The attack on Judah in Sennacherib's Third Campaign: An ideological study of the various texts

By

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Submitted as partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Masters in Ancient Languages and Cultures

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Most studies done on the subject of this mini-dissertation have only focused on the differences in chronological detail and text – searching for the facts behind the different accounts. Much attention has thus been paid to the historicity of the various texts and the way in which the different accounts affect each others credibility. But is this the only research to be done? The contention of this mini-dissertation is that to only look at the different texts surrounding Sennacherib's third campaign through the eyes of a modern historian is to lose the unique and significant message that the various texts wanted to convey. An event only forms part of the construction of a meaningful whole by the author; thus it can be found in various stories at different places and with varying significance attached to it, without meaning that the account of which it forms a part is neither important nor historical. It only means that the authors of the various ancient accounts wanted to achieve different outcomes with their retelling of the original story. For this reason it is important to be able to enter the world represented in, and the mind of the writer of, the ancient texts – allowing the ideology and intentions of the author to be brought to the fore and the text to speak with its own voice, not that of the modern historian. To achieve this requires knowledge of the different symbols, concepts and the meanings attached to them by the ancient societies – shifting the attention to the texts themselves by looking at the way in which the events were narrated as well as what events were narrated; thus revealing the ultimate meaning and purpose of the various texts. The intention of this mini-dissertation is to study the various texts from the underdeveloped angle discussed above, namely ideology and social values. In doing so it is proposed that a new significance will be revealed for the various texts.

Research done on the subject of this mini-dissertation has mostly focused on whether there was a single campaign in 701 BC; or two campaigns, one in 701 and one later; or whether chronological difficulties should be explained as arising from the perspective of an author who wrote much later than the actual events occurred. Most studies have only focused on the differences in chronological detail and text – searching for the facts behind the different accounts. Much attention has thus been paid to the historicity of the various texts and the way in which the different accounts affect each others credibility. But is this the only research to be done? The contention of this mini-dissertation is that to only look at the different texts surrounding Sennacherib's third campaign through the eyes of a modern historian is to lose the unique and significant message that the various texts wanted to convey. An event only forms part of the construction of a meaningful whole by the author; thus it can be found in various stories at different places and with varying significance attached to it, without meaning that the account of which it forms a part is neither important nor historical. It only means that the authors of the various ancient accounts wanted to achieve different outcomes with their retelling of the original story. For this reason it is important to be able to enter the world represented in, and the mind of the writer of, the ancient texts – allowing the ideology and intentions of the author to be brought to the fore and the text to speak with its own voice, not that of the modern historian. To achieve this requires knowledge of the different symbols, concepts and the meanings attached to them by the ancient societies – shifting the attention to the texts themselves by looking at the way in which the events were narrated as well as what events were narrated; thus revealing the ultimate meaning and purpose of the various texts. The intention of this mini-dissertation is to study the various texts from the underdeveloped angle discussed above, namely ideology and social values. The question as to why the various narratives were written as they were will be the focus of this work, pushing aside the modern paradigm and analytical methods which so often focus on the idiosyncrasies instead of the commonalities. In doing so it is proposed that a new significance will be revealed for the various texts.

Keywords:

- Ideology
- Social values
- Sennacherib
- Hezekiah
- Isaiah
- Lachish

- 2 Kings 18-20
- Isaiah 36-39
- 2 Chronicles 29-32
- Jerusalem

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Chapter 1   Introduction

The campaign of the Assyrian king, Sennacherib, against Syria-Palestine in the year 701 BC can probably be called the best documented piece of biblical or even Ancient Near Eastern history (Ussishkin, 1982: 11). This is because information about the campaign is available from both literary and archaeological sources.

From the literary side, no fewer than three biblical accounts are available. Then there are also the various Assyrian accounts. From the archaeological side evidence of Sennacherib's invasion is apparent from excavations of both his royal palace in Nineveh, and from ancient Lachish, the second most important fortified city in Judah during the reign of Hezekiah (Prinsloo, 2000: 349).

1.1 Problem Statement

The interpretation of the various sources has presented scholars with numerous historical problems (Van der Kooij, 2000: 114-119), and what really happened outside the walls of Jerusalem remains a hotly debated issue. The topics of research have mostly been whether there was a single campaign in 701, as maintained for instance by Jagersma (1979: 230); or two campaigns, one in 701 and one later, as maintained by Bright (1966: 282-287); or whether chronological difficulties should be explained as arising from the perspective of an author who wrote much later than the actual events occurred (Van der Kooij, 2000: 118). Much attention has thus been paid to the historicity of the various texts, and to the way in which the accounts affect each other's credibility. Most studies have only focused on the differences in chronology, detail and text; searching for the facts behind the different accounts and the one history behind all the different stories.

But is this research into the historicity, and therefore credibility, of the various texts the only research to be done on the subject? Are these results the only viable ones? Or are there other angles from which to approach the different texts, a combination of whose findings with work already done maybe leading to altogether different conclusions concerning the seeming differences and inconsistencies in the various texts? Can there be more to these texts than history?

1.2 Description of relevant research methods

For the scholars busy with these types of research, history is generally assumed to mean: 'modern scientific' (eg. Garbini, 1988), following in the footsteps of the German historiography tradition (see Oden, 1987: 1-18). Impressed by the achievements of the natural sciences,

humanist scholars have for a considerable time cherished the ideals of objectivity in observation, theory construction and verification (cf. Van Seters, 1966). In this tradition 'facts' are spoken of as tangible things and the question of genre forms the all-important, key issue (see Van Seters, 1966). For scholars in this tradition, a rigid, essentialist genre analysis alone is sufficient to identify and define history writing – because of the traits inherent to a genre. Genre is thus understood to mean a determinate category with fixed constituents which enable the correct interpretation of a text (see Oden, 1987: 1-18).

But Derrida (1980: 64-65) argues that no generic trait can completely and absolutely confine a text to a certain genre or class, because such belonging falsifies the constituents of the text. In the light thereof a new genre theory is advocated by Cohen. He argues that genre concepts in theory and practice arise, change and decline for socio-historical reasons (1986: 204). Furthermore, texts accrue to compose a genre – the grouping must thus be seen as a process (1986: 205ff).

"Genres are open categories. Each member alters the genre by adding, contradicting or changing constituents, especially those of members most closely related to it. Since the purposes of critics who establish genres vary, it is self-evident that the same texts can belong to different groupings or genres and serve different purposes."[1]

The classifications made are not logical, but empirical – they are historical assumptions constructed by the author, the audience and the critic to serve a communicative and aesthetic purpose (Cohen, 1986: 205ff). Because of this, genres can be seen as nothing other than open systems containing groupings of texts which fulfil certain ends (Cohen, 1986: 210, 212).

