

# THE SIEGE OF JERUSALEM: PART I: ASSYRIA THE WORLD POWER

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## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

During the ninth-seventh centuries BCE, Assyrian monarchs were intent on imposing their rule over territories to the west of Mesopotamia. In 722/721 BCE, Samaria, the Kingdom of Israel's capital, was conquered by Sargon II (or his predecessor, Shalmaneser V), who then deported its rebellious inhabitants to Assyria.<sup>1</sup> The Bible attributes this disaster to the Israelites' sinful practice of idolatry (II Kgs. 17:7-18, 18:12). Later campaigns were mounted by Sennacherib, Sargon's son and successor, who put down rebellions close to home (702 BCE in Babylonia) and a year later in "Syro-Palestine."

In the course of his reign (the actual date, between 717 and 704 BCE, is uncertain), Hezekiah, the God-fearing king of Judah, led an anti-Assyrian coalition and suspended his annual payment of tribute to Sennacherib. Anticipating an enemy invasion, he prepared troops and weapons of war, strengthened the fortifications of Jerusalem, and dug a tunnel diverting water from the Gihon spring to the Pool of Siloam within the city walls.<sup>2</sup> According to his Annals, Sennacherib captured 46 fortified cities from Tyre and Sidon in Phoenicia down to "innumerable small cities" (town and villages) in Judah.<sup>3</sup> When the Assyrians invaded his kingdom, Hezekiah sent an urgent letter from Jerusalem to Sennacherib in Lachish, a Judean city then under siege, apologizing for the non-payment of tribute and offering to compensate him in full. Not only was Hezekiah forced to hand over all the silver in the Temple and the royal treasury, he had to strip all the gold from the Temple's doors and doorposts as well (II Kgs. 18:14-16).

Even this immense tribute – 30 talents of gold and 300 talents of silver – did not appease Sennacherib, who besieged Jerusalem and dispatched three envoys to Hezekiah, urging him to surrender. Sennacherib boasted that he had taken 200,150 prisoners of war, together with livestock, precious stones, and other items.<sup>4</sup> The biblical account of Sennacherib's march through the kingdom of Judah indicates that Hezekiah and Jerusalem's inhabitants were

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eventually spared the fate of Samaria because of their faith in God and the vision of His prophet Isaiah.<sup>5</sup>

In a previous article,<sup>6</sup> I set out to identify the general commanding Jabin's Canaanite forces (as related in chapter 4 of Judges) and the probable location of his chariot army. This new essay, utilizing ancient and later (especially archaeological) sources, will endeavor to shed light on another enigmatic figure, the envoy of Sennacherib who made every effort to browbeat the inhabitants of Jerusalem into submission (II Kings 18-19; Isaiah 36-37). One of three high-ranking officers, this messenger bore the Assyrian title of Rabshakeh.



#### ASSYRIA'S HIGH OFFICIALS

There are two accounts of the Rabshakeh's appearance and taunting harangue before the Jerusalemites, of which the more detailed one begins as follows:

SARGON II (left) AND  
HIS TARTAN

*Now the king of Assyria sent the Tartan, the Rabsaris, and the Rabshakeh from Lachish with a large force to King Hezekiah in Jerusalem. They marched up to Jerusalem; and when they arrived, they took up a position near the conduit of the Upper Pool, by the road of the Fuller's Field. They summoned the king; and Eliakim son of Hilkiah, who was in charge of the palace, Shebna the scribe, and Joah son of Asaph the recorder went out to meet them.*

*The Rabshakeh said to them, 'You tell Hezekiah: Thus said the Great King, the King of Assyria: What makes you so confident? You must think that mere talk is counsel and valor for war! Look, on whom are you relying, that you have rebelled against me? You rely, of all things, on Egypt, that splintered reed of a staff, which enters and punctures the palm of anyone who leans on it! ...' (II Kgs. 18:17-21).*

Although verses 19-21 reappear almost verbatim in the Book of Isaiah (36:4-6), the historical introduction (II Kgs. 18:13-18) is abbreviated there, mentioning neither the Tartan nor the Rabsaris. Whereas two medieval Jew-

ish Bible commentators, Rashi and Kimḥi (Radak), maintain that there were two missions (the Rabshakeh alone came the first time, and the Tartan and the Rabsaris the second time) it is also possible that the Rabshakeh headed the delegation bearing Sennacherib's final message to Hezekiah (II Kgs. 19:9-13; Isaiah 37:9-13).<sup>7</sup>

