

## SENNACHERIB'S THIRD CAMPAIGN AND HEZEKIAH: A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS\*

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This paper examines the Assyrian records of Sennacherib's third campaign from a literary perspective by investigating the structure of the text, the means of participant reference, and terms and expressions with ideological connotations. It focuses especially on the representation of the Assyrian king and other participants for or against his rule, elucidating how the author portrays the participants through the use of literary structure as well as particular forms, terms or expressions. It also shows how the author makes use of these devices to paint the Judean king Hezekiah as an arch-enemy and the target of the third campaign.

*Key words:* Sennacherib, Hezekiah, Assyria, Judah, enemy, discourse analysis.

### **I. Introduction: The Records of Sennacherib's Third Campaign**

The part of Sennacherib's annals that describes his third campaign has extensively been studied since its excavation and publication in the 19th century (Grabbe 2003, pp. 20–35). The conquest of Lachish and subsequent deportation in this campaign are vividly portrayed in reliefs decorating a room in the royal palace that the king constructed in Nineveh (Barnett–Bleibtreu–Turner 1998, pp. 101–105; Ussishkin 1982, pp. 59–126; 2014, pp. 85–89). The reliefs are corroborated by the archaeological evidence excavated at Tel Lachish (Tell ed-Duweir) (Ussishkin 1982, pp. 19–58; 2014, pp. 76–85). The Assyrian records of the campaign have been of special interest to Hebraists as well as Assyriologists, because parallel accounts appear in the Hebrew Bible (2 Kgs 18:13–19:37; Isa 36–37; 2 Chr 32:1–22). The Akkadian and Hebrew

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accounts, however, do not agree on what took place during the campaign. Therefore, most attention has been given to historical aspects of the annals.

Though Assyrian royal inscriptions in general cannot be considered literature in the narrower sense of the term,<sup>1</sup> close literary and linguistic investigations reveal how their authors selected particular forms to communicate their message with specific objectives in mind. The main purpose of this paper is to better understand the mind of the scribe or the king himself by examining some of these forms. With this purpose in mind, it will examine the structure of the text, look into the grammatical and lexical means employed to refer to the participants in the narrative, and focus on the terms and expressions that describe the behaviour of the enemies.

## II. Structure and Content of the Text

Our main corpus is the Rassam Cylinder dated 700 BCE, the earliest known account of Sennacherib's third campaign. It contains the records of his first three campaigns in 94 lines, of which the third campaign occupies 29 lines (4.32–60), and one-line colophon.<sup>2</sup> When dealing with Sennacherib's other campaigns, we resort to a later version that includes the accounts of all his eight campaigns, i.e., the Chicago/Taylor Prism, dated 691/689 BCE.<sup>3</sup> The account of the third campaign in the Rassam Cylinder can be divided into paragraphs in accordance with the identity of the kings/peoples that Sennacherib had to face during his expedition.

- A. Foreword (4.32a)
- B. Lulî (4.32b–35)
- C. Kings of Amurru (4.36–38)
- D. Šidqâ (4.39–41)
- E. Ekronites (4.42–48)
- F. Hezekiah (4.49–58)
- Fa. Capture of the forty-six cities (4.49–54)
- Fb. Confinement and tributes (4.55–58)
- G. Conclusion: Disposition of the prisoners and booty (4.59–60)

Beginning with the general introductory remark that sets the target of the campaign as “the land of Ḫatti” (Paragraph A), the text describes Sennacherib's confrontation with Lulî king of Sidon, his flight, the capture of his cities, and the installation of his replacement on the throne (Paragraph B). Then follows a list of the kings along

<sup>1</sup> Grayson (1981, p. 47) asserts that the Assyrian royal inscriptions cannot be classified as history or literature.

<sup>2</sup> In the following discussion, unless otherwise noted, the numerals in reference to Sennacherib's records represent the text (in Arabic), column (where applicable, in Roman) and line (in Arabic) numbers given in *The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period 3* (= RINAP 3/1, 3/2) (Grayson–Novotny 2012/2014).