Recently the discovery has been made by Huizinga that:

"The idea of history only emerges with the search for certain connections, the essence of which is determined by the value which we attach to them. It makes no difference whether we think of a history which is the result of researches strictly critical in method, or of sagas and epics belonging to former phases of civilization…we can speak in the same breath of historiography and historical research…of the local analyst and the designer of a historical cosmology. Every civilization creates its own form of history…if a civilization coincides with a people, a state, a tribe, its history will be correspondingly simple. If a general civilization is differentiated into distinct nations, and these again into groups, classes, parties, the corresponding differentiation in historical form follows of itself. The historical interests of every sectional civilization must hold

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[1]Gadamer has also argued along these lines that genre can no longer be regarded as timeless a priori categories since they are history-bound. Thus their rise and decline are intrinsic to text interpretations (Gadamer, 1978. p.250ff).

its own history to be the true one, and is entitled to do so, provided that it constructs this history in accordance with the critical requirements imposed by its conscience as a civilization, and not according to the craving for power in the interests of which it imposes silence upon the conscience" (1936: 5-7).

It is clear that for Huizinga history writing is not necessarily 'nationalistic' (1963: 46); indeed, to him cultural history is a much deeper and more important pursuit than political history (1963: 46).

His work led to the abandonment of the notion of the inseparable connection between 'history' and 'political'. This notion has been replaced by the belief that a relationship exists between history and ideology (La Capra, 1986: 221). As La Capra (1986: 221) states: "One obvious point is that the defence or critique of generic definitions typically involves a defence or critique of discursive and social arrangements, since genres are in one way or another inserted into socio-cultural and political practices. This point is frequently not made explicit because it would impair the seeming neutrality of classifications and the way they function in scholarship".

This implies that there can be no neutral and objective classification of texts, leading to the conclusion that these classifications cannot function as interpretative keys. Furthermore, because of the variability of literary conventions used by both historiography and fiction, the one cannot be distinguished from the other by simply examining form[2].

1.3 <u>Hypothesis</u>

In view of the above, the historical narrative should rather be differentiated from fiction by its commitment to subject-matter – to real rather than imaginary events (eg. White, 1984: 21). However, the term 'real' must be understood culturally (as a culturally and religiously encoded word).

The Old Testament does not make the (essential modern) distinction between legendary elements and elements based on actual history when telling a story – divine and human action are inextricably bound to one another. The modern day importance of an eyewitness recording

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[2] Sternberg (1985: 26, 29-30) puts it this way: "Equally fallacious, because unmindful of convention and its invariability, are the attempts to distinguish fictional from historiographic writing by their form…one simply cannot tell fictional from historical narrative – still less, fiction from history within narrative – since they may be equally present in both, equally absent, equally present and absent in varying combinations. So, to the possible disappointment of shortcut seekers…there are simply no universals of historical vs. fictive form".

the events to validate the historicity of a particular text also didn't exist in those times. Most ancient stories are thus not as committed to a clear and factual representation of the events being narrated as modern texts are.

But this does not automatically disqualify these stories as histories, for history is far more than an accurate description of events as they happen (Sternberg, 1985: 25). Danto (1965: 149ff) argued this point by using the idea of an 'Ideal Chronicler'; an individual possessing knowledge of everything that happens as it happens and the way in which it happens. This individual would be able to record an accurate, full description of everything as it happened. But this, contrary to popular belief, is not the end of the work to be done, "for there is a class of descriptions of any event under which the event cannot be witnessed, and these descriptions are necessarily and systematically excluded from the Ideal Chronicler. The whole truth concerning an event can only be known after, and sometimes only long after the event itself has taken place, and this part of the story historians alone can tell. It is something even the best sort of witness cannot know" (1965: 151).

In the light thereof it can be said that any account of the past is essentially incomplete because a complete account of the past would presuppose a complete account of the future (Danto, 1965: 17). Two implications can be drawn (Lawson Younger, 1990: 41):

- A full description cannot fully meet the needs of historians, failing to represent the ideal by which we should judge accounts.
- Not being witness to the account is not such a bad thing if the interest is historical – the credibility of the account does not necessarily decrease in the ratio of its distance in time from the narrator.

Through this discussion it becomes obvious that historians employ the same devices as literary artists to arrange and fashion their work, implying that history is not a record of fact, but a discourse claiming to be a record of fact (White, 1975: 60). The antithesis between history and fiction thus lies only in the one's commitment to the truth value of its story (Sternberg, 1985: 25).

The view of history as secular, unbiased, scientific, antithetical to religion, non-pragmatic and non-didactic is therefore shown to be modern and unsatisfactory. Many histories are indeed didactic and/or pragmatic (Sternberg, 1985: 25) because they are designed to teach future generations to avoid the mistakes of the past or to influence present public opinion through propaganda.

As Carr so eloquently puts it: "Three generations of German, British, and even French, historians marched into battle intoning the magic words 'wie es eigentlich gewesen' like an incantation – designed, like most incantations, to save them from the tiresome obligation to think for themselves… [According to this view] the facts are available to the historian in documents,

inscriptions and so on, like fish on the fishmonger's slab. The historian collects them, takes them home, and cooks and serves them in whatever style appeals to him…The facts are really not at all like fish on the fishmonger's slab. They are like fish swimming about in the vast and sometimes inaccessible ocean; and what the historian catches will depend, partly on chance, but mainly on what part of the ocean he chooses to fish and what tackle he chooses to use" (Carr, 2001: 9, 23).[3]

This makes it clear that any historical work is always the historian's interpretation of events, filtered through his/her vested interests[4]. But a document does not need to be objective and unbiased to be able to fall into the category 'history' (Millard, 1983: 41). In fact: "Undoubted bias need not provoke the modern reader to a totally adverse attitude to a document, nor give rise to allegations that the accounts are untrue or imaginary. Recognition of the unconcealed standpoints of many ancient documents has resulted in a fuller understanding of their contents, without any recourse to devaluation or discrediting of them. The fact that the modern interpreter does not share the beliefs and aims of the writers does not prevent him from respecting them and giving them their due weight" (Millard, 1983: 41).

History writing is not chronological and sequential; it is linear and developmental. We can therefore agree with White's argument: "I treat the historical work as what it most manifestly is: a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse. Histories…combine a certain amount of 'data', theoretical concepts for 'explaining' these data, and a narrative structure for their presentation…The same event can serve as a different kind of element of many different historical stories…In the chronicle, the event is simply 'there' as an element of a series; it does not 'function' as a story element. The historian arranges the events in the chronicle into a hierarchy of significance" (See also White, 1973: ix, 7-8, 142-143).

History is thus artistically constructed and does not necessarily follow a strict chronological format – implying that the term 'story' embraces both historical and fictional narratives[5]. The function of this narrative form is not just to relate a succession of events, but to present an ensemble of interrelationships as a single whole. An event, under the same or different descriptions, may belong to different stories, and the significance of the event will vary together with its place in the different narratives (Mink, 1978: 145).

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[3] See also Braudel, 1980: 11.

[4] Habermas (1971) has shown that all knowledge is related to matters of interest, and that any imagined objectivity is likely to be an exercise in self-deception.

[5] E.g., Ricoeur (1978: 152, 161) uses 'story' to mean 'historical text', in particular, narrative discourse.

So when it comes to the narrative treatment of an ensemble of relationships we have to credit the imagination, sensibilities and insights of the individual historian, since there are no strict rules for the construction of a narrative. Because of this, history is always the imposition of form on the past and the communication of a meaning. History is always constructed from a particular point of view[6]; it is the writer's selective arrangement and presentation of events – a reflection of his/her ideology.

