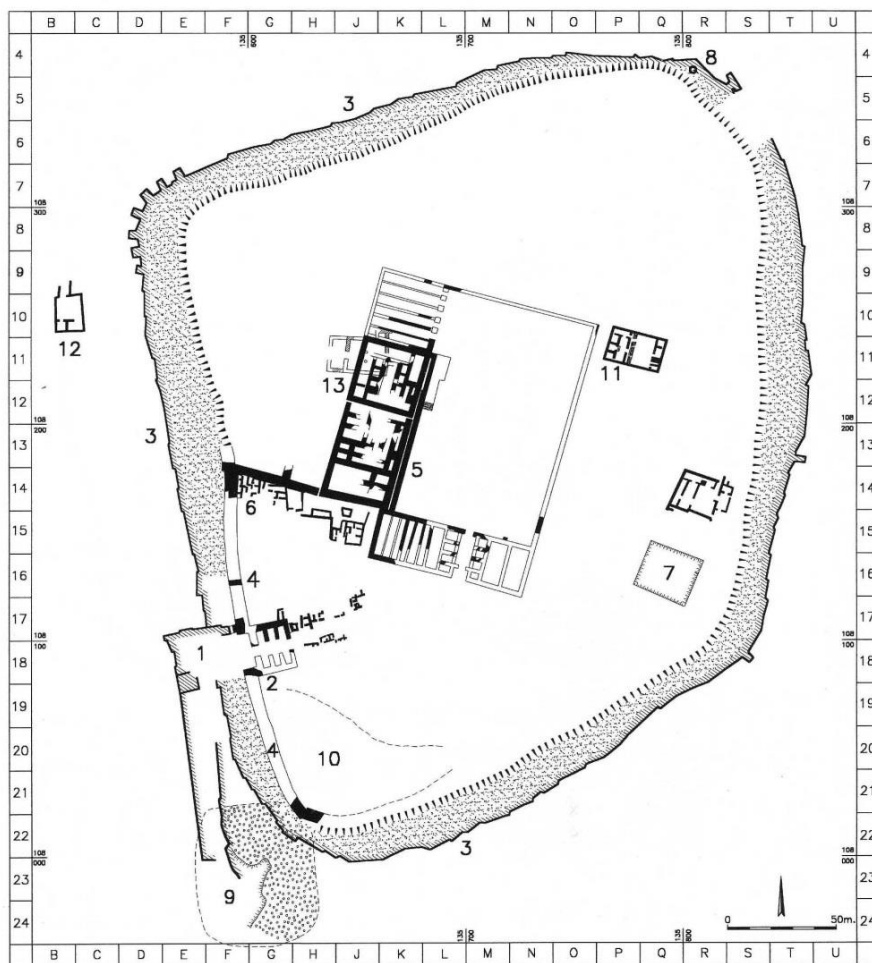
Fig. 5. Plan of Tel Lachish: (1) Outer city-gate; (2) Inner city-gate; (3) Outer revetment; (4) Main city-wall; (5) Palace-Fort complex; (6) Area S – the main excavation trench; (7) Great Shaft; (8) Well; (9) Assyrian siege-ramp; (10) Counter-ramp; (11) Solar Shrine; (12) Fosse Temple; (13) Acropolis Temple
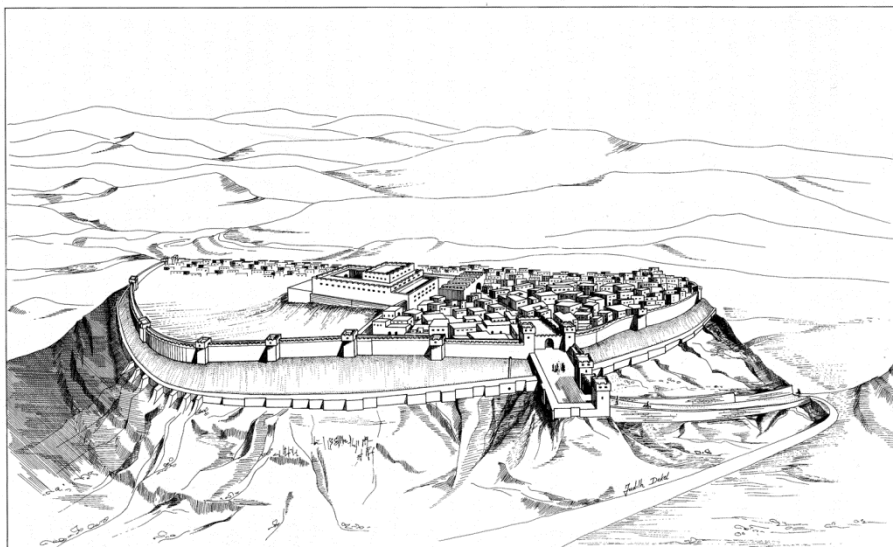
Fig. 6. Reconstruction of Lachish on the eve of Sennacherib's siege, from west; prepared by Judith Dekel from a sketch by H.H. Williams in 1933, supplemented by newly excavated data

