

THE NEW TIRHAKAH TEXT AND SENNACHERIB'S SECOND PALESTINIAN CAMPAIGN

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Introduction

The question of whether the Assyrian king Sennacherib conducted one campaign or two against Philistia and Judah has been a long-standing issue in biblical studies.¹ The issue arises from the fact that only one such campaign is known in Assyrian sources.² The relevant biblical texts (2 Kgs 18-19 and Isa 36-39) can, on the other hand, be interpreted in such a way as to suggest that there were two campaigns. In this case, the first campaign is represented by 2 Kgs 18:13-16, and the second campaign would be described in 2 Kgs 18:17-19:36. Another approach to the problems presented by the difference between these two accounts is to consider them as coming from different literary sources.³ While biblical scholars have been divided upon the matter of whether there were two campaigns or not, Assyriologists and Egyptologists have generally favored only one campaign because only one is mentioned in the Assyrian annals.⁴ There is a difficulty in using such an argument, however, since the annals for the last decade of Sennacherib's reign are missing, and thus we do not know for sure just what activities he was engaged in during that period.

When I wrote on this question previously, I assembled the arguments from various sources which seemed to favor a second campaign.⁵ At that time F. J. Yurco, who supports a one-campaign theory, rejected all of the

¹As far as can be determined, the idea that Sennacherib conducted a second campaign against Judah was first proposed in the literature by G. Rawlinson in 1858.

²ANET 287-288.

³The most recent contribution following this approach is that of P.-E. Dion, "Sennacherib's Expedition to Palestine," *Eglise et Théologie* 20 (1989): 5-25.

⁴The most recent Egyptologist to favor one campaign is D. B. Redford in his *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1992), 351-359.

⁵W. H. Shea, "Sennacherib's Second Palestinian Campaign," *JBL* 104 (1985): 401-418.

lines of evidence I had assembled in support of this theory.⁶ Some of those lines of evidence may need revision, while others still stand. My purpose here is not to evaluate those old arguments again; the interested reader can do that by simply evaluating the two articles side by side. My point here is to introduce new evidence from Egypt, compatible with a second campaign against Philistia and Judah conducted by Sennacherib early in the decade of the 680s.

One of the major reasons why a second campaign has been suggested is that 2 Kgs 19:9 identifies one of Sennacherib's opponents in the west as Tirhakah from Egypt. It is well known that Tirhakah did not come to the throne in Egypt until 690.⁷ The one well-attested campaign of Sennacherib to Philistia and Judah occurred in 701. That is evident both from the dates in the Assyrian annals and 2 Kgs 18:13, where Sennacherib's campaign against Judah is dated in the 14th year of Hezekiah. Dating from the death of his father Ahaz in 715, this campaign occurred in 701, which corresponds to the date of Sennacherib's third campaign after he came to the throne upon the death of Sargon II in 705. The reference to Tirhakah in 2 Kgs 19:9 would point to a date more than a decade after the Assyrian campaign of 701.

Several suggestions have been made in attempts to resolve this problem. One is that Tirhakah was only a prince at the time that he accompanied the Egyptian troops to Canaan in 701, but later records referred to him as king, which he later became.⁸ This argument is not entirely satisfactory because the Kawa stela IV from Nubia identifies the pharaoh who called Taharqa/Tirhakah to Lower Egypt for the first time as Shebitku.⁹ Recent studies of Egyptian chronology, however, have indicated that the pharaoh on the throne in 701 was Shabako.¹⁰ Thus it would have been impossible for Tirhakah to take his journey north as early as that, regardless of his official position at the time.

An attempt to solve this problem was proposed by Yurco. He suggested that there was a coregency between Shabako and Shebitku and

⁶F. J. Yurco, "The Shabaka-Shebitku Coregency and the Supposed Second Campaign of Sennacherib Against Judah: A Critical Assessment," *JBL* 110 (1991): 35-45.

⁷R. A. Parker, "The Length of the Reign of Ramasis and the Beginning of the Twenty-Sixth Dynasty," *Mitteilungen des deutschen archäologischen Instituts—Abteilung Kairo* 15 (1957): 208-212.

⁸This is the approach of K. A. Kitchen in his work, *The Third Intermediate Period in Egypt* (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1973), 386, n. 823.

⁹F. L. Macadam, *The Temples of Kawa. I. The Inscriptions* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1949), 14-21.