The Hebrew Bible seemingly regards the titles of these Assyrian officials as proper names, omitting the *ha-* prefix used for the definite article.<sup>8</sup> It also lists them in their order of importance. Tartan (*tartān* or *turtānu* in Akkadian) was the title of the Assyrian commander in chief, one who ranked next to the king.<sup>9</sup> Apart from the Tartan who led the delegation to Hezekiah, a general bearing this title was sent by Sargon II in 711 BCE to conquer Ashdod (Isa. 20:1).<sup>10</sup> Rabsaris (*rab ša-rēši* in Akkadian), literally "chief of the head," was the title of another Assyrian dignitary. *Saris* can mean "eunuch" in Hebrew, but even if *Rav-Saris* once meant "chief eunuch," it must have lost that connotation because the Akkadian term signifies "a person close to the king" or "chief of the king's attendants."<sup>11</sup> Elsewhere in the Bible, Nebushazban, a *Rav-Saris*, was one of the Babylonian commanders who liberated the prophet Jeremiah from his imprisonment (Jer. 39:13-14); Ashpenaz, another *Rav-Saris*, trained young Jews of noble birth to serve in Nebuchadnezzar's court (Dan. 1:3 ff.).<sup>12</sup>

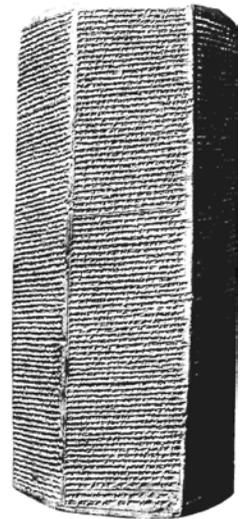
Rabshakeh, often hyphenated as Rab-shakeh (*rab-šāqē* or *rab-šaqû* in Akkadian), was the title of the third official listed in our narrative. It supposedly means "chief of the princes [or officers]", but in Middle Assyrian texts the *šaqē* ("butler") is referred to as a member of the palace's domestic staff. Originally, therefore, the *rab šaqē* was the king's "chief butler" and in time he became his "chief cupbearer" or vizier.<sup>13</sup> The title, "chief cupbearer," has a biblical equivalent in the *sar ha-mashkim* of Genesis 40:2, 9, 20-21 and 23. He is simply called *ha-mashkeh* ("cupbearer") in the same chapter (verses 1, 5), a term also designating Nehemiah, the Jewish courtier who served wine to the king of Persia (Neh. 1:11, 2:1). Though ranking only fourth in the Assyrian hierarchy, this particular Rabshakeh was evidently chosen to act as the king's spokesman – for reasons that will be explained in due course.

## THE ANNALS OF SENNACHERIB

Sennacherib obviously attached great importance to the defeat of Hezekiah and the obliteration of his Judean kingdom. This is evident from the extensive wall reliefs in his palace at Nineveh, depicting the siege and capture of Lachish,<sup>14</sup> and from the detailed account of Sennacherib's third campaign recorded in his Annals. Like other Akkadian documents, these Annals were inscribed with a stylus in cuneiform (wedge-shaped) characters on clay tablets or pottery, making them almost imperishable.<sup>15</sup> They have survived in three hexagonal prisms, made of red baked clay and measuring approximately 38 cm in height, which bear virtually identical inscriptions and were created during the reign of Sennacherib. The Taylor Prism, discovered in 1830 and purchased by the British Museum in 1855, is one of the earliest cuneiform artifacts, dating from 691 BCE.<sup>16</sup> A second version, the Oriental Institute Prism, was written in 689 BCE; purchased from a Baghdad antiques dealer in 1919, it is now housed in the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute.<sup>17</sup> The third example, known as the Jerusalem Prism (and also dating from 691 BCE), was acquired by the Israel Museum at a Sotheby's auction in 1970, but the text was only published 20 years later.<sup>18</sup>

When comparing the Annals of Sennacherib with the Bible's version of his campaign, I will quote from the relevant section of the Chicago (Oriental Institute) Prism.<sup>19</sup> This document's bombastic opening lines set the tone for what follows:

Sennacherib, the great king [Sin-ah-eri-ba Šarru rabú]/  
the mighty king, king of the universe, king of Assyria  
[Aššur]/ king of the four quarters [of the earth], the  
wise shepherd,/ favorite of the great gods, guardian of  
the right,/ lover of justice, who lends support,/ who  
comes to the aid of the needy, who turns [his thoughts]  
to pious deeds,/ perfect hero, mighty man,/ first among  
all princes,/ the powerful one who consumes/ the un-  
submissive, who strikes the wicked with the thunder-  
bolt;/ the god Assur, the great mountain, an unrivaled  
kingship/ has entrusted to me, and above all those/ who  
dwell in palaces, has made powerful my weapons . . .<sup>20</sup>