Fig. 7. The Judean city-gate, partly reconstructed

Fig, 8. The foundation structure of the Judean palace-fort, from south, photographed in 1933; the floor of the building extended along the top of the structure

Fig. 9. The well – the main water source of ancient Lachish

Fig. 10. *Lmlk* storage jars after reconstruction; the jar at left was found with its stone stopper

Fig. 11A. Stamps on handles of *lmlk* storage jars: Four-winged stamp with the inscription "*lmlk ḥbrn*"

Fig. 11B. Stamps on handles of *lmlk* storage jars: two-winged stamp with the inscription "*lmlk ḥbrn*"

Fig. 11C. Stamps on handles of *lmlk* storage jars: "Private stamp" bearing the name "Meshulam (son of) Ahimelech"
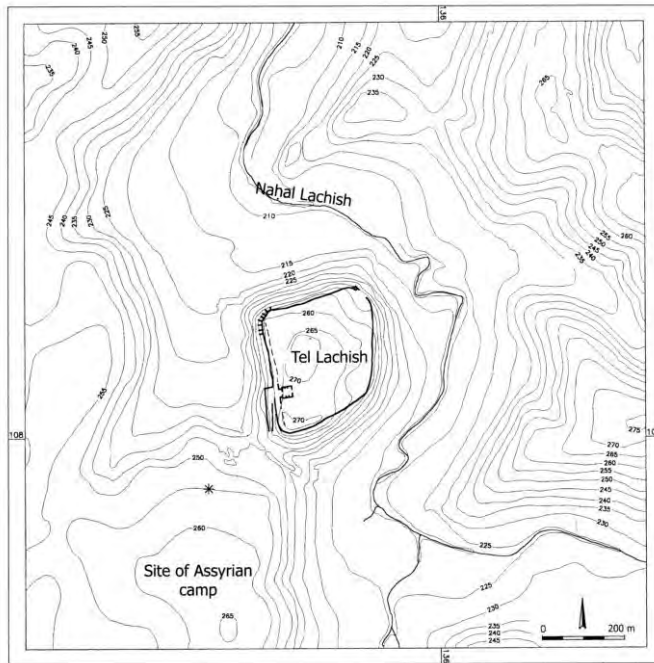
Fig. 12. Topographical map of Tel Lachish and its surroundings

Fig. 13. The trench (Area R) and the remains of the siege-ramp at the south-west corner of the site
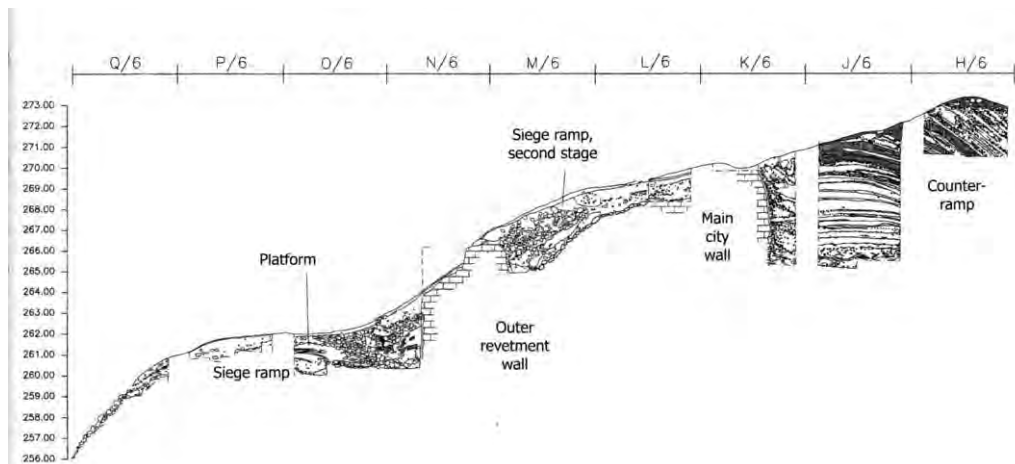
Fig. 14. A longitudinal section along Area R