To only look at the different texts surrounding Sennacherib's third campaign through the eyes of a modern historian can cause the researcher to lose the unique and significant message that the various different texts wanted to convey. Since an event only forms part of the construction of a meaningful whole by the author, it can be found in various stories at different places and with varying significance attached to it. This does not mean that the account of which it forms a part is not important nor historical, it only means that the different writers wanted to achieve different outcomes with their narratives.

The fact that the different narratives surrounding the conquest of Lachish and the siege of Jerusalem vary does thus not have to only alarm and preoccupy our study of these texts. In fact, to only look at these differences from a modern historical point of reference, is to muffle the voice of the text. For then the text is only studied through the modern perspective that the researcher represents. To escape that trap, it is important to be able to enter the world represented in, and the mind of the writer of each ancient text. To be able to accomplish this it is necessary to study the reason and motivation behind the differences in the text.

In this way, the world of the text and the ideology and intentions of the author are allowed to be brought to the fore. In the case of the various texts surrounding Sennacherib's third campaign, it could lead to new and surprising interpretations of the texts, in which the ideological contours of the texts may be enhanced – so enhancing the importance of these social values in understanding the politics of the situation (Botha, 2000a: 269).

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[6] White (1978: 47) argues that this is the key to historical interpretation; namely, 'to recognize that there is no such thing as a single correct view of any object under study but that there are many correct views, each requiring its own style of representation. This would allow us to entertain seriously those creative distortions offered by minds capable of looking at the past with the same seriousness as ourselves but with different affective and intellectual orientations.

1.4 A definition and discussion of ideology

Ideology is a difficult term to give meaning to, as Apter (1964: 16) correctly noted: "Ideology is not quite like other subjects. It reflects the presuppositions of its observers." It can be defined in at least three different ways:

- In the narrow (Marxist) sense of 'false consciousness' – meaning distorted or selected ideas in the defence of the status quo of a social system. But this leads back to the problem of establishing a 'true consciousness' enabling men to understand their role.
- In a restrictive sense as only those parts or aspects of a system of social ideas which are distorted or unduly selective from a scientific viewpoint.
- In a neutral sense as "a schematic image of social order" (Geertz, 1964: 63). It is unscientific to define ideology as distortion and selectivity because they are secondary and empirical (Geertz, 1964: 63). Ideology thus embraces both normative and allegedly factual elements, which are not necessarily distorted (Gould, 1964: 315-317).

According to the first two definitions ideology is a mask and a weapon, its pronouncements seen against the background of a universal struggle for advantage (power). Ideology is thus a higher form of cunning. This view, according to Shils (1968: 73), is incorrect. Ideologies contain many propositions; even though they strive for, and claim to possess, systematic integration, they are never completely successful. Hence, true propositions can exist next to false ones (Shils, 1968: 73). This also means that to understand ideology simply as a 'distortion of reality' (Shils, 1968: 60) is not adequate – distortion is present, but not necessarily in every element.

Important to pay attention to is the use of figurative language within ideological discourse, a fact not always recognized by scientists (Shils, 1968: 73). There exists in ideological language a subtle interplay – the semantic structure is much more complex than it appears, the analysis of which forces one into tracing a multiplicity of referential connections between it and the social reality so that the final picture is one of a configuration of dissimilar meanings out of whose interworking both the expressive power and the rhetorical force of the final symbol derive. This interworking is in itself a social process, an occurrence in the 'public world' rather than 'in the head' (Shils, 1968: 60).

Geertz (1964: 57) observed that: "It is the absence of such a theory and in particular the absence of any analytical framework within which to deal with figurative language that have reduced sociologists to viewing ideologies as elaborate cries of pain. With no notion of how metaphor, analogy, irony, ambiguity, pun, paradox, hyperbole, rhythm and all the other elements of what we lamely call 'style' operate – even, in a majority of cases, with no recognition that

these devices are of any importance in casting personal attitudes into public form, sociologists lack the symbolic resources out of which to construct a more incisive formulation."

An ideology that has developed beyond the point of mere sloganeering consists of an intricate structure of interrelated meanings – interrelated in terms of the semantic mechanisms that formulate them – of which the two-level organization of an isolated metaphor is but a feeble representation (Geertz, 1964: 74).

It would thus seem the most appropriate to advocate a neutral definition of ideology as a pattern of beliefs and concepts which purport to explain complex social phenomena – in the explanation symbolic figurative language, code shifting and overcoding may be used to simplify the explanation (Geertz, 1964: 74). So, if ideology is described as 'a schematic image of social order/culture', then a provisional agreement of some sort has to be struck on the meaning of the concept of 'culture'.

Quite generally speaking one may distinguish between material, habitual and mental culture. The first concerns the things people do (how they feed and shelter themselves, procreate, dress etc.), the second has to do with the way in which they do things (through distributing labour, marrying, trading, making war etc.) and the third is about their reasons for doing these things the way in which they do them. The reasons for some actions may be quite obvious, but they may also be deeply embedded in a people's own philosophy for the construction of the universe. 'Culture' can thus be roughly defined as those things that define a particular group of people as a recognizable identity in the eyes of an outsider (Deist, 2000: 21).

The argument behind this definition is that when people speak, they are not merely uttering sounds with structure and meaning – they intend something, and that intention is entrenched in their whole material, habitual and mental world (Deist, 2000: 22).

1.5 <u>Methodology</u>

To be able to analyse the texts surrounding Sennacherib's third campaign from the suggested ideological point of view would thus require an in-depth study of the different symbols and concepts and the meanings attached to them by the ancient societies.

This is necessary because language forms part of culture. People socialized in the same culture as the speaker need not be reminded of this; under ideal circumstances they understand his/her speech spontaneously, automatically and instantaneously. However, for outsiders to understand the same speech, they have to acquire as much of the intimate knowledge presupposed by the speaker as they can. That is why linguistic proficiency and knowledge of the relevant culture of which the language forms an integral part (an acquaintance with the culture) enhances the

readers' intuitive ability to formulate relevant hypotheses about the speakers' intentions – It avails the exegete of the range of arguments that may assist him/her in arguing about a particular interpretation and it creates an opportunity for the reader to discover features of the world he/she inhabits, preventing him/her from substituting his/her own cultural orientation for that of the text.

But understanding a text means comprehending more than just the logical structure and purely designative/defining meanings of the lexical and grammatical structures. Any chosen approach to interpretation cannot do without cultural knowledge; if the time and society from which a text originated are ignored a social framework foreign to the text itself is substituted as interpretive context.

Cultural anthropology distinguishes a variety of interactive 'domains' through which a culture may be studied and described: the interaction between humans and their environment, the technologies they apply, their economic system, social and political organisation, forms of social control, language, religion, art and world view. These distinctions are made from a modern perspective and are of a purely theoretical nature, because in subsistence societies things are involved and integrated, the culture is constituted by the constant interaction of a variety of human activities that cannot be separated into watertight compartments. The theoretically demarcated 'domains' merely enable the observer to focus more clearly on one kind of activity at a time and to investigate its interrelationship with the rest of the cultural system.