<sup>3</sup> The records of this campaign in the Rassam Cylinder and the Chicago/Taylor Prism are virtually the same except for the booty list where some of the items in the former (4.56–57) are abbreviated as “every kind of valuable treasure” in the latter (22.iii.45), and the statement about the disposition of the booty, which is missing in the latter.

the Mediterranean coast as well as those in Transjordan who have submitted and paid tribute to Sennacherib (Paragraph C). The next paragraph (Paragraph D) is again concerned with a recalcitrant enemy: Šidqâ king of the Philistine city-state Ashkelon. The Assyrian king deports him along with his household to Assyria, inaugurates the pro-Assyrian son of a former king on the throne, and conquers Šidqâ's cities.

The episode in Ashkelon is followed by a more complex narrative (Paragraph E). In this paragraph, the episodes in Ekron, another Philistine city-state, encompass an account of the conflict between Assyrians and Egyptian–Ethiopian coalition forces in the neighbourhood of Eltekeh. After the successful warfare, Sennacherib marches toward Ekron and punishes anti-Assyrian residents, releasing the rest of the population. He also brings Padî king of Ekron out of Jerusalem, whom his anti-Assyrian subjects have turned over to Hezekiah king of Judah.

Interestingly, the reinstatement of Padî is mentioned before the account of the events in Jerusalem in the next paragraph. If the arrangement of the text is strictly chronological, we might have to posit a rescue mission in Jerusalem or Hezekiah's obedience to Sennacherib's demand to release Padî before their encounter in Jerusalem. Both reconstructions are without textual support, and thus highly unlikely. The reinstatement of Padî probably happened after Hezekiah surrendered to Sennacherib. Here the writer follows the "associative" or "thematic" arrangement at the expense of the chronological (Levine 1981, p. 63; Gallagher 1999, p. 123).<sup>4</sup>

At this point, the reader may wonder about the fate of Hezekiah, who would eventually have to let the Ekronite king free. The question is covered in the last paragraph (Paragraph F), which we split into two subparagraphs. The first (Fa) mentions capturing Hezekiah's cities, deporting a large population, taking spoils, setting up a blockade on Jerusalem, and allotting his territory to the three kings of the neighbouring Philistine city-states. Noticeably, Padî is mentioned as one of these kings. Since Padî must have been confined in Jerusalem, he was not in a position to receive Sennacherib's generous gift at that time. Here again, the arrangement of events are based on themes rather than chronology. The next subparagraph (Fb) is almost entirely devoted to a list of gifts Hezekiah has sent to Sennacherib. In (G), the third-campaign account concludes with a statement that he used the booty from the campaign to organise a military contingent and distributed the rest among the people.

Except for the list of kings of Amurru who paid tribute (C), all main paragraphs begin with the terms identifying an enemy: Lulî (B), Šidqâ (D), the officials, nobles, and people of Ekron (E), and Hezekiah (Fa, Fb). Near the end of each of these paragraphs, including C, a form of tribute is imposed upon the vassals: "tribute (and) payment" (B, 4.35), "extensive gifts, ... as their substantial audience gift" (C, 4.38), "the payment of tribute (and) gift" (D, 4.40), "payment" (E, 4.48), "the payment (of) gifts" (Fa, 4.54), and "payment" (Fb, 4.58).

While Sennacherib depicts himself as victorious throughout the text, the reactions of the other kings and their treatment are portrayed in various ways. Lulî flees

<sup>4</sup> According to Cogan (2008, p. 119), mention of Padî's reinstatement at this point is "an example of closing the narrative circle, which is often out of chronological sequence".

before the Assyrian army (B), the kings of Amurru pay tributes without any military encounter (C), Šidqâ is deported (D), Pađî is restored to his own throne (E), and Hezekiah pays tribute after being locked up in Jerusalem (F). B, D, and F are involved with rebellious kings, while C and E deal with submissive or pro-Assyrian ones. The alternating occurrences of enemy and friendly kings reflect the narrator's intentional literary arrangement of the text.