Fig. 15. The stone-covered façade of the main city-wall exposed in Area R
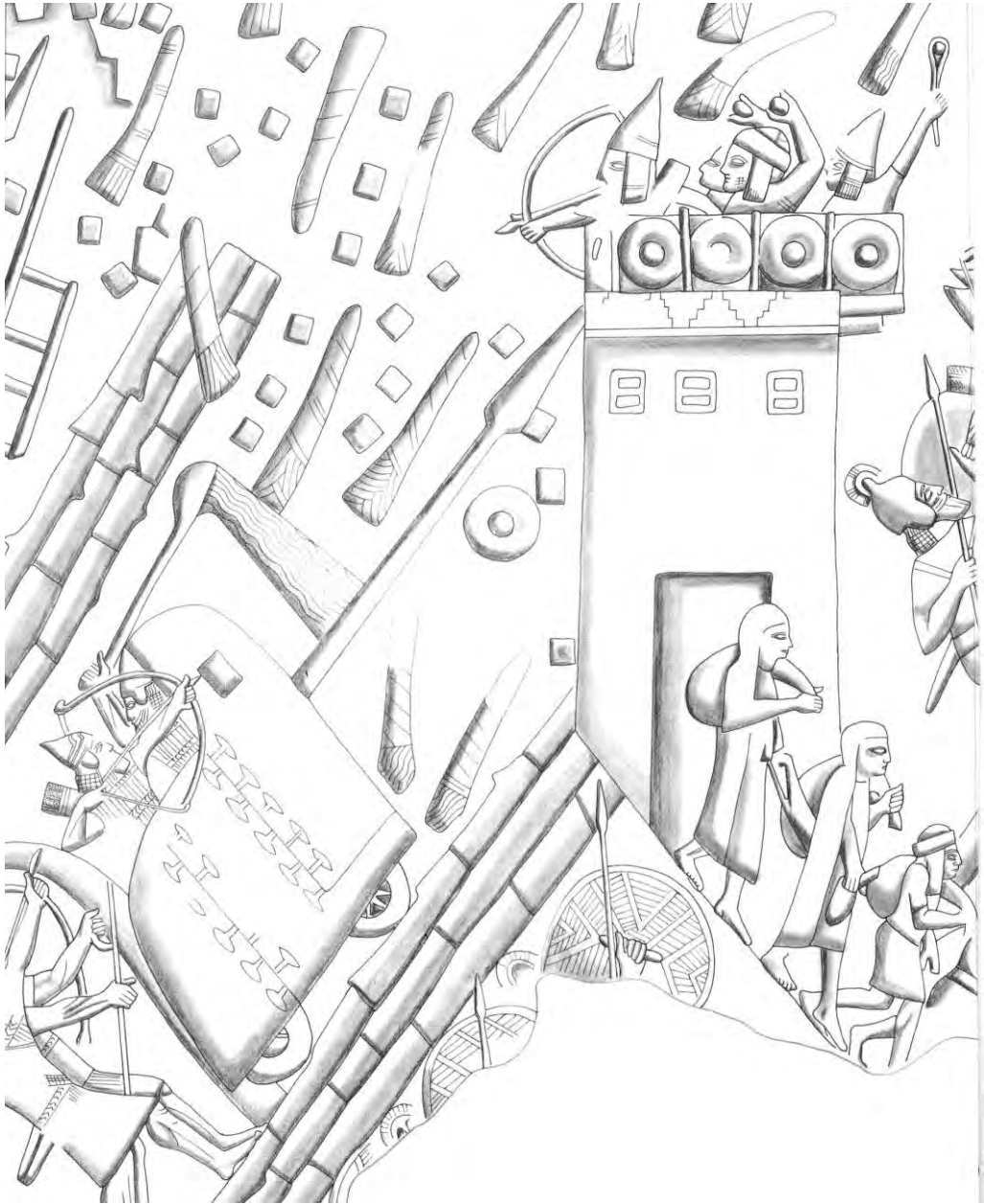
Fig. 16. The Lachish reliefs: Assyrian siege-machine attacking the city-gate (drawing: Judith Dekel)
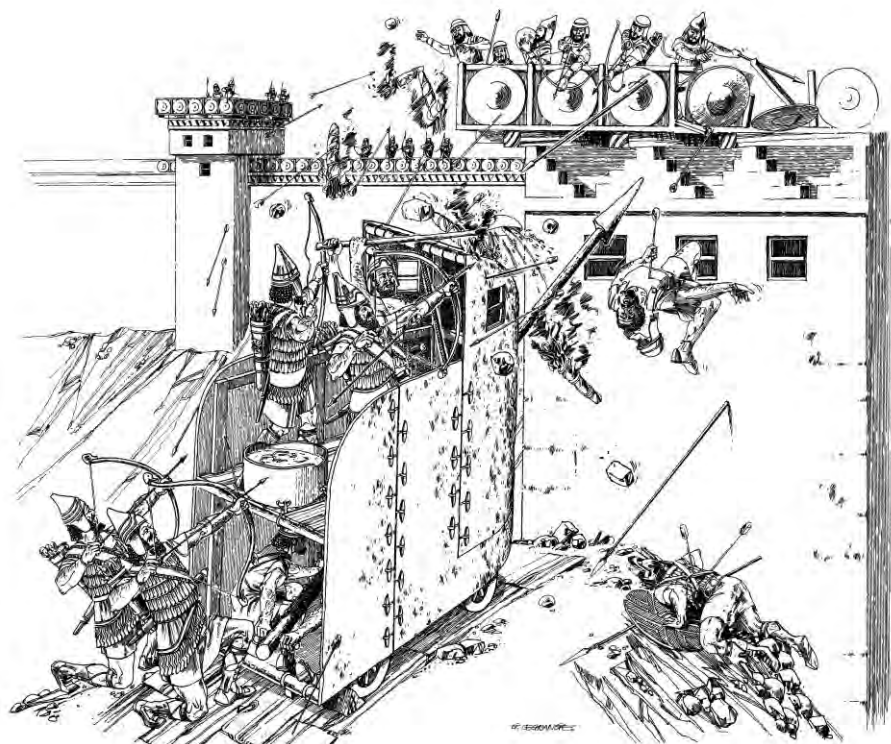
Fig. 17. The attack on the city-wall: a reconstruction by Gert le Grange