Any attempt to capture the meaning of things automatically brings us to the linguistic domain, since it is through language that people express their interpretation of life. Language plays a pivotal role in a culture's 'picture' of reality. The human brain has a limited capacity to perceive and to sort and store information, therefore language also has to be finite and opt for some form of economy. Coded categorisation, where observable objects and experiences are classified into hierarchically organised categories, is one of these forms (Deist, 2000). Languages not only categorise reality and in that way ascribe value to such categories, they also express a wide variety of relations among terms and categories of terms. Such relations may be expressed as spatial, temporal, semantic and symbolic.

But even though all languages have the ability to express such relations, the relations that are in fact established in a particular language are dependant upon such things as the relevant culture's view of time and space, its rules of inference, its value system and its capacity to bear with contradiction (Deist, 2000). Since causality forms part of a culture's system of meaning, causal relations accepted in one culture to exist between events or phenomena may not impress people from another culture. Apart from the above, a language also assists people in

understanding new things in the light of the known. This is the function of, among other things, comparison, simile, metaphor and parable (Deist, 2000).

The above illustrates that there is more to language than mere phonology, syntax and semantics – that 'meaning' is a complicated terrain and that valid interpretation of texts ideally implies full knowledge of the relevant culture as well as of the cultural world constructed by the relevant language. It also highlights the undesirability of severing a language from its culture and interpreting texts in that language as if they were written in the reader's own language. When interpreting a text, it is important to use what Hallo (1980: 1-26) has called the 'contextual approach' (1980: 2), a comparative investigation of 'the literary context, broadly interpreted as including the entire Near Eastern literary milieu to the extent that it can be argued to have had any conceivable impact on the biblical formulation.'

Another important aspect when reading and interpreting historical texts is the method of analysis that the reader chooses to use (Wise, 1973: 171). Wise suggested that the critic must practice 'a willing suspension of disbelief' in the initial stage of analysis which allows him/her to conduct an 'intricate textual analysis', ascertaining both the structure and the mode of communication of the text. The reader of a historical text must thus curb his/her scepticism in order to prevent the obvious being misconstrued (1973: 172). This must not be equated with a naïve approach (where criticism is repudiated), but should only be seen as a warning to the modern reader not to dismiss something out of hand because he/she finds it unbelievable (1973: 172). Instead the reader must willingly suspend his/her disbelief in order to be able to 'participate' in the world of the text.

Semiotics can be used to accomplish this 'intricate textual analysis' (Scholes, 1985: 16) – the reader seeks to discern and understand the transmission code(s) which are used to convey the message of the text[7]. This is relevant because any text is understood as 'the product of a person or persons, at a given point in human history, in a given form of discourse, taking its meaning from the interpretative gestures of individual readers using the grammatical, semantic and

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[7] It must be kept in mind that every narrative discourse consists not of one single code monolithically used, but rather of a complex set of codes, the interweaving of which by the author – for the production of a story infinitely rich in suggestion and variety of affect, not to mention attitude toward and subliminal evaluation of its subject-matter – attests to his talents as an artist, as master rather than as servant of the single code available for his use. This explains the density of the various ANE and biblical historical texts. (See further: White, 1984: 18ff)

cultural codes available to them' (Scholes, 1985: 16). The narrative form of the discourse is a medium for the message and has no more informational content than any other formal structure – it is the vehicle/apparatus for the transmission of the message. In this way, 'literary' questions are not confused with 'historicity' questions (Scholes, 1985: 16).

"…not yet general is the consciousness that the analysis of the 'events' narrated in the text must be set aside from the analysis of the literary and thought patterns according to which the events are presented" (Liverani, 1973: 181). The historical text must first be analyzed as a kind of prose discourse before its claims to objectivity and truthfulness can be tested (White, 1984: 52). This allows the reader to (temporarily) put aside the dilemma of whether and to what extent the events of a text correspond to the 'truth' (Eco, 1979: 65), shifting the attention to the texts themselves.

The most important and necessary questions to ask are thus not only which events were narrated, but the way in which they were narrated (Eco, 1979: 65). The latter question reveals the ultimate meaning and purpose of the text. Many in-depth modern historical studies (the questions of which events were narrated and their factuality in comparison to other narratives) have been done on the various texts which form the centre of the research done in this mini-dissertation[8].

The intention of this mini-dissertation is not to repeat the work already done, for that would be futile. No, the intention is to study these texts from a very underdeveloped angle, namely that of ideology and social values. This research wants to ask the question as to why the narratives were written as they were with the goal to find a new meaning and purpose to the different texts which has not as yet been fully developed. All the different texts which tell the tale of Sennacherib's third campaign are used because Scholes (1985: 30) has suggested that 'we can generate meaning by situating a text among the actual and possible texts to which it can be related.'

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[8] Works relating to

- 2 Kings: Brueggemann. 1982; Conroy. 1983; Hobbs. 1989; Long. 1991; Provan. 1997; White. 1987; Wiseman. 1993.
- Isaiah: Childs. 2001; Cronje and Boshoff. 2003; De Moor. 2001; Goldingay. 2001; Jensen. 1984; Oswalt. 1986; Schmitt. 1986; Stiebert. 2002; Seitz. 1991; Widyapranawa. 1990.
- 2 Chronicles: De Vries. 1989; Dillard. 1987; Graham and McKenzie. 1999; Japhet. 1993; Jones. 1993; Mangan. 1982; Selman. 1994; Swanston. 1972; Williamson. 1982.

Thus, by using semiotics in conjunction with an intertextual method, it will be possible to gain a better understanding of the historical narratives – both reveal certain aspects of the text's make-up that will further the interpretative endeavour and permit a finer distinction in the analyses. While semiotic approaches and stylistic analyses do not rule out the possibility of an inquiry concerning the factual contents of a text, the referential items in the text are not necessarily the primary point to which ultimate significance should be attached. This is because single elements can be used to describe either positive or negative events – the same referent can be viewed in a completely different way, as concerns its ideological connotations.

"In all instances, we have to keep foremost in our mind that even strictly historiographic documents are literary works and that they manipulate the evidence, consciously or not, for specific political and artistic purposes. Even these few texts that are patently more reliable than others, whose aim is mainly literary, cater to preconceived ideological requirements.

Most literary representations are not altogether 'innocent': Laato has pointed out a few devices Assyrian scribes employed in the 'historical records' of Sennacherib to hush up a military defeat or setback of the king (1995: 198-226). They sometimes simply omitted facts, or combined a report on a victory with that of a defeat in such a manner that the defeat became part of the victory, or boasted of major victories without indicating what the actual political gain was. If poets and narrators had the licence to 'distort' reality in order to make their hearers and readers view it from a different angle, the cultural setup in a text could equally be a distortion of cultural reality.

It is exactly this difference between the literary and the real cultural world of a text that often provides a powerful generator of meaning as well as important clues regarding the text's social or ideological function. To be able to involve the difference between the cultural situation pictured and discussed in a text in the process of interpretation requires placing the text with reference to time and space. In short, nearly all these texts are as wilfully unconcerned with the 'truth' as any other 'historical text' of the Ancient Near East" (Oppenheim, 1964: 143-144).

1.6 <u>Concluding remarks</u>

We have thus found that it is only after also identifying the literary and ideological structures used in composing the historical narratives, that a proper understanding of the text can be gained (Clements, 1980: 9-27). It is especially this identifying and understanding of ideological structures in the various texts and the impact they have on the texts and their meanings that have not received enough attention in the past. It is therefore on this aspect of research that this mini-dissertation will focus, in the hope of finding new understandings of the text that will enrich the existing understanding of the texts that research has shown.