¹⁰K. Baer, "The Libyan and Nubian Kings of Egypt: Notes on the Chronology of Dynasties XXII to XXVI," *JNES* 32 (1973): 7, 25.

it was Shebitku who, as junior coregent, called Tirhakah to Lower Egypt in time to accompany the expedition to Philistia in 701.¹¹ This theory founders, however, upon the fact that there is no inscriptional or archaeological evidence for such a coregency.¹²

The other way in which to look at the reference to Tirhakah in 2 Kgs 19:9 is that it is a genuine reference to Tirhakah at a time when he was the true and bona fide king of Egypt and that he led an expedition to Philistia when he was king, some time early in his reign. This would have to have occurred between 689, when Sennacherib finished his five years of campaign against Babylon, and 686, the death of Hezekiah of Judah according to most standard biblical chronologies of Judah in the 7th century.¹³

The chronological window that can accommodate all three of these kings in the same place at the same time is narrow. For Tirhakah it must have taken place after 690, when he became king. For Sennacherib it must come after his campaign to Babylon in 689, for that begins the blank period to his death in 681, during which we do not know where he was or what he was doing. For Hezekiah the conjunction of these three kings in Palestine must have taken place before 686 when he died. Thus, if it occurred, such a campaign would have taken place during the brief period of 688 to 686. No new Assyrian texts from this period have been published, but a recently published text from Egypt aids in that project, even though it has been misdated and thus misconnected.

The New Tirhakah Text

Discovery of the Text

As a member of the Karnak temple project, D. B. Redford came across a previously unpublished stela of Taharqa in 1990. A preliminary announcement of this find was presented to the International Conference of Asian and North-African Studies in Toronto, Canada, in August 1990. Preliminary publication of the stela appeared in 1993.¹⁴ At the time of this writing the definitive publication of the text has not been issued yet, but the preliminary announcement contains adequate information to complete the study. One problem with that publication is, however, that

¹¹Yurco, 39.

¹²Yurco admits that no ancient Egyptian texts point to such a coregency (*ibid.*, 45). In his collection of Egyptian coregencies W. J. Murnane passed over this possibility completely (*Ancient Egyptian Coregencies*, Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization, vol. 40 [Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1977], 189).

¹³For a representative Israelite chronology with this conclusion, see E. R. Thiele, *Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 158-159.

¹⁴D. B. Redford, "Taharqa in Western Asia and Libya," *Eretz Israel* 24 (1993): 188-191.

Redford's line drawing of the text was published upside-down.¹⁵ The text was incised in Aswan granite, and three large chunks of the stela are extant, so even though the text is not complete, considerable portions of it remain.

The Contents of the Text

The first three lines of the surviving text talk about the neglect of the cult of an unnamed god. Somebody, also unnamed, was responsible for interrupting the steady flow of food for the god. The customary rituals were also interrupted due to this neglect. In line 6 the military opposition by an enemy appears in the surviving text. Here Tirhakah refers first to the preparations to meet the enemy: "I (came?) to this city in order to provide horses, chariots (and ?) more than anything."¹⁶ In the meantime the enemy had done something threatening, "he did all this in marching against me." Having made his preparations, Tirhakah set forth, "hastening to the place where they were." Lines 10 and 11 tell of the engagement between the two forces, "they were destined for a severe and grievous blow, the work of my hands. . . . I had no compassion on the least of them nor [on the most influential of them?]. (Soon they were) fleeing before me with fear pulsating through their limbs I forced (?) his confederates to the ground all at once."

As a result of his claimed victory Tirhakah took some of the prisoners or captives and settled them in villages in Egypt, including some of those around the Temple of Amun in Karnak. There they had to work to support the god. This type of activity is described in line 13: "[I placed them] in quarters, I settled them in villages, and [their] cattle [in]. (They came with their benevolences) in their hands, and I had brought the mellifers of the levy [and I put them in the treasury?] of the House of Amun and made them responsible for the divine income of honey."

The final surviving portion of the text in lines 15-18 records a prayer to Amun, that he would grant Tirhakah many years of life. The king acknowledges that Amun had been in his heart since the days of his youth, and that he had brought "many valuables of every land, and bore (the contents of) their treasuries to Amun," and the god himself can tell what Tirhakah has done for him. Between line 13, which tells of the settlement of the captives, and line 15, where his prayer to Amun begins, line 14 appears with its chronological boundary. This line mentions that "the inundation came as a cattle-thief, although for many years (it had been in) abeyance." The outline of the text is as follows:

¹⁵Ibid., fig. I11. 1 on 189.

¹⁶All quotations from the translation of this text are taken from Redford, 190.