The author does not assign equal space to each episode. The episodes about the last two kings occupy the majority of the text: paragraphs E (7 lines) and F (10 lines) comprise nearly two thirds of the 27-line main paragraphs (B–F). Organisation of each paragraph is not monotonous either. For example, in paragraphs B, D, and F, we find difference in the order of their shared components: the main city, dependent cities, and imposition of tribute.

B: main city – dependent cities – tribute

D: main city – tribute – dependent cities

F: dependent cities – main city – tribute

Though the author of our text was bound by literary conventions of the genre of royal annals, he knew how to handle the information on hand artistically.

### III. Means of Participant Reference: The King and His Enemies

Entities in a discourse can be referred to in various ways according to the attitude or judgement of the speaker or writer.<sup>5</sup>

Sennacherib's name is never mentioned explicitly in the text since he identifies himself with the writer. In the larger context of the Rassam Cylinder, it occurs only once at the very beginning (4.1). Here, his personal name is followed by honorific epithets, which occupy the first three lines.<sup>6</sup> After the lengthy introduction, the king speaks in first person, and as the speaker he is continuously referred to by first-person verbal agreement and pronominal forms.<sup>7</sup>

In the third-campaign text, he is referred to as a pronominal suffix attached to a noun, e.g., “my overlordship (*be-lu-ti-ia*)” (6×), “my feet (*še-pu-u-a/GİR.II-ia*)” (3×), “my campaign (*ger-ri-ia*)” (2×), “my lord (*EN-ia*)” (2×), and “my yoke (*ni-ri-ia/ab-šá-a-ni*)” (2×). Most of these expressions demonstrate his military power that enables him to drive out or defeat the enemies. They also contribute to the creation of cohesion in the text through a chain of reference to the speaker (Halliday–Matthiessen 2004, pp. 534–535).

<sup>5</sup> Brown–Yule (1983, p. 205) defines the term “reference” as the “function whereby speakers (writers) indicate, via the use of a linguistic expression, the entities they are talking (writing) about”.

<sup>6</sup> The same is true in his last known campaign records: his name occurs only once at the beginning of the longer text of the Chicago/Taylor Prism (22.i.1).

<sup>7</sup> The Assyrian annals are “primarily in first person” though there are cases of alternation between first and third person, which can be explained as “scribal carelessness” (Grayson 1981, pp. 37, 42).

However, Sennacherib is never referred to as a pronominal suffix attached to verbal forms. This indicates the Assyrian king's desire to portray himself as an active initiator and not to allow himself to become an object to be acted upon. Outside of the third-campaign text in the Rassam Cylinder, two cases are attested in which the first-person pronominal suffix serves as the object of a verb: "the god Aššur, the great mountain, granted to me unrivalled sovereignty (<sup>d</sup>*aš-šur KUR-ú GAL-ú LUGAL-ut la šá-na-an ú-šat-li-ma-an-ni-ma*)" (4.4) and "the god Aššur, my lord, encouraged me (<sup>d</sup>*aš-šur be-lí ú-tak-kil-an-ni-ma*)" (4.18). These cases, however, do not invalidate the point made just above, for it is the supreme god of Assyria that is the agent of the action described by the verbs "grant" and "encourage".<sup>8</sup>

In the third-campaign text, Sennacherib's only lord is the god Aššur, who appears twice as "Aššur my lord".<sup>9</sup> In one case, Sennacherib boasts that "the awesome terror of the weapon of the god Aššur, my lord, overwhelmed" the Phoenician cities, causing them to bow down in submission at his feet (4.34). In the other, the king defeats the Egyptian–Ethiopian coalition "with the support of (the God) Aššur, my lord" (4.44).

Interestingly, in 4.34 the verb is in the third-person masculine plural (*išhupūšu-nūti*) instead of the common singular form (*\*išhupšunūti*) that agrees with the subject in the singular, "the awesome terror (*ra-šub-bat*)".<sup>10</sup> As Borger (2006 [1963], Vol. 1, p. 135) suggests, it seems that the writer in his mind supplied the plural form "fear (*puḫī*)" of 4.32 before "the awesome terror (*ra-šub-bat*)" of 4.34.<sup>11</sup> The author thus identifies "fear of my lordly brilliance" (4.32) with "the awesome terror of the weapon of the god Aššur, my lord" (4.34).<sup>12</sup> By paralleling these two phrases, Sennacherib identifies his own power with that of Aššur.