THE ORIENTAL  
INSTITUTE PRISM  
OF SENNACHERIB

Not content with defeating his enemies in battle, Sennacherib appropriated everything of value and executed all the captured warriors: "Not one escaped. Their corpses I hung on stakes [impaled] . . . I destroyed, I devastated, and I turned [their small towns] into ruins."<sup>21</sup> During his third campaign, "against the Hittite land" (Syria), Sennacherib defeated, despoiled, and dethroned one ruler after another. He also vanquished an Egyptian-Ethiopian army that came to assist the rebels and turned his armed might against the defiant kingdom of Judah:

As for Hezekiah the Jew [Ha-za-kí-a-ú Ia-ú-da-ai],/ 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 levelling with battering-rams/ and by bringing up siege-engines, by attacking and storming on foot,/ by mines, tunnels and breaches – I besieged and took [those cities]./ 200,150 people, great and small, male and female,/ horses, mules, asses, camels,/ cattle and sheep, without number, I brought away from them/ and counted as spoil. Himself [Hezekiah], like a caged bird,/ I shut up in Jerusalem [Ur-sa-li-im-mu] his royal city./ Earthworks I threw up against him/... The cities of his, which I had despoiled, I cut off from his land and/ to Mitinti, king of Ashdod,/ Padi, king of Ekron, and Silli-bêl,/ king of Gaza, I gave. And [thus] I diminished his land./ I added to the former tribute,/ and laid upon him the giving [up] of their land, [as well as] imposts – gifts for my majesty.<sup>22</sup>

This portion of the Assyrian record largely agrees with the biblical account (II Kgs. 18:13-16; Isa. 36:1) but is far more detailed. It also establishes the fact that a siege of Jerusalem took place and that Hezekiah was forced to pay an increased tribute to Sennacherib. However, in contrast to the Annals, the Bible makes no mention of the circumstances leading to the Assyrian campaign – notably the revolt of vassal states in the West and Hezekiah's bid for political independence.<sup>23</sup> The text of the Prism goes on to declare:

As for Hezekiah,/ the terrifying splendor of my majesty overcame him, and/ the Urbi [Arabs] and his mercenary troops which he had brought in to strengthen/ Jerusalem, his royal city,/ deserted him. In addition to the 30 talents of gold and/ 800 talents of silver, [there were] gems, antimony,/ jewels, large *sandu*-stones [carnelians], ivory[-inlaid] couch-

es,/ ivory[in-laid] house-chairs, elephant hides, elephant tusks,/ ebony, boxwood, and all kinds of valuable treasures,/ as well as his daughters, his harem, his male and female/ musicians, [which] he had brought after me/ to Nineveh, my royal city. To pay tribute/ and accept servitude, he dispatched his messengers.<sup>24</sup>

As stated earlier, the Bible does mention a tribute of gold and silver (II Kgs. 18:14), but the figure of 800 (instead of 300) talents of silver given here is either an exaggeration or a scribal error. The remaining items do not appear in biblical sources, and the seizure of Hezekiah's daughters and "harem" may be pure invention. Furthermore, while Sennacherib boasts that he has shut up Hezekiah in Jerusalem "like a caged bird", there is no reference in his Annals to dispatching envoys or to capturing and looting Hezekiah's "royal city" – a sure indication that the victory Sennacherib claimed was by no means decisive.<sup>25</sup>

#### ASSYRIAN TERROR TACTICS

While the Greeks, Babylonians, Persians, and Romans were also capable of great brutality, what particularly distinguished Assyrian kings and armies was their sheer ruthlessness. They combined terror propaganda with the wholesale extermination of rebel leaders and soldiers, also deporting conquered populations to serve as forced labor. In the ninth century BCE, the "calculated frightfulness" of Ashurnasirpal II was impressed on his vassals by the reliefs carved on the walls of his palace; and Shalmaneser III directed the "hammer blows" of his armies against his western neighbors – the Israelites, Arameans, Phoenicians, and others – who at one point fought the Assyrians to a draw at the battle of Karkara in 853 BCE.<sup>26</sup>