- I. Introduction—neglect of the cult as the problem
- II. The Battle
 - A. Preparation for the battle. Tirhakah gathers troops and equipment
 - B. Approach of the enemy
 - C. Tirhakah moves his troops out to meet the enemy
 - D. Tirhakah and his forces are victorious (the battle itself is not described in the surviving text)
- III. Results
 - A. Captives are settled in the villages of Egypt
 - B. Other captives are settled in the vicinity of Karnak
 - C. Some of those settled near Karnak are given responsibility for maintaining the cult, thus answering in part the problem with which the recital of the text began, the neglect of the cult.
- IV. An additional unrelated result—the high Nile comes after years of low Niles.
- V. The final benediction
 - A. Note of what the god had done for Tirhakah
 - B. Note of what Tirhakah had done for the god

The position in the text and in this outline in which the reference to the high Nile occurs may be emphasized again. It comes in line 14, after line 13, in which the settlement of the captives concludes, and before line 15, where the final prayer and benediction begins.

According to the order of this text, the high Nile came after the military campaign of lines 7-13. While the campaign was under way, Egypt was still suffering from low Niles; then came the high Nile. Since that high Nile can be dated to the 6th year of Tirhakah, according to Kawa Stela V,¹⁷ this military campaign must have been conducted before Tirhakah's sixth year. The connections of this point are discussed in the following section.

Connections of the Text

When Redford published his preliminary announcement of this text, he connected it with the campaign Tirhakah conducted against the Libyans in his eighth year.¹⁸ This does not agree with the order of the text. The Libyan campaign occurred after the high Nile of the sixth year, not before it; thus it does not fit well with this campaign. To identify the campaign of this new text, we must look elsewhere among the records

¹⁷Kitchen, 388; F. L. Macadam, 22-32.

¹⁸D. B. Redford, "Taharqa in Western Asia," 190.

that deal with Tirhakah. Until the appearance of this new text there was no direct Egyptian indication that Tirhakah conducted any military campaigns in the first half decade of his reign. There were some hints in terms of small objects and trade but nothing definite.

As Redford has pointed out,¹⁹ there is no enemy or target city mentioned by name in the surviving portions of the text. Even if the text were complete, there may not have been such a mention, as other texts of this type from Tirhakah tend to be general and not specific.

Lacking specific mention of the enemy, where this battle was fought, or where these captives came from, one must fall back upon the circumstantial evidence of chronology to see where these connections might be the strongest. As mentioned above, there is a very narrow window of opportunity to locate the kings of Assyria, Egypt, and Judah in a war at the same time. Tirhakah's accession year was 690, and 685 was the year of the high Nile, so the campaign attested by this text would have been conducted after 690 and before 685. Sennacherib could not have been involved in the west before 688, for he was busy with Babylon in the east until 689. Since Hezekiah died in 686, any contact by him with Tirhakah would have to have taken place before that time. These conclusions may be outlined as follows:

- Date of the campaign of the new Tirhakah text—between 689 and 686
- Date of any second Palestinian campaign conducted by Sennacherib—
between 688 and 686
- Date of the death of Hezekiah of Judah—by 686

Since the Egyptian text does not mention the target city or country or army with which the Egyptian troops fought, sources external to Egypt need to be brought into this analysis. Assyrian sources of this time are essentially silent because of the absence of Sennacherib's annals between 689 and 681. That leaves us with the records from Judah. In 2 Kgs 19:9 is a reference to the appearance of Tirhakah upon a battlefield in the vicinity of Philistia. Given the chronological constraints mentioned above, it is unlikely that Tirhakah could have conducted two full campaigns in this interval; thus the one with the unnamed target in his own text is best associated with the one mentioned in 2 Kgs 19:9, when he marched into Philistia to meet the Assyrian troops and thus brought relief to Hezekiah of Judah. For whatever reasons, this general effort seems to have been an Egyptian success, for the biblical record indicates that Sennacherib returned to his own land.

¹⁹Ibid.

Summary

A new text of Tirhakah was discovered at Karnak in 1990 and was announced in preliminary publications in 1993. This text tells of a previously unknown military campaign of Tirhakah. The name of the country or city against which he campaigned has not survived in the fragments of this text. The text can be connected with Tirhakah because of its reference to the high Nile, which fits well with an event which occurred in Tirhakah's sixth year, 685. Since that reference also comes toward the end of the surviving portions of text, and the military campaign is described before that point, the military campaign should be dated prior to 685. The only text that points to military activity in the field at that time is the biblical reference to Tirhakah's appearance in Palestine when Sennacherib was besieging Hezekiah's Judah. This cannot be the campaign of 701 because Tirhakah was not on the throne at that time and could not have been in Lower Egypt that early, according to his own stela at Kawa. This action in 2 Kgs 19:9 should, therefore, belong to a second campaign of Sennacherib to Palestine. During that second campaign Tirhakah would have met him on the plain of Philistia after he lifted the siege of Libnah. This new Egyptian text tells of just such a campaign, which fits directly into that chronological niche.