As for his archenemies, Lulī is introduced as "Lulī, the king of the city Sidon" (4.32), while Šidqā is presented as "Šidqā, the king of the city Ashkelon who had not bowed down to my yoke" (4.39). Interestingly, Hezekiah is referred to as "Hezekiah of the land Judah" (4.49) at the beginning of subparagraph Fa without the title "king". His name has already been mentioned earlier in E (4.42) in relation to the fate of Pađī, king of Ekron, who had been betrayed and given to Hezekiah by the anti-Assyrian

<sup>8</sup> This reminds us of Longacre's (2003, p. 154) claim, made through the examination of the Joseph story in the Hebrew Bible, that "when the narrator wants to represent someone in a position where he is dominated by somebody else, verb object suffixes are used".

<sup>9</sup> However, in the larger context of the Rassam Cylinder, Sennacherib also mentions "the gods of Assyria, my lords" in the record of his first campaign (4.17).

<sup>10</sup> The word might be interpreted as the plural *rašubbāt*, instead of the singular *rašubbat*. In this case, however, the expected feminine plural verb form would be *išhupāšunūti*.

<sup>11</sup> Grayson (1981, p. 46) takes the frequent incongruence in gender and number as mistakes. However, we had better seek probable causes before calling these cases as such.

<sup>12</sup> Smith Bulls 2 and 3 note that after taking refuge in Cyprus Lulī vanished "before the awesome terror of the weapon of the god Aššur, my lord" (44.19), not by "fear of my lordly brilliance" as in 4.32. This interchangeability also supports the identification of the king's power with his god's (Mayer 2003, p. 194).

Echronites. There also, he is referred to as “Hezekiah of the land Judah”. It is noteworthy that both references lack the expected title “king”.<sup>13</sup>

Notably, the title is also missing for the kings listed in C who paid tribute to Sennacherib after the incident in Phoenicia. Though they are clearly heads of state, their names are not adorned with any title. Instead, the author refers to them simply as “Minuḥimmu of the city Samsimuruna, Tu-Ba’lu of the city Sidon, etc.” (4.36–37). However, at the end of this list, the phrase “all of the kings of the land Amurru (LUGAL.MEŠ-*ni* KUR MAR.TU.KI *ka-li-šú-nu*)” (4.38) reinstates their royal status. Thus the lack of the title can better be explained as omissions to avoid repetitions in a list (Kim 2008, p. 486). However, this is not the case with Hezekiah.

Hezekiah’s name last appears at the beginning of Fb (4.55). In this instance, even the attributive “of the land Judah” is missing. The name “Hezekiah” opens a new paragraph just as in its occurrence at the beginning of Fa. While in Fa *ša* introduces Hezekiah as a new topic (4.49),<sup>14</sup> in Fb an independent pronoun *šū* that immediately precedes “Hezekiah” reactivates the topic introduced earlier. In a sense, “Hezekiah” constitutes a central discourse topic in our text that centres on the enemies of Sennacherib.<sup>15</sup> The absence of the title in reference to Hezekiah can be taken as a stylistic device to conceal military setback (Laato 1995, pp. 219–220). Notably, only Hezekiah appears three times by name in the text, two of which introduce the last two subparagraphs (Fa, Fb). In addition, the last word of the main paragraphs (B–F) is “a mounted messenger of his (*rak-bu-šū*)” (4.58), which ends with the third-person suffix (*-šū*) referring to Hezekiah. The latter suffix corresponds to the independent pronoun *šū* at the beginning of the subparagraph Fb (4.55). In sum, Hezekiah along with his country Judah is the primary focus of the text.

