

Assyrian Siege of Jerusalem

Central Historical Question:
What happened during Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem?

Materials

- Assyrian Empire PowerPoint
- Copies of Palace Wall Carving
- Documents A-B
- Guiding Questions

- 1) Project PowerPoint Slide 1: Wall Carving from Assyrian Palace and hand out copies of Palace Wall Carving.
 - a. Ask students to describe what they see through addressing the questions. Share out responses.
 - i. Describe what you see in this carving.
 - ii. When do you think this carving was made?
 - iii. What event do you think this carving portrays?
 - iv. What do you think was the purpose for making this carving?
 - v. Whose perspective does it show?
 - vi. Do you think this carving is a reliable historical document? Why or why not?
 - b. Explain that this artifact comes from a series of pictures carved into the palace walls of an Assyrian king named Sennacherib. It depicts an event from one of his final military campaigns in 701 BCE. Historians use artifacts like this to try and determine both what happened and what life was like in the past.
 - c. Point out that this carving illustrates many of the military tactics used by Assyrian kings between 900 BCE and 600 BCE to conquer lands in Mesopotamia and establish and maintain the Assyrian Empire. Although carvings like these depict real events, they only present one perspective. Further, kings often ordered these carvings to celebrate their accomplishments. This motivation may have led to exaggerated or distorted depictions.
 - d. Explain that today we are going to look at two different artifacts to explore one of Sennacherib's final military campaigns. First, it's important to get some more information about the Assyrian Empire and the documents we are going to analyze.
- 2) Use PowerPoint to establish background information.
 - a. Slide 2: Title slide. *Between approximately 900 BCE and 600 BCE a series of Assyrian kings expanded the Assyrian Empire throughout Mesopotamia.*
 - b. Slide 3: Assyrian Military. *The Assyrians were known as fierce warriors. They conquered lands and put down revolts through brutal military tactics.*

They developed new military strategies and refined weapons such as battering rams, chariots, and arrows.

- c. Slide 4: Assyrian Empire. *Map of the Assyrian Empire. At its largest, the Assyrian Empire covered most of Mesopotamia and parts of what today are Turkey and North Africa.*
 - d. Slide 5: Assyrian Artifacts. *How do we know this? For one, the Assyrians produced many palace wall carvings, or reliefs, that depicted the conquests of different Assyrian kings.*
 - e. Slide 6: Assyrian Scribes. *Assyrian scribes also wrote about these events using cuneiform script carved into tablets.*
 - f. Slide 7: King Sennacherib. *Sennacherib was an Assyrian King from (705-681 BCE). He used military force against revolts within his empire. One of these revolts was by the people of Judah, who were led by King Hezekiah. These people, the Hebrews, revolted against Assyrian rule in 701 BCE. The palace carving from the opening of this lesson illustrates a battle from this campaign. It depicts Sennacherib's troops conquering the town of Lachish. After this conquest, Sennacherib moved to attack Hezekiah and the city of Jerusalem.*
 - g. Slide 8: Corroboration. *Part of what historians do when trying to determine what happened in the past is to compare different accounts of events. They try to corroborate accounts by looking at their similarities and differences and whether or not some accounts are more reliable or trustworthy than others. This is often difficult to do for events in ancient history because accounts are often incomplete. And, rarely are there multiple accounts of events.*
 - h. Slide 9: Two Sources. *Like other events in ancient history, there are very few historical records of Sennacherib's military campaigns, and in particular, his siege of Jerusalem. However, archeologists did find a cuneiform tablet with descriptions of this event in the ruins of Sennacherib's palace. There is also a brief account of the siege in the Book of Kings from the Hebrew Bible. It is interesting to note that there is no known wall carving that illustrates the siege. We are going to compare, or try to corroborate, these two accounts.*
 - i. Slide 10: *Today our task is to read and corroborate the sources as we investigate the question: What happened during Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem?*
- 3) Pass out Document A and the Guiding Questions.
 - a. In groups of two to three, have students read the document and answer the Guiding Questions.
 - b. Share out and discuss responses.
 - 4) Pass out Document B.
 - a. In the same groups, have students read the document and answer the Guiding Questions.
 - b. Share out and discuss responses.