Fig. 18. "Perforated stones" found at the foot of the city-wall

Fig. 19. Iron chain, 37 cm long, found at the foot of the city-wall
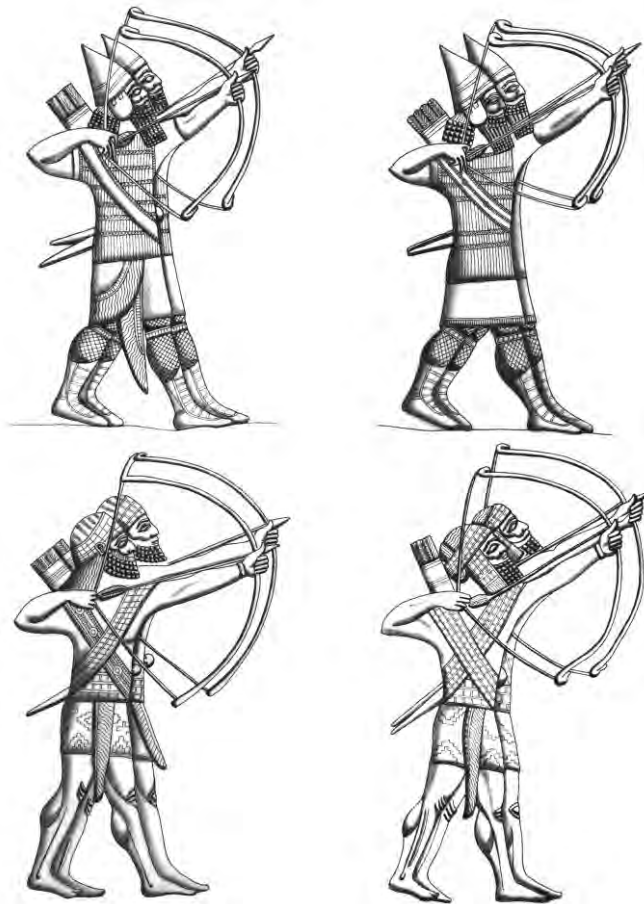
Fig. 20A. Assyrian archers shown on the Lachish reliefs