In terms of the specific historical problem of 701 BC, it seems unlikely that a satisfactory historical solution will be forthcoming without fresh extra-biblical evidence (Clements, 1980: 9-27). Yet to put the problem in this fashion is to see it in a heavy historicist perspective. What we need is some insight into the nature and origin of this 'legend' in order to show how it arose and what purpose it was intended to serve. It may be that we can discover other factors which will show us how and why this narrative arose and why it gives such a highly coloured picture of events (Clements, 1980: 9-27).

In this ideological study therefore, the focus will be on the ideology and socio-cultural systems employed in the various texts and the ways in which the writers of the different sources encoded these values into the texts. The goal is to ascertain whether an ideological study can assist in finding new meaning in and significance for the various texts. In this way, the modern paradigm and analytical methods can be pushed aside to allow the ancient texts and writers to speak for themselves – also allowing the researcher a chance to look past the differences and idiosyncrasies so often emphasised in research, and to perhaps find a new and significant commonality between the texts.

Chapter 2   Ideological and socio-cultural context of the Ancient Near Eastern World

In order to achieve the goal set out in the first chapter, it is necessary to first explore the many concepts and symbols of the ancient world and the different values they portrayed, as it can now be safely stated that recognition of the importance of the social values is a *sine qua non* for understanding not only the social life of ancient Israel, but also almost every chapter of the entire Old Testament (Botha, 2000: 270). A discussion of the social values and norms that governed the Ancient Near Eastern World is given, followed by description of the historical context of the events described in the texts to be studied. In this way, the discussion of the texts that is to follow will be well grounded.

2.1   Introductory remarks on social values

Every culture colours the way its members perceive and interpret reality (Pilch and Malina, 1998: xv). Though reality is always the same, cultural interpretations of it differ (Pilch and Malina, 1998: xv). The word 'value' describes some general quality and direction in life that human beings are expected to embody in their behaviour – it is an emotionally anchored, general, normative orientation of action in a social system (Pilch and Malina, 1998: xv). 'Values' are also qualities that inhere in 'value objects', which include; self, others, nature, time and space (Pilch and Malina, 1998: xv). Values are constantly revealed in the way people behave as well as in the way they assess value objects (Pilch and Malina, 1998: xv).

It is important to remember that, at an abstract level, any given value bears no reference to specific goals or situations (Pilch and Malina, 1998: xvi). A general value is given specific content or meaning through institutionalisation; a fixed structure of procedures and behaviours that people follow while exercising a value (Pilch and Malina, 1998: xvi).

Institutionalisation can be explained in the following way: In an effort to satisfy their needs or to maintain their group's equilibrium people devise plans (Deist, 2000). Their goals may vary, but those plans that yield the best results for a specific purpose tend to become 'recipes' for action. Not all human needs can be met simultaneously; while some may be satisfied concurrently, others can only receive attention successively. Such needs require prioritising and scheduling, but once a satisfactory recipe for attaining a particular goal has been found it becomes a routine that reduces the burden of individual improvisation (Deist, 2000). Different groups may, however, develop different routines of attaining particular goals; so different routines may be followed in

different places. But once a specific routine has been accepted by a cultural community as the right way of obtaining a specific goal, such a routine becomes a custom/institution.

So a custom/institution typically is 'our' way of achieving our goals, a set of railroad tracks of specific width laid out in a given direction toward a specific goal (Pilch and Malina, 1998: xvii). These institutions mark the general boundaries within which certain qualities and directions of living must take place (for example the generating and nurturing of human beings), and they delineate and define value objects (Pilch and Malina, 1998: xvii). Institutionally, even the individual is delineated by social arrangements called roles and statuses – which are replicated throughout the whole social system because their dimensions distinguish the individual from others, nature, space, time and God (Pilch and Malina, 1998: xvii).

As fixed forms of various aspects in social life, institutions focus on goals required for the maintenance of a social group (Pilch and Malina, 1998: xviii). The purpose of organising a community is, among other things, to exercise some form of control over individual members in order to ensure the proper functioning of society (Deist, 2000). Every society must ensure that its members behave in such a way that the fabric holding it together, in spite of individuals' goals and characters, is not endangered. Therefore every society has some form of social control (Deist, 2000). External control over the behaviour of individuals was achieved either by the use of positive or negative sanctions. In any society then, social institutions take on dynamic expression by endowing persons, things and events with feeling and meaning (Pilch and Malina, 1998: xviii).

'Value' can also be defined as the meaning and feeling that inhere in persons, things and events (Pilch and Malina, 1998: xviii). The reasons for a routine becoming a custom may vary – one criterion would be that a routine fits in with the values shared by the group (Deist, 2000). The value system of a culture, in its turn, consists of a number of goal-orientated 'rules' prescribing the rights, privileges and duties of each member of the group (Deist, 2000).

These rules stating the rights, privileges and duties of community members are not necessarily explicitly verbalised – they are implied in all actions that have the sanction of the group. The valued person, thing or event (the object endowed with meaning and feeling) is often called a 'symbol' – that person, thing or event filled with some socially appreciable value bears the meaningfulness characteristic of a symbol (Pilch and Malina, 1998: xviii).

From this point of view, social institutions are systems of symbols which establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in people (Pilch and Malina, 1998: xix). They accomplish this by projecting concepts of an adequately meaningful, social, human existence and then clothing these concepts with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic (Pilch and Malina, 1998: xix). The way in which values are affixed to

value objects is the process of 'symbolising' (Pilch and Malina, 1998: xix): drawing lines over, under, around, through, into and out of persons, nature, time, space and God, investing the lines thus drawn with feeling, and then perceiving meaning in the emerging configuration (Pilch and Malina, 1998: xix).

2.2 The Social Values of the Ancient Near Eastern World

There are many ways to categorise values; core and peripheral, primary and secondary, means and ends and so on (Pilch and Malina, 1998: xix). Values expected in all human interactions are called core values (Pilch and Malina, 1998: xix), while values that are specific to any given situation and interaction are called peripheral (Pilch and Malina, 1998: xix). Values that facilitate the realisation of core and peripheral values may be called 'means values' (Pilch and Malina, 1998: xix).

Of the major social institutions, the prevailing institution in the ancient world was kinship (Pilch and Malina, 1998: xx). The rules of kinship controlled the main ways in which the core and peripheral values of society were realised (Pilch and Malina, 1998: xx). Because of the centrality of the social institution of kinship, value objects were in the first place assessed by gender (Pilch and Malina, 1998: xx). In the Mediterranean world then, a human being was primarily male or female and human discourse is primarily patterned in rhythms and stanzas which are male and female in quality in both the worlds of human affairs and labour (Pilch and Malina, 1998: xx).