5) Final Questions

Individually, have students respond in writing to the final questions. Note that responses should be in complete sentences and include information from or about the documents.

6) Final Discussion

- a. Why do you think these documents present such different versions of Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem?
- b. Do you think these documents provide trustworthy accounts of what happened during Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem? Why or why not?

Points to note:

- Ultimately, we cannot know exactly what happened during Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem.
- Neither of these sources is particularly trustworthy in providing an account of the event. Although the prism was created close in time to the siege, it is from one perspective and was probably written to celebrate Sennacherib's accomplishments. The Hebrew account, on the other hand, combines a series of different types of writing and is not completely historical.
- The differences between the accounts highlight why it is difficult to trust either as reliable or trustworthy.
- However, there are some important similarities between these accounts. Both, for example, indicate that Hezekiah paid tribute to Sennacherib. And, both show that Sennacherib was not able to conquer Jerusalem. In this regard, they do help us address the question of what happened during Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem.

Citations

Palace Wall Carving

Ashurnasirpal II's Assault of a City. Nimrud, Northwest Palace of Ashurnasirpal II. From E. A Wallis Budge (Ed.), *Assyrian Sculptures in the British Museum: Reign of Ashur-Nasir-Pal, 885-860 B.C.*, plate XIII. Retrieved from: <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000431110>

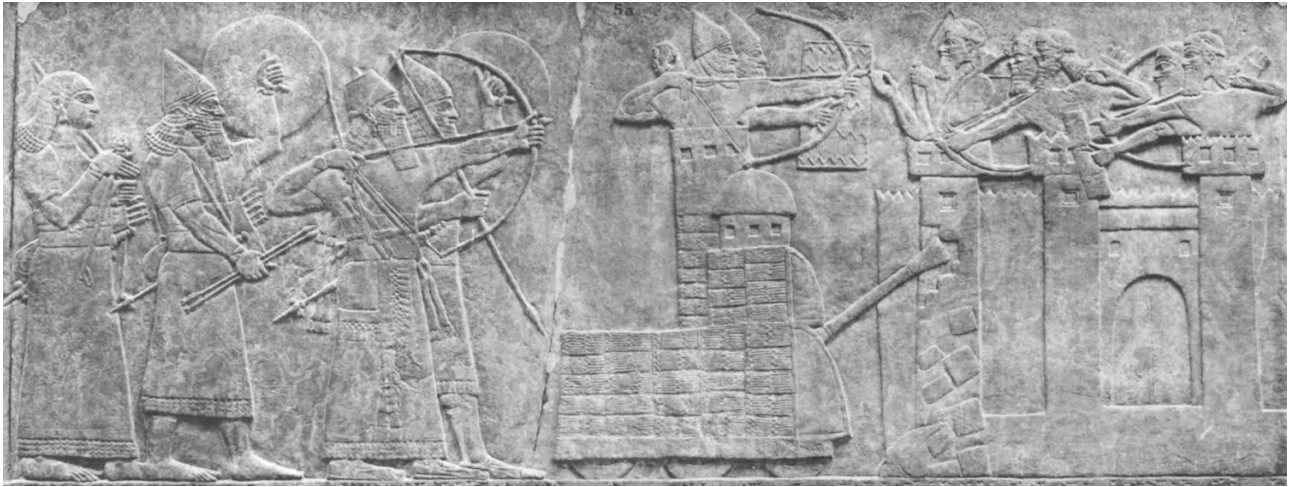
Document A

Oliver J. Thatcher, ed., *The Library of Original Sources*, (Milwaukee: University Research Extension Co., 1907), Vol. I: *The Ancient World*. Retrieved from Ancient History Sourcebook: <http://www.utexas.edu/courses/classicalarch/readings/sennach.html>

Document B

The Bible (Douai-Rheims Version), (Baltimore: John Murphy Co., 1914). Retrieved from Ancient History Sourcebook: <http://www.utexas.edu/courses/classicalarch/readings/sennach.html>

Palace Wall Carving



Source: Carving on the wall of an ancient Assyrian palace showing Assyrian warriors attacking the Judean city of Lachish. The battle was part of Assyrian King Sennacherib's final military campaign. This event occurred in 701 BCE. Historians date this carving from approximately 700 BCE.