The rulers of many ancient civilizations were fond of enumerating the casualties they had inflicted on the enemy, along with the prisoners, booty, and cities they had taken. Sennacherib did likewise, but his treatment of the vanquished shows that Babylon's King Nebuchadnezzar (605-562 BCE) was, by comparison, almost benign. Not only did Sennacherib gleefully list the cities he had destroyed, devastated, burned down, and reduced to ashes,<sup>27</sup> he also delighted in recording the atrocities committed against prisoners of war:

The soldiers of/ Hirimme, wicked enemies, I cut down with the sword./ Not one escaped. Their corpses/ I hung on stakes [impaled],

surrounding the city [with them] . . . I approached Ekron and slew the governors and nobles/ who had sinned [rebelled], and/ hung their bodies on stakes around the city . . . Upon his [Merodach-Baladan's] ally, the king of Elam,/ I poured out [my] terror<sup>28</sup> . . . I cut their throats,/ cut off their precious lives as [one cuts] a string. Like the many waters of a storm, I made [the contents of] their gullets and entrails/ run down upon the wide earth. My prancing/ steeds, harnessed for me to ride, plunged/ into the streams of their blood as [into] a river. The wheels of my war chariot,/ which brings low the wicked and the evil,/ were bespattered with blood and filth. With the bodies of their warriors/ I filled the plain like grass . . . I cut off their hands.<sup>29</sup>

Sennacherib renamed one captured city for himself and brought deportees from other lands to settle there.<sup>30</sup> He also sought to magnify and immortalize his battlefield victories in characteristic fashion: "I had a stela made, and the might of my conquering hand . . . I had inscribed upon it."<sup>31</sup> Little wonder that the Judeans and other peoples regarded the Assyrian armies with horror and prayed for Nineveh's overthrow.<sup>32</sup>

Among the Assyrians, warfare was considered a religious duty. "At his coronation the king swore to extend the land of the national god Ashur, who demanded stability and order. So the imagery of battles and sieges that line the palace walls should be understood not only as statements of power but as statements of a religious responsibility which was achieved with divine support."<sup>33</sup> This imagery was meant to "present a believable and realistic view of their world . . . in contrast to the art of Classical Greece, which masked conflict by setting it in a mythological time and place."<sup>34</sup> By 700 BCE, the Assyrians "had created an empire stretching from the borders of Egypt to the Persian Gulf. Their world view had expanded with their territories and the imagery in the royal palaces was adapted accordingly. Earlier symbolic images of conquest and triumph were replaced by representations of the defeat of actual enemy tribes, cities and individuals . . . In addition, the reliefs powerfully express the ease with which the Assyrian king is able to traverse difficult terrain and obstacles like rivers, and to punish and humiliate rebel kings who had opposed the divine order of the world, by effortlessly conquering their heavily fortified cities, such as Lachish in Judah."<sup>35</sup>

The Assyrians fully understood the importance of terrorizing their enemies. "To conserve manpower, they preferred to accept the surrender of their opponents or else destroy their ability to resist." This could be achieved by parading an irresistible military machine; by threatening restless subjects with mass deportation; and, where necessary, by removing one rebellious population and settling it among another.<sup>36</sup> Even with all the heavily armed troops and formidable equipment at his disposal, Sennacherib would refrain from conducting a long and costly siege if an enemy fortress was prepared to submit. He invariably attained that objective through the use of bloodcurdling threats and psychological warfare.<sup>37</sup> My follow-up article in the next issue of the *JBQ* will show how these tactics were adopted before the walls of Jerusalem.