Fig. 20B. Arrowheads found at Lachish
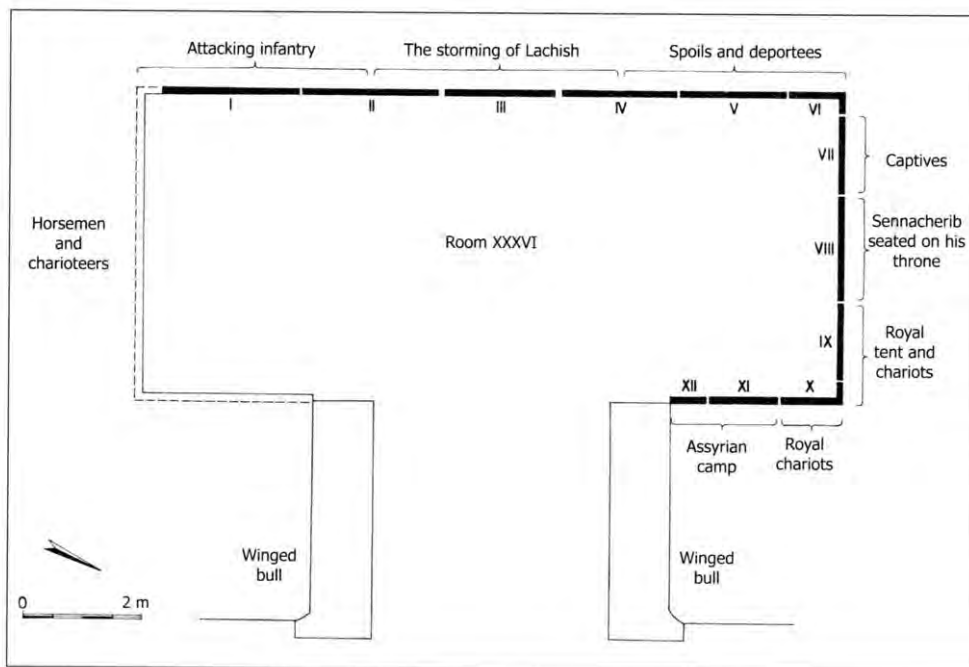
Fig. 21. Plan of Room XXXVI in Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh in which the Lachish reliefs were erected

Fig. 22. The Lachish reliefs: Assyrian slingers and archers shooting at the walls of the city

