

SENNACHERIB

Upon acceding to the throne of Assyria following the death of Sargon II in battle, Sennacherib (705–681 BCE) faced two major insurrections: in the West, a coalition of a number of Phoenician and Syrian kingdoms led by King Hezekiah of Judah, and in the South, the combined forces of the Chaldeans and Elamites under the leadership of Merodach-baladan. A single campaign to the West in 701 BCE ended in a decisive victory by the Assyrian army. But this success was not matched on the Babylonian front where war continued on and off from 703 until 689 BCE. In that year, Sennacherib pressed on to victory against Babylon, which was followed by the wanton destruction of the city. In 681, Sennacherib was murdered by his son, Arda-Mullissu, who had been passed over by his father who chose Esarhaddon as his successor (cf. 2 Kgs 19:37; Babylonian Chronicle no. 1 [Text no. 41, lines 34–35]).

No. 28—SENNACHERIB'S CAMPAIGN TO JUDAH

The events of the year 701 BCE are among the most discussed in biblical research. Since the discovery of Sennacherib's inscriptions at the beginning of Assyriological research in the mid-19th century, countless reconstructions of the Assyrian campaign to Judah have been proffered, without any scholarly agreement having been reached, except perhaps in the most general terms. One suspects that it is the uncommon multiplicity of written sources referring to the events that gives rise to so many differing reconstructions. These sources include: the narratives in 2 Kgs 18–19; Isa 36–37; 2 Chr 32, as well as various prophecies of Isaiah; the Assyrian annal report; a wall relief from the palace of Sennacherib depicting the investiture and surrender of the Judean town of Lachish.

The Assyrian document presented here, known as the Rassam Cylinder, is the earliest source; its colophon reads: "Month of Iyyar, (eponymate of)



Fig. 13. *Prism of Sennacherib* (Israel Museum).

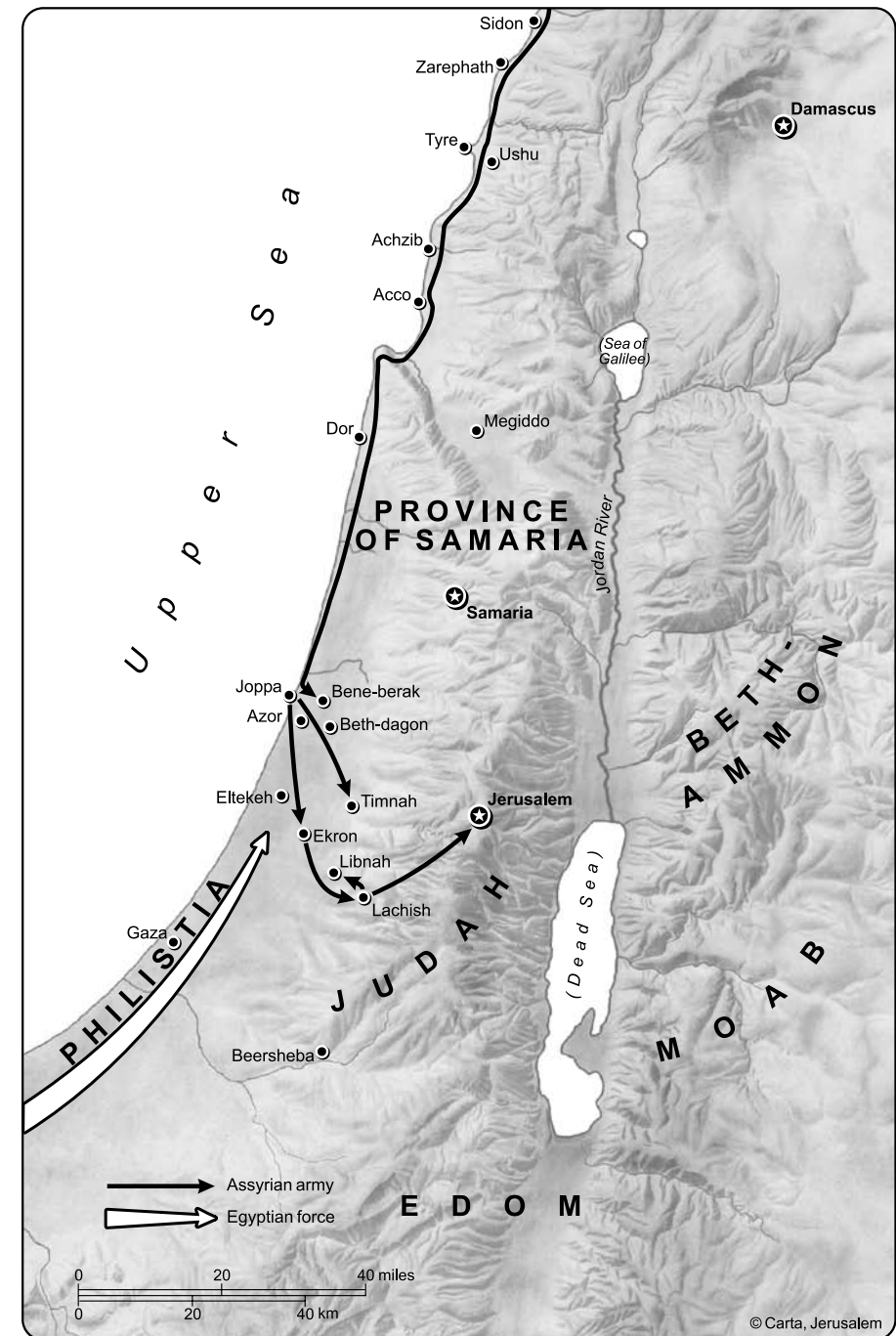
Mitunu, governor of Isana," i.e., spring 700 BCE. This date, when compared with those of earlier prisms that report just two campaigns, helps establish the date of the "third campaign," the campaign to Judah, to 701 BCE.