#### NOTES

1. Whether it was Shalmaneser or Sargon who conquered Samaria is still a matter of dispute. For one argument in favor of Shalmaneser, see T. C. Mitchell, *The Bible in the British Museum: Interpreting the Evidence* (London: The British Museum Press, 2004; hereafter Mitchell) p. 60. However, most scholars believe that although Shalmaneser besieged Samaria for three years, Sargon was "the king of Assyria" who finally captured the city and deported its inhabitants to distant parts of the Assyrian empire (II Kgs. 17:4-6, 18:9-11). Sargon, who reigned from 722 until 705 BCE, is mentioned only once in the Bible (Isa. 20:1) and his very existence was often denied until 1842-44, when Paul-Émile Botta, a French archaeologist, unearthed both the new capital, Dûr-Sharrûkin ("Sargon's Fortress"), and the magnificent palace that he built at Khorsabad in northern Iraq. Various artifacts discovered there, bearing his name, are housed in the British Museum and other collections. The most important find was a clay prism inscribed with the Annals of Sargon (now in the Louvre) which records his triumphant boast, "I besieged and captured Samaria, and carried off 27,290 of its inhabitants," thus validating the biblical account in II Kings.
2. II Kings 20:20, Isaiah 22:9-11 and II Chronicles 32:2-8, 30; *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1972; hereafter *EJ*) 8:452. See also Chaim Herzog and Mordechai Gichon, *Battles of the Bible* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1978) pp. 351-2; Dan Bahat, *The Illustrated Atlas of Jerusalem*, trans. Shlomo Ketko (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990) pp. 25-28, 30-31, 49, 67.
3. On the Annals of Sennacherib and parallel records in the Bible, see below.
4. *EJ* 14:1161-2; Mitchell, p. 66.
5. II Kings 19:15ff., Isaiah 37:15ff. See Haim Gevaryahu, "Isaiah and Hezekiah: Prophet and King," *Dor le Dor*, 16:2 (Winter 1987-8) pp. 78-85; *II Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* by Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, in *The Anchor Bible*, vol. 11 (Garden City, NY: 1988) pp. 215-263. For an imaginative reconstruction of these events, see H.

W. F. Saggs, "The March of Empires," in *Everyday Life in Bible Times* (Washington, DC: National Geographic Society, 1976) pp. 256-261.

6. "Sisera and Harosheth-Goim," *Jewish Bible Quarterly*, 41:2 (April-June 2013) pp. 95-103.

7. Another version of these events, in II Chronicles 9-19, refers only to the Assyrian king's "servants" (*avadim*), not mentioning their titles.

8. The Hebrew text thus reads *et-Tartan* instead of *et-ha-Tartan* and *ve-et-Rav-Shakeh* instead of *ve-et-ha-Rav-shakeh*. This omission of the definite article was adopted by English Bible translations, including the Jewish Publication Society of America's version of *The Holy Scriptures* (1917). However, the new JPS translation (1985) has restored the definite article in its English text.

9. The image of one Tartan survives in a relief from the palace of Sargon II at Khorsabad (now in the British Museum). It shows the Tartan standing face to face with Sargon as he reports on the latest campaign.

10. *EJ* 15:827; Mitchell, pp. 60, 66, 76-77; *Da'at Mikra: Melakhim Bet* (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1989) p. 717.

11. It will be recalled that Potiphar, "a courtier of Pharaoh" (*seris Par'oh*), was his chief steward (Gen. 37:36, 39:1). See *Soncino Books of the Bible: Kings: Hebrew text and English translation, with an introduction and commentary* by Dr. I. W. Slotki (London: Soncino Press, 1950) p. 274.

12. *EJ* 13:1481; Mitchell, pp. 66, 77; *Da'at Mikra*, loc. cit. For a scholarly account of these designations, see Hayim Tadmor, "Rab-saris and Rab-shakeh in 2 Kings 18," in Carol L. Meyers and M. O'Connor, eds., *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, for the American School of Oriental Research, 1983) pp. 279-282.

13. *EJ* 13:1482; Mitchell, pp. 66, 76-77; Slotki, *Kings*, loc. cit.; Walter G. Clippinger, *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Rabshakeh"; Tadmor, op. cit., pp. 279-281. In Hebrew, see also the *Entziklopediyah Mikra'it*, vol. 7 (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1976) cols 323-4; and *Da'at Mikra*, loc. cit.

14. These reliefs, measuring nearly 70 feet in length, can now be viewed in the Ancient Near East Department of the British Museum in London. For two examples, see *EJ* 3:319 and 5:213-4. The entire series, which lined the walls of Room 26 in the palace, is depicted in Mitchell, document 31, pp. 67-71. Archaeological excavations at the site of Lachish have confirmed many of the details: see William Dever, *What Did the Bible Writers Know and When Did They Know It?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001) pp. 168-9.

15. *EJ* 14:1151.

16. Mitchell, document 30, p. 66.

17. See below.

18. *EJ* 14:1162; this prism is damaged and the illustration in *EJ* 12:573 is mistakenly credited to the Baghdad Museum. See P. Ling-Israel, "The Sennacherib Prism in the Israel Museum – Jerusalem," in J. Klein and A. Skaist, eds., *Bar-Ilan: Studies in Assyriology Dedicated to Pinhas Artzi* (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1990) pp. 213-247. Oddly enough, while Mitchell (p. 66) refers to the "Chicago" (Oriental Institute) Prism, he does not mention the Jerusalem Prism, details of which had been published years before the many revised editions of his book.