As a value preference, 'being' is favoured over 'doing' (McVann, 1998a: 3), and living in harmony with or being in subjection to nature is preferred to seeking to master it (McVann, 1998a: 3). Consequently, it is no surprise to find that the group oriented, dyadic personalities who people the ancient world tend to deal with problematic situations as follows: activeness is generally favoured as a characteristic of affairs among human beings, whereas passiveness is favoured in affairs having to do with the gods (McVann, 1998a: 3). Both are peripheral values having to do with specific arenas of human interaction (McVann, 1998a: 3). The two attitudes are integrally interconnected and reciprocal – the first flows from the second (McVann, 1998a: 4).

The self-revelation of the deity is the foundation of a people's self-understanding, but this self-understanding has to be maintained through the upholding of laws and customs to ensure the continued presence of the deity (McVann, 1998a: 4). It can also be set out as follows:

- Humanity – The people of the ancient world had the obligation to uphold the divinely instituted laws and cultural traditions which governed their affairs, ensuring their holiness. The ideally energetic pursuit of holiness demanded constant vigilance in the observance of the law, avoidance of impurity and pollution and adherence to the requirements of

one's social status. Considerable social energy was expended in an effort to maintain boundaries and a relatively static equilibrium (McVann, 1998a: 3).

- God(s) – They demanded vigorous observance of the law and enthusiastic endorsement of their traditions. But in their presence, in the face of their proclamations and great works, the only legitimate response is passiveness born of worship and awe (McVann, 1998a: 3).

Closely linked to the abovementioned view, is the value that perceives events in a person's life as somehow fixed or determined (Malina, 1998c: 79). For the ancients, fate was in the control of the deity (Malina, 1998c: 79). The conceivable, possible past and the conceivable, possible future are domains exclusive to the deity (Malina, 1998f: 192).

In light of the above the peasant societies of the Ancient Near East held the present as their first-order temporal preference, the past was their secondary preference, and the future was a very distant and very nearly unthinkable third choice (Malina, 1998f: 189).

The whole purpose of the recorded stories of the ancient world was to direct present experience (Malina, 1998f: 190). Should the present turn problematic, one would look to the past (Malina, 1998f: 190). For this reason patience is a virtue that is highly esteemed in the ancient world (McVann, 1998f: 148). Patience derives from the assumed permanence of religious, cultural and cosmic structures conceived of as unified in a divinely ordained whole (McVann, 1998f: 149). Having patience indicates the acceptance of the status and condition of the individual and/or group (McVann, 1998f: 149). Patience, then, is the acknowledgement of God's ultimate authority and power – it trusts in or waits for God to judge, vindicate, punish or reward (McVann, 1998f: 150).

The deities are often pictured with strong likes and dislikes, which become the criterion for what believers should like and dislike, rather than allowing their personal ideas to determine the standard (Reese, 1998: 121). Being likeable is an attitude controlled by a dualistic view of reality – each person is under the eye of the deity who judges the heart to reward the good and punish the sinners (Reese, 1998: 121). This belief prevents members from acting merely to satisfy human desires (Reese, 1998: 121).

The core values of the Mediterranean world in general and the Bible specifically are the values honour and shame (Plevnik, 1998: 106).

Honour is a claim to worth that is publicly acknowledged: to have honour is to have publicly acknowledged worth (Plevnik, 1998: 107), to 'be honoured' is to be ascribed such worth or be acclaimed for it (Plevnik, 1998: 107). Shame, as the opposite of honour, is a claim to worth that is publicly denied and repudiated (Plevnik, 1998: 107): to 'be shamed' is always negative – it

means to be denied or to be diminished in honour. On the other hand, to 'have shame' is always positive – it means to be concerned about one's honour (Plevnik, 1998: 107). All human beings seek to have shame; no human being cares to be shamed (Plevnik, 1998: 107).

'Status' refers to the position in a social system which is evaluated in terms of what others perceive that position to be. Essentially, status defines who a person is. A role is defined as what a person is expected to do socially on the basis of status. Often the role a person plays in society already symbolises his/her status, but certain statuses in society are marked by specific symbols, for example dress, living quarters etc.

Honour is primarily a group value – Individual members of a group share in its honour (Plevnik, 1998: 107). Honour is also a value embodied by adult males, while (positive) shame is a value embodied by adult females (Plevnik, 1998: 107). Individual males must achieve honour in public contests: it must be claimed, gained and defended before one's peers (Plevnik, 1998: 107).

Communicativeness is a key strategy for establishing, maintaining and defending honour (McVann, 1998c: 28). It can also serve as a strategy for attempting to shame others (McVann, 1998c: 28). Communicativeness is thus effective, valued and prized if it endorses and explicates the world view and ethos held by the culture in general (McVann, 1998c: 29). It is inadequate, untrustworthy and contemptible if it challenges, denies or repudiates the culture's core values (McVann, 1998c: 29).

When a person or thing is acclaimed to be of social worth and worthy of priority, he/she/it is evaluated as 'prominent' (Seeman, 1998: 166). As a form of ascription, prominence is a mode of classification which confers limit-breaking or limit-defining status to a person or thing (Seeman, 1998: 166). Thus, prominence is a value that serves as a means for establishing and/or confirming honour (Seeman, 1998: 167). In every case, priority implies legitimisation and the power to wield social commitment (Seeman, 1998: 168). Therefore honour is associated with a value cluster that includes strength, courage, daring, valour, generosity and wisdom (Plevnik, 1998: 107). Weakness, cowardice and lack of generosity indicate lack of honour, and hence, are despised (Plevnik, 1998: 107). For a male, to 'lose honour' is to 'be shamed' – which involves a loss of repute and worth in the eyes of others, especially one's peers (Plevnik, 1998: 107). It results from a public exposure of a man's weakness, cowardice, pretension or foolishness (Plevnik, 1998: 108).

But what behaviour is termed as cowardly? In this respect the terms honour and shame are vacant; they are really high context words whose content must be deduced from actual social behaviour (Plevnik, 1998: 107). Israel's claim to honour is its special relationship to the Lord, the evidence that God is on the side of Israel (Plevnik, 1998: 108-109). This claim, of course, depends on evidence for God's continued interest in his chosen people. The righteous person's

claim to honour is evidence of a special relationship with God because of reliance on God's help (Plevnik, 1998: 108-109). A calamity, of course, points in the opposite direction.

The female domain is that of shame in the sense of focal concern for honour; such shame is neither won nor claimed (Plevnik, 1998: 107). It is, rather, presupposed and then maintained as a veil of privacy and of personal and sexual integrity (Plevnik, 1998: 107). Shame is therefore not associated with strength, courage or wisdom, but rather with privacy, reserve and purity (Plevnik, 1998: 107).

These core values flow over into many other value clusters of the ancient world. These related clusters will now be discussed.

The Hebrew Scriptures relentlessly censure nudity, because nudity became inextricably linked with issues of purity and pollution in myth and practice (Eilberg-Schwartz, 1997: 34 and Neyrey, 1998e: 136). While many cultures are preoccupied with the body, there are specific, local reasons why the body emerges as problematic in any given cultural formation (Eilberg-Schwartz, 1997: 34).