#### IV. Description of Enemies: Focus on Hezekiah

The Assyrian royal inscriptions are full of expressions with ideological connotations. According to Van Seters (1995, Vol. 4, p. 2434), the ideology of royal scribes can be seen “through the rather verbose recitation of the honorific epithets ascribed to the king and of his special relationship to the deity”. As a consequence, the inscriptions portray the king’s enemy as a powerless and helpless mortal in front of the mighty god Aššur and his earthly representative, the Assyrian king (Grayson 1981, pp. 44–45). In the third-campaign text, enemies flee “afar into the midst of the sea” as in the case

<sup>13</sup> Laato (1995, p. 220) asserts that “Sennacherib uses pejorative adjectives and attributes to describe Hezekiah”. Oded (1998, p. 423) refutes Laato’s argument pointing out that the adjective “Jew” in Laato’s translation is post-exilic. But the fact remains that Sennacherib deliberately omitted the title “king” when mentioning Hezekiah in this text. The expression “Hezekiah, its king” is found in Sennacherib’s other inscriptions (34.15; 42.11; 44.21).

<sup>14</sup> The Chicago/Taylor Prism replaces *ša* with *u* (22.iii.18). As is often the case in Neo-Assyrian, here *u* “marks the boundary of two entirely unconnected sentences, the latter of which is beginning a new thought” (Hämeen-Anttila 2000, p. 123).

<sup>15</sup> Regarding the notion of discourse topic, see Dik (1997, 1:314), Brown–Yule (1983, pp. 71–73).

of Lulî (4.32),<sup>16</sup> or submit and pay a tribute to the Assyrian monarch as in the case of “all of the kings of the land Amurru” (4.38). The descriptions of flight or submission of the enemies are so schematised as to be taken as idealised, or even mythologised forms of behaviour.<sup>17</sup>

Of the three archenemies, Lulî flees and in his place a certain Tu-Ba’lu is appointed as king of Sidon, whereas Šidqâ is deported and his position filled by Šarrulū-dâri. However, Hezekiah keeps his royal status as well as his capital city, though he is never called “king”. Even after losing his fortified cities, citizens, and valuables to Assyria, Hezekiah could still survive the disaster in Jerusalem. Sennacherib boasts of capturing forty-six fortified cities of Hezekiah as well as their numerous neighbouring settlements, deporting 200,150 people alongside many livestock. However, none of the cities are mentioned in the text. In contrast, the text lists eight cities of Lulî (4.33) as well as four cities of Šidqâ (4.41). Why does it not enumerate the names of those Judean cities but mention deportation of enormous population from them? If the list of forty-six cities would be too long, the writer could have referred to some prominent ones such as Lachish, leaving out the others. The fact that none of the cities appear in the text suggests that the number is probably an overstatement.

The number 200,150 also seems to be imaginary and unrealistic (Fouts 1994, pp. 205–211; De Odorico 1995, p. 174).<sup>18</sup> Earlier in the Rassam Cylinder, the number of people deported from Babylonia to Assyria during the first campaign is recorded as 208,000 (4.14). Both figures represent a roughly similar quantity. Moreover, in both cases, the number is followed by the same list: “people, young (and) old, male and female, (7200) horses and mules, (11,073) donkeys, (5230) camels, (80,100) oxen, and (600,600) sheep and goats, which were without number” (4.14; 4.51).<sup>19</sup> The author reproduces the expression used for an earlier campaign record, probably in an attempt to make literary compensation for the failure to conquer the capital city Jerusalem, in which Hezekiah still remains on his throne. The long list of booty that occupies the closing part of our text (4.56–58) may also have been triggered by a similar purpose.

Our text does not describe a siege effort against Jerusalem or its conquest or plunder.<sup>20</sup> Instead, Sennacherib asserts that he shut up Hezekiah in Jerusalem “like a

<sup>16</sup> The Chicago/Taylor Prism inserts “*šad-da-šú e-mid* (disappeared)” after this statement (22.ii.40).

<sup>17</sup> According to Fales (1987, p. 425), the enemies we see in the Assyrian annals is of “a pre-conceived, or mythical, ideological pattern”.

<sup>18</sup> Millard (1991, pp. 221–222) states that “the number of people taken from Hezekiah’s Judah should be accepted as stated by Sennacherib’s chronicler as 200,150, or something of that order”. Gonçalves (1986, p. 115) concludes that the number may include the total number of the conquered population of Judah, while Mayer (2003, p. 182) thinks it counts both people and animals. These and other rationalising efforts, however, cannot easily be justified.