19. Daniel David Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1924). A transliteration of the Akkadian text and Luckenbill's English translation of the

same are printed in parallel columns on pages 23-47. The editor's three introductory chapters (pages 1-22) contain important background information.

20. *The Annals of Sennacherib*, col. 1, lines 1-12 (p. 23).

21. *Ibid.*, col. 1, lines 59-60, 78 (pp. 26-27). On the Assyrian terror tactics, see below.

22. *Ibid.*, col. 3, lines 18-36 (pp. 32-33).

23. *Ibid.*, col. 2, line 37- col. 3, line 11 (pp. 29-32). See *EJ* 8:452-3, 16:1509-10; and *Truth Magazine*, 45:1 (January 4, 2001), for a Christian view. There is, nevertheless, a reference in the Bible to Hezekiah's ties with the Babylonian king, Merodach-Baladan, for which Isaiah the prophet rebuked him (II Kgs. 20:12-18; Isa. 39). In chapter 2 of his book ("The Reign of Sennacherib", p. 12), Luckenbill observes that the *Annals* nowhere mention the capture of Jerusalem and, in a footnote, he declares that the biblical narrative (II Kgs. 18:13 ff.; Isa. 36:1 ff.) "sounds almost as if an Assyrian scribe had written it."

24. *Ibid.*, col. 3, lines 37-49 (pp. 33-34).

25. *Ibid.*, p. 11 (Luckenbill's conclusion). See also below and *EJ* 9:1383, 14:1162, 16:1510.

26. See Patricia Berlyn, "A Lost Battle of King Ahab Rediscovered," *Jewish Bible Quarterly*, 41:1 (January-March 2013) pp 3-13.

27. *The Annals of Sennacherib*, col. 1, line 78; col. 2, lines 18-19; col. 3, lines 69-70; col. 4, lines 12, 31, 44-46, 78-79, etc.

28. *Ibid.*, col. 1, lines 57-60; col. 3, lines 8-10, 70-71.

29. *Ibid.*, col. 6, lines 1-12. Some of the gruesome mutilations described in lines 10-12 have been omitted. In their palace reliefs, Assyrian kings had themselves portrayed as bloodthirsty, merciless conquerors to demonstrate the consequences of rebelling against these all-powerful rulers and their empire. Ashurnasirpal II indicated the various ways he dealt with rebels - by impaling, beheading, blinding, castrating, flaying or burning them alive. His example was followed by Tiglath-pileser III and by Sennacherib, whose Lachish reliefs bear witness to the flaying and impaling of chosen victims (see note 14 above). Assyrian sculptors evidently reveled in depicting even the most grisly details.

30. *Ibid.*, col. 2, lines 27-31.

31. *Ibid.*, col. 2, lines 7-9. After the building of his new palace in Nineveh was complete, Sennacherib had the following text recorded at the end of his *Annals* (col. 6, lines 72-83): "A stela/ with my name inscribed on it I set up there. In the days to come... when that palace shall become old and ruined,/ may some future prince restore its ruins, look upon/ the stela with my name inscribed on it, anoint it with oil,/ pour a libation upon it, and return it to its place. Then Assur and Ishtar/ will hear his prayers. He who destroys my inscription and my name/ - may Assur, the great lord, the father of the gods,/ treat him as an enemy,/ take his scepter and throne away from him, and overthrow his rule."

32. Echoes of this abhorrence may be heard in Jonah 1:2, Zephaniah 2:13-15 and the Book of Nahum.

33. Quoted from *A History of the World: Lachish Reliefs* by Paul Collins, a British Museum curator: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/ahistoryoftheworld/objects/81> (2010).

34. *Ibid.*

35. *Ibid.* Apart from the scribes who kept a record of each Assyrian campaign, artists may have sketched the details which, later on, were used by sculptors for their palace reliefs.

36. Deportation was no idle threat but a real possibility. The Assyrians began this process in the ninth century BCE, always resettling deportees outside the Assyrian homeland, to prevent unruly elements from undermining their powerbase. Tiglath-pileser III is reckoned to have deported 95,000 people from Iran and Syria (744-742 BCE); Sargon II deported over 27,000 Israelites from Samaria (721) and expelled 108,000 people from the Babylonian region (707); while Sennacherib deported a further 208,000 from Babylon in 703 BCE.

37. Yigael Yadin, *The Art of Warfare in Biblical Lands in the Light of Archaeological Discovery* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1963) p. 319.