In ancient Judaism the human body was the object around which conflicting cultural representations met and clashed. Ancient Judaism was not a tidy entity: as with all cultures it had its own set of conflicting impulses that struggled against one another for hegemony (Eilberg-Schwartz, 1997: 35). In the case of Judaism, it was the human body – humans are understood as created in the image of God, yet God has no body; procreation is enjoined as a mandate from God, yet semen is considered polluting. This idea of cultural conflicts explains why certain objects arrest more attention than others – those objects around which conflicting representations revolve are the ones in which vast cultural and symbolic resources are invested as both a consequence of and strategy for dealing with the conflict in question (Eilberg-Schwartz, 1997: 35). Objects caught between incompatible impulses are evocative, puzzling and dangerous. These conflicted objects make valuable symbolic resources (Eilberg-Schwartz, 1997: 36): because these objects are volatile their power and energy can be transferred by association to other more stable cultural meanings. They can thus be used to symbolise and hence empower a variety of cultural messages, and these established cultural messages they are now associated with help to control an otherwise unruly object (Eilberg-Schwartz, 1997: 36).

Judaism is a tradition preoccupied with the body, especially the government of the body and certain bodily processes that were regarded as problematic (Eilberg-Schwartz, 1997: 37). It is in the writings of the priest, especially Leviticus, that the boundaries and integrity of the body arouse sustained interest. Leviticus pays particular attention to what passes in and out of orifices, particularly the mouth and genitals – certain kinds of foods may not be taken into the

body and various genital emissions create pollution. Concern with the body's integrity expresses itself in elaborate rules concerning skin diseases as well as through interest in congenital or accidental disfigurations of the body. In addition to these concerns about bodily boundaries and integrity, Leviticus strictly regulates the use to which people put their bodies. This government of the body has both prophylactic and moral motivations – many of the bodily regulations are intended to protect the sacrificial cult from contamination. But the concern is not exclusively a cultic matter – Israel is enjoined to be holy, just as God is holy. Being holy includes observing the regulations governing what goes in and out of the body. While being impure is not considered a sin, the state of uncleanness does signify an alienation from God (Eilberg-Schwartz, 1997: 37).

Douglas has argued that the body is frequently a symbol of society; thus the dangers and concerns of the social structure are reproduced on the human body. "The threatened boundaries of their body politics would be well mirrored in their care for the integrity, unity and purity of the physical body" (Douglas, 1966: 124). She also suggests that the Levitical restrictions on the body stem from a concern with wholeness (Douglas, 1966: 124). The elaboration of the rules around the body was in part an attempt to control a puzzling object.

For this reason clothing of any sort was valuable (Neyrey, 1998a: 22). This was because it was not merely body covering, it indicated a person's role and status (Neyrey, 1998a: 22). For this reason it is best viewed in terms of the values of honour and shame.

Cultures structured according to kinship, honour and shame divide the world in terms of male and female (Neyrey, 1998a: 22). Clothing could signal gender, nationality, wealth and religious status (Neyrey, 1998a: 22-23). Cultural attitudes towards women directed that they be defensive of their chastity (Neyrey, 1998e: 136). This concern was expressed by the expectation that women would be oriented toward the private space of the house, which would keep them from public areas where their virtue might be compromised (Neyrey, 1998e: 136). Such concern for female virtue was also realised in the expectation that women's bodies be clothed as fully as possible (Neyrey, 1998e: 137). The result was that loss of clothing was synonymous with loss of virtue (Neyrey, 1998e: 137). Public nudity inevitably meant 'shame' for them, for their chastity was compromised.

In regard to men we find a comparable pattern: just as women's organs are occasionally called her shame, so the penis is also referred to as Adam's shame (Neyrey, 1998e: 137). Thus a man may also be shamed if he is stripped of his clothes by an aggressor and his male member is displayed (Neyrey, 1998e: 137). This kind of shame also occurs when the buttocks of exiles and captives are involuntarily exposed - the higher the ranking of the naked captive, the greater the shame (Neyrey, 1998e: 137). One is shamed then, when involuntarily stripped naked by another

(Neyrey, 1998e: 138). Yet a person may also be shamed if someone aggressively exposes either his penis or buttocks to him (Neyrey, 1998e: 138). Such a display is a claim of power and superiority, for masculine strength is symbolised by the penis (Neyrey, 1998e: 138).

Clothing can also be viewed from the perspective of purity and pollution (Neyrey, 1998a: 24). Purity refers to the perception of things and persons as being 'in place' according to the value system of any given culture (Neyrey, 1998e: 138). So it has to do with the making and maintenance of boundaries (Neyrey, 1998e: 139). Pollution refers to what is 'out of place' (Neyrey, 1998e: 138). The physical body was regulated with the same systematic concern for order as the Temple and the body politic (Neyrey, 1998e: 139). This meant concern for specific and precise classification. Whenever a person's role or status becomes blurred or ambiguous, the orderly system is threatened (Neyrey, 1998e: 139).

Purity is threatened in four ways: from outside, from inside, at the margins and boundaries and from inconsistencies or internal contradictions (Pilch, 1998d: 171). Clothing is such a boundary for the physical body, which is a microcosm of the social system (Neyrey, 1998e: 140). Clothing begets clarity, and clarity denotes purity (Neyrey, 1998e: 140). On the level of the physical body, these social concerns are expressed in concern over nudity – either the absence of clear boundaries, the loss of distinguishing marks of status or the uncovering of nakedness (Neyrey, 1998e: 138). Nudity means the complete absence of boundaries – the body is accessible to any and every one, destroying its exclusivity. Thus nudity was not just shameful but unclean as well (Neyrey, 1998e: 140).

In light of the above, healing can also be seen as a cultural technique or strategy for restoring a person to well-being (Pilch, 1998c: 102). Lack of human well-being is a shameful situation, hence restoration to proper human well-being, or healing, is a restoration to honour and meaning of life (Pilch, 1998c: 102). This is due to the fact that illness is a culturally constructed and interpreted phenomenon, it reflects a social and cultural view of socially disvalued states and includes more than what science identifies as disease (Pilch, 1998c: 103). Mostly the concern is about boundaries, what the community feared was pollution, not contagion (Pilch, 1998c: 104).

Another of the core values, and the main pillar, of the culture reflected in the ancient world is family-centeredness (McVann, 1998e: 75). The principle of collective responsibility, ancestral and contemporary, underlies much of biblical prophecy and historiography (Deist, 2000). This is because everybody's survival depends almost solely on the full participation of all members of the group (Deist, 2000).

In a subsistence economy the goals of the community are very basic – providing enough food and shelter for its members, caring for each other (especially those who cannot care for

themselves), and guaranteeing the safety of the community as far as possible (Halpern, 1991: 12). To achieve these goals it is necessary that there are enough hands to carry out the tasks crucial for the group's survival (Halpern, 1991: 12). For this reason such a high premium is placed on large families and fertility. An ancestor shines, and the descendants prosper; a king sins, and the nation suffers (Halpern, 1991: 12). Thus staunch loyalty to the family and obedience to family authorities are constant features of the culture reflected in the ancient world (McVann, 1998e: 75). The value of family-centeredness derives from three distinct but closely related components (McVann, 1998e: 75):

- Honour and shame – social standing, or one's worth in the community, is of inestimable value in cultural contexts where the well-being of the collective is of paramount importance (McVann, 1998e: 75). The idea of the autonomy of the individual is entirely absent from the societies and cultures reflected in the ancient world (McVann, 1998e: 75). Family-centeredness should thus be understood directly literal: the family is the centre of the social interaction of its members and the system of meaning out of which such cultures arose (McVann, 1998e: 75). The individual (primarily) responsible for the procurement and maintenance of the family's social standing is the patriarch of the family (McVann, 1998e: 76).