<sup>19</sup> The numbers in the parentheses are provided only for the first campaign (4.14). They are not given for the third campaign (4.51) or in the final account of the first campaign (22.i.50–52).

<sup>20</sup> The expression “I surrounded, conquered (*al-me KUR-ud*)” is attested seven times in the Chicago/Taylor Prism (22.i.74, 22.ii.18, 22.ii.72, 22.iii.7, 22.iii.23, 22.iv.26, 22.iv.78). The high concentration of the expression in the third campaign (22.ii.72 = 4.41; 22.iii.7 = 4.46; 22.iii.23 = 4.50) is probably a face-saving effort on the part of the author in front of the failure to conquer Jerusalem in this campaign.

bird in a cage” (4.52). Though describing enemy as an animal is found in the annals of other kings of Assyria, it is attested more frequently in Sennacherib’s and Sargon II’s records (Marcus 1977, p. 86).<sup>21</sup> The image of a bird is often used to symbolise the loss of freedom (Marcus 1977, p. 98). The same expression “I confined like a bird in a cage (*kīma iššūr quppi ʿsiršu*)” is found in Tiglath-Pileser III’s inscription (RINAP 1 20.11’). Tadmor (1994, p. 79) comments regarding both the occurrences that “the hyperbole is employed as a face-saving device to cover for a failure to take the enemy’s capital and punish the rebellious king”. Sennacherib’s ultimate goal could not have been simply to incarcerate Hezekiah in Jerusalem.

In this face-losing situation, the author took advantage of the conventional image of a bird trapped or confined in a cage to describe an enemy.<sup>22</sup> According to Assyrian ideology, enemies are supposed to flee before the Assyrian king or submit to his authority in order to survive.<sup>23</sup> But Hezekiah failed to follow either course of action. Instead, he chose resistance but managed to survive. The author could not communicate this reality. Instead of rejecting and dumping the fact, he reinterpreted it to fit in his own ideology: the mighty king Sennacherib succeeded in keeping Hezekiah from escaping.

Near the beginning of the text, Luli is overwhelmed by the “fear of my lordly brilliance (*pul-ḥi me-lam-me be-lu-ti-ia*)” (4.32). Exactly the same wording is reserved only for Hezekiah (4.55). The repetition of this expression concerning subjugation of enemies forms an *inclusio* by its use near the beginning and end of the main paragraphs (B–F). The expression praises Sennacherib’s quasi-divine power. There is no battle report in either case but only a portrayal of fearful mortals before the transcendent power of the Assyrian king. Unlike Luli, however, Hezekiah remains in his place, though he had to pay a heavy tribute.

## V. Conclusion

By examining the structure of the text, the means of participant reference, and the literary descriptions in Sennacherib’s records of his third campaign, we could appreciate how the Assyrian scribes paint their king and his enemies. Undertandably, the scribes resort to conventional expressions and idioms. Yet they enjoy considerable latitude in determining the order of events and selecting particular terms or grammatical forms when describing the participants, events concerning them, and their behaviour. Among other things, we could discern the thematic arrangement of events and the efforts to magnify the Assyrian power and minimise the enemies, especially, the Judean

<sup>21</sup> In other places of the Chicago/Taylor Prism, the enemies are compared to a bird (22.i.16–19; 22.iii.64–65), locusts (22.v.56), and young pigeons (22.vi.29), while Sennacherib compares himself to “a strong wild ox” (22.iv.2), “a young gazelle” (22.iv.6), and “a lion” (22.v.67).

<sup>22</sup> In Amarna letters, Rib-Haddi, prince of Byblos, complains several times that he is confined in Byblos “like a bird in the middle of a trap/cage” (Marcus 1974, p. 281).

<sup>23</sup> Therefore, in the Assyrian royal inscriptions, the Assyrian king and his enemy “cannot physically meet in a battle” (Oded 1992, p. 40).



king Hezekiah. This study gives some interesting insights into the attitude of the Assyrian scribes – and the king behind them – toward the world and the events that took place around them.

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