- 1) Describe what you see in this carving.
- 2) When do you think this carving was made?
- 3) What event do you think this carving portrays?
- 4) What do you think the purpose of making this carving was?
- 5) Whose perspective do you think it shows?
- 6) Do you think this carving provides a trustworthy picture of this account?

Document A: The Sennacherib Prism (Modified)

*The passage below comes from the Sennacherib Prism, an object with **cuneiform** text describing Sennacherib's military campaigns. Archeologists found the prism in ruins of Sennacherib's palace. It was written in approximately 701 BCE.*

In my [Sennacherib's] third campaign, Hezekiah the Jew did not submit to my control. I surrounded and conquered 46 of his strongly fortified cities and countless small towns using siege ramps, battering rams, and **relentless** attacks of foot soldiers, using mines, as well as trenches. I drove out 200,150 people, young and old, male and female, horses, mules, donkeys, camels, big and small cattle beyond counting, and made them slaves.

I made Hezekiah a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage. I surrounded him with **earthwork** in order to hinder those who were leaving his city's gate. Thus I made his country smaller, but I still increased the tribute and the presents to me as overlord, to be delivered annually. Hezekiah sent 30 **talents** of gold, 800 talents of silver, precious stones, large cuts of red stone, couches and chairs made of ivory, elephant hides, ebony-wood, boxwood and all kinds of valuable treasures.

Source: *Sennacherib Prism, 701 BCE.*

Vocabulary

cuneiform: an early system of writing

relentless: unforgiving or unending

earthwork: a military fortification built from soil

talents: a unit of measurement for silver

Document B: The Book of Kings (Modified)

The Book of Kings is from the Hebrew Bible. It presents a biblical view of Jewish history from 960-560 BCE. Historians believe it includes parts written by different people at different times between the 680 BCE and 500 BCE. Historians also point out that it mixes history, folktales, myths, and religious miracles. The excerpt below describes Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem.

In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, the king of Assyria [Sennacherib] went on an expedition against all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them. Hezekiah, king of Judah, sent this message to the king of Assyria at Lachish: "I have done wrong. Leave me, and I will pay whatever tribute you impose on me." The king of Assyria **exacted** 300 talents of silver and 30 talents of gold from Hezekiah, king of Judah. Hezekiah paid him all the funds there were in the temple of the Lord and in the palace treasuries. . . . That night the angel of the Lord went forth and struck down 185,000 men in the Assyrian camp. Early the next morning, the Assyrian camp was full of corpses. So Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, broke camp and went back home to Nineveh.

Source: *The Book of Kings, written 7th-6th century BCE.*

Vocabulary

exacted: demand and receive a payment

Guiding Questions

Document A: The Sennacherib Prism

1. (Sourcing) What type of document is this?
2. (Sourcing) When was it written?
3. (Sourcing) Why do you think it was written?
4. (Close Reading) According to this document, what did Sennacherib's forces do to the towns surrounding Jerusalem?
5. (Close Reading) According to this account, what happened when Sennacherib tried to conquer Jerusalem? Was he successful?
6. (Corroboration) What parts of this document corroborate the palace carving's account of Sennacherib's conquest of Lachish?

Document B: The Book of Kings

1. (Sourcing) What type of document is this?
2. (Sourcing) When was it written?
3. (Sourcing) Why do you think it was written?
4. (Close Reading) According to this document, what happened when Sennacherib tried to conquer Jerusalem? Was he successful?
5. (Corroboration) What is a major difference between this document and the account in the Sennacherib prism [Document A]?
6. (Corroboration) What parts of this document corroborate Document A?

Final Questions

1. Why do you think these documents present such different versions of Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem?

2. Do you think these documents provide trustworthy accounts of what happened during Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem? Why or why not?