Fig. 23. The Lachish reliefs: The city under attack – the central part of the scene
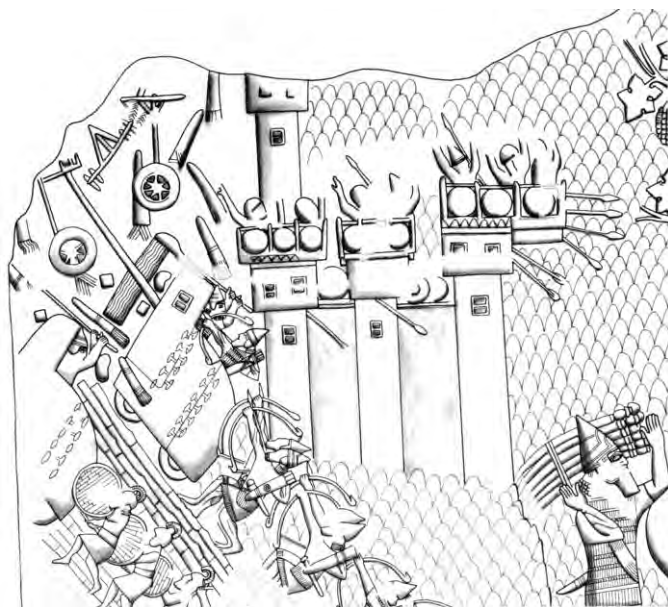
Fig. 24. The Lachish reliefs: burning chariots thrown by the defenders on the attacking Assyrians (drawing: Judith Dekel)
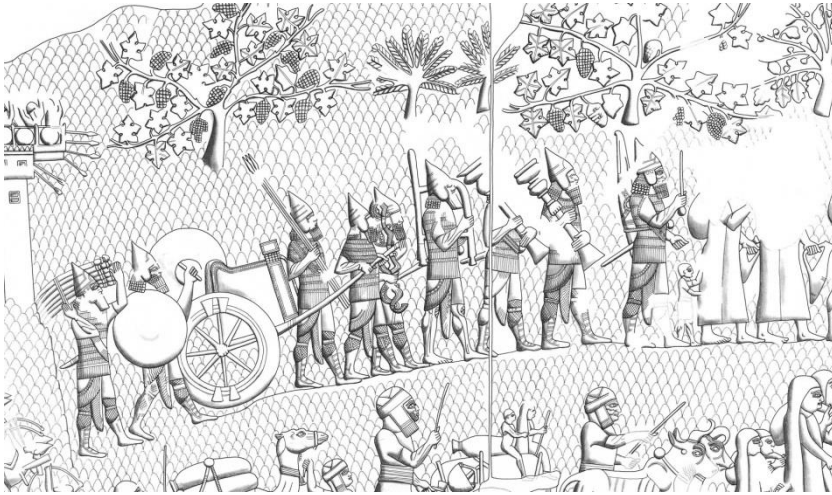
Fig. 25. The Lachish reliefs: Assyrian soldiers carrying booty (drawing: Judith Dekel)

Fig. 26: The Lachish reliefs: Impaled prisoners near the city-gate

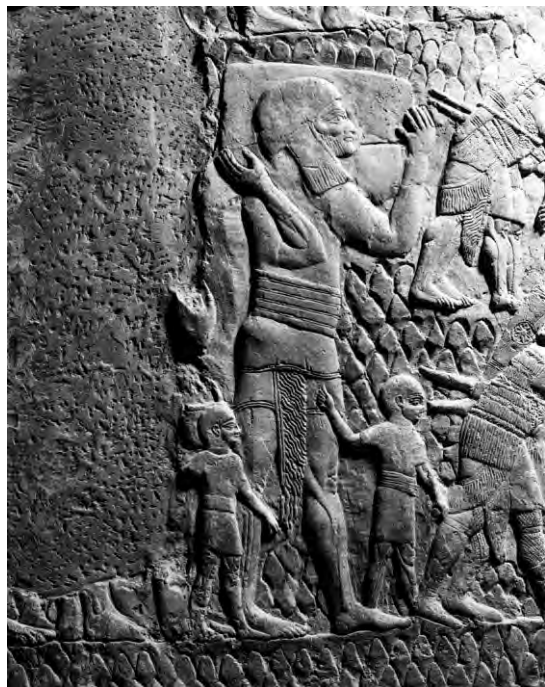Fig. 27. The Lachish reliefs: Judean family deported from the conquered city