From the Assyrian point of view, the military operations in Judah were undertaken to quell the revolt of vassal states in the West that had broken out upon the death of Sargon II four years earlier. The literary nature of narrative, in which events are arranged topically rather than chronologically, i.e., they are grouped under the rubrics of "the submissive" or "the defeated," does not permit reconstructing the itinerary of the campaign. It should also be kept in mind that this report is a part of the royal annals, which sought to magnify and memorialize the achievements of Sennacherib on the battlefield and in civil affairs. Thus, setbacks, if such there were, inevitably appear as Assyrian advances; see in detail Tadmor 1986; also Laato 1995.

The biblical account, on the other hand, is more complex than the Assyrian one; it is composed of multiple sources that have been juxtaposed in the present text, causing much tension between them. In the Book of Kings, three distinct units of different genres and different ages are identifiable: 2 Kgs 18:13–16, a chronicle-like report; 2 Kgs 18:17–19:37, two intertwined prophetic accounts.

The greatest point of discrepancy—indeed the bone of contention of most studies—lies in the contradictory endings to the campaign reported by each of the contending sides. The biblical account tells of the miraculous defeat of the Assyrian army (2 Kgs 19:35), while the Assyrian annals portray Sennacherib as having roundly defeated Hezekiah, who submitted to his overlord and sent a substantial tribute payment to Nineveh at the conclusion of the campaign. For the present, let it suffice to reiterate that there is no record of Sennacherib having undertaken a second western campaign during his reign, and considering the development of events in the West during the first quarter of the 7th century, all the events described in our sources refer to a single campaign in 701 BCE; see Cogan 2001. For thorough critical discussions of the events of year 701, see the studies of Gonçalves 1986 and Gallagher 1999.

32–35 In my third campaign, I marched to Ḫatti. The awesome splendor of my lordship overwhelmed Luli, king of Sidon, and he fled overseas far-off. The terrifying nature of the weapon of (the god) Ashur my lord overwhelmed his strong cities, Greater Sidon, Little Sidon, Bit-zitti, Šariptu, Maḫaliba, Ushu, Achzib, Acco, walled cities (provided) with food and water for his garrisons,



SENNACHERIB'S CAMPAIGN TO THE WEST, 701 BCE