Fig. 28. The Lachish reliefs: A man and his small children deported from the conquered city
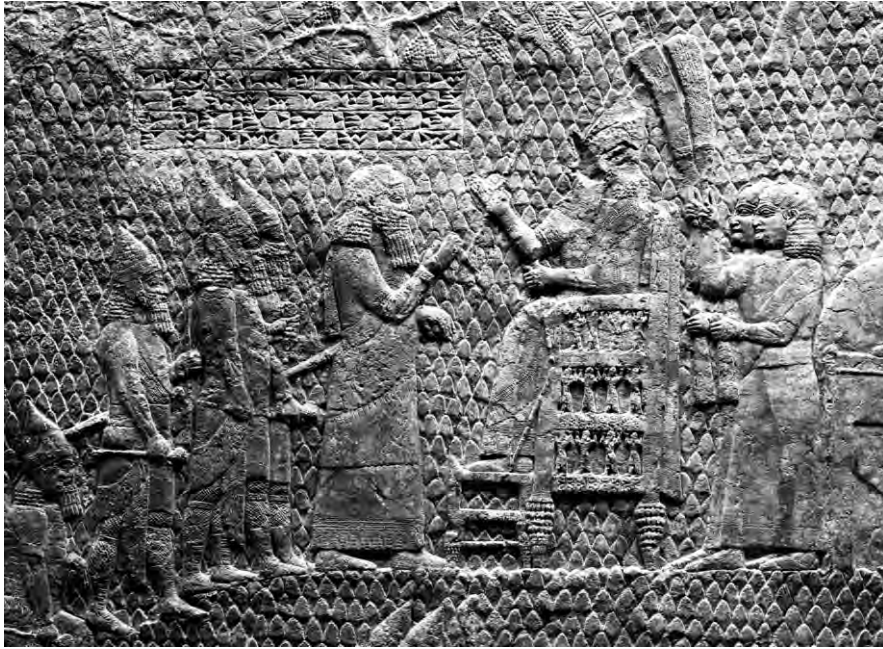
Fig. 29. The Lachish reliefs: Sennacherib sitting on his throne facing Lachish

Fig. 30. Reconstruction of Lachish as seen from the presumed vantage point where it was depicted in the relief, prepared by Gert le Grange
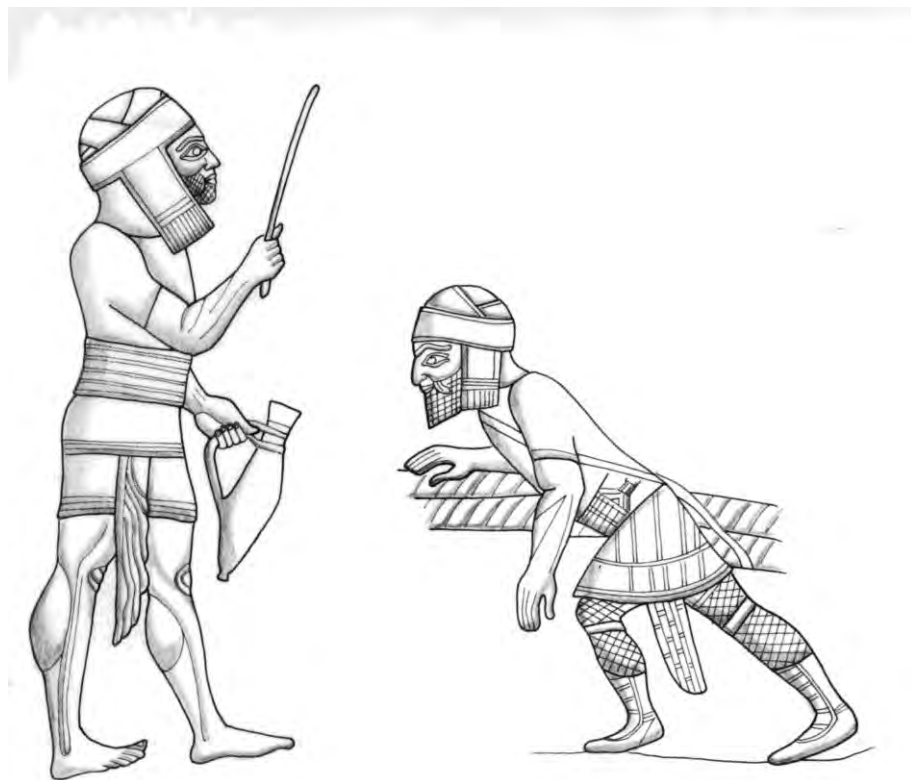
Fig. 31. Deportee from Lachish (left) and Judean captive working on construction of Sennacherib's palace (drawing: Judith Dekel)