- Tradition – the honour paid to father and mother by their children is their due not only because they have given them life but because they convey the tradition to them (McVann, 1998e: 76). Tradition here refers to the handing down of established and time-tested communal wisdom which simultaneously grounds and encompasses identification with the culture (McVann, 1998e: 76). Thus, a circular movement of societal formation is established: tradition grounds and informs family structure, and family structure perpetuates tradition (McVann, 1998e: 76). But these common religious and cultural traditions are reflected both in the individual family and in the nation as a whole – the nation is thought to replicate the family on a large scale (McVann, 1998e: 76-77). Authority in the larger segments of society is shaped on the model provided by the *pater familias* (McVann, 1998e: 77).

- Land – the land provides the framework in which honour/shame and tradition are knitted together into a single whole (McVann, 1998e: 77). The land is a gift from the deity, and therefore sacred (McVann, 1998e: 77). Control and maintenance of the land are not simply matters of survival, but are questions of honour and shame and tradition as well (McVann, 1998e: 77). Expulsion from the land is catastrophe because it necessarily seems to mean the destruction of tradition and the families who live by it, while restoration of the land is a cause for celebration (McVann, 1998e: 77).

Family-centeredness is also the Mediterranean cultural value that governs the value of cooperativeness, which is best interpreted as 'help' rendered to those in need (Pilch, 1998b: 35). Primarily, it contributes to and strengthens the tight-knit family structure characteristic of the Mediterranean world (Pilch, 1998b: 35). This is because, in the Mediterranean world, compassion is a value rooted primarily in kinship obligations, whether natural or fictive (Pilch, 1998a: 30).

From this perspective, compassion is a peripheral value that governs and guides kinship considerations (Pilch, 1998a: 30). Therefore the primary analogue for compassion is indeed the parent (Pilch, 1998a: 31). But in the Hebrew Bible it is God, not human beings, that is the most common subject of the verb 'to show compassion' (Pilch, 1998a: 31). In many of these occurrences the word compassion is linked with mercy and situated in the context of God's covenant promises (Pilch, 1998a: 31).

Another value frequently associated with covenant is 'steadfast love'. This is a value that governs human interactions in the Mediterranean world and draws its meaning primarily from interactions in this social context (Pilch, 1998e: 184). It refers to the debt of gratitude or interpersonal obligation for an unrepayable favour received (Malina, 1998e: 92). Through such a debt of obligation, a person is bound to another in terms of ongoing generalised reciprocity – the idea that beneficiaries owe a debt of gratitude to their benefactors (Malina, 1998e: 92). Persons incur this sort of debt by birth, choice or happenstance (Malina, 1998e: 92). But those toward whom one has such a debt are equally obliged to maintain the relationship by further favours, since this is ongoing reciprocity (Malina, 1998e: 92).

The reason why 'steadfast love' is related to 'covenant' is that the basis for this sort of debt of interpersonal obligation is a covenant or contract between unequals (Malina, 1998e: 93). In each case, the superior party gives life to or sustains the life of the inferior one (Malina, 1998e: 93). For such gifts the inferior one owes especially honour, which entails practical support as well as full respect (Malina, 1998e: 93). On the other hand, for seeing to the honour and well-being of the superior, the superior likewise owes (Malina, 1998e: 93).

Together with the abovementioned family-centeredness is found the idea of 'dyadism' (Neyrey, 1998b: 53). Individual people are not known or valued because of their uniqueness, but in terms of their dyad – some other person or thing (Neyrey, 1998b: 54). This means that individuals basically depend on others for their sense of identity, for their understanding of their role and status in society, for clues to the duties and rights they have and for indications of what is honourable and shameful behaviour (Neyrey, 1998c: 94). The group communicates what is expected and proper, and the individual responds accordingly (Neyrey, 1998c: 95). Members of

an extended family saw themselves and were seen by others as embedded in the head of the family (Osiek, 1998: 176). Personal identity and knowledge of this sort belong in a cultural world which is highly ordered and clearly, extensively and carefully classified, so that there is a place for everyone and everyone in his place (Neyrey, 1998b: 54). It follows that such people tend to think of themselves and others in stereotypes which tell of their role and status (Neyrey, 1998b: 54).

Group orientation indicates that the individual should always 'seek the good of the group' and not pursue individualistic objectives (Neyrey, 1998c: 96). In this context then, once again, great value is placed on obedience, faithfulness and loyalty to tradition (Neyrey, 1998b: 55). This group orientation is clearly expressed in the importance given to authority (Neyrey, 1998c: 97).

The cluster of values that comprise authoritarianism is rooted in the social experience of authority, nearly always sanctioned by force (Malina, 1998a: 12). 'Authority/power' refers to the socially recognised and approved ability to control the behaviour of others and is common to all societies (Malina, 1998a: 12). But what is not common is the nature of sanctions involved for not complying with the directions or commands of the authority (Malina, 1998a: 12). When the prevailing sanction is force, there is good reason to believe that the society in question is authoritarian (Malina, 1998a: 12-13).

The whole of the ancient Mediterranean world was a world of authoritarianism, characterised by the following features (Malina, 1998a: 13). Authoritarian societies repeat and reinforce the focus on force as sanction with a number of values, which include the expectation of: Total submissiveness to authority, a tendency to exercise power for its own sake which causes both admiration for the application of physical force and a high regard for a person's ability to endure pain (Malina, 1998a: 13). These force-related values are often clustered with the following features: A tendency to be very conventional because of a great sensitivity to group pressure (Malina, 1998a: 13). This causes an anti-introspective personality, stereotypical thinking and a tendency to shift responsibility from the individual onto outside forces (Malina, 1998a: 13-16).

Assyrian ideology was of this 'imperialistic type'[9]: an ideology of unbalance (Cf. Lawson Younger, 1990).This type of ideology has the aim "of bringing about the exploitation of man by

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[9] Imperialism has acquired so many meanings that its use proves to be problematic. Twaddle (1985: 377-379) discusses imperialism and concludes: "Probably imperialism is best defined in some medium manner. Imperialism is probably best separated analytically from both 'capitalism' and 'colonialism' and treated principally as the pursuit of intrusive and unequal economic policy in other countries supported by significant degrees of coercion."

man, by providing the motivation to receive the situation of inequality as 'right', as based on qualitative differences, as entrusted to the 'right' people for the good of all….Ideology has the function of presenting exploitation in a favourable light to the exploited, as advantageous to the disadvantaged. It provides those who surrender their wealth, their work, their life, with a counterpart of a non-physical but moral, religious, cultural character" (Liverani, 1973: 298).[10]

The imperialistic ideology is characterized by three 'roles': the beneficiary, the agent and the victim (Olmstead, 1921: 345-382). The agents of the ideology are the receivers of its ideological propaganda, and the victims of an imperialistic ideology perceive it as an ideology of terror or 'calculated frightfulness' (Olmstead, 1921: 345-382). "In the absence of mass media of communication, terror, spreading from village to village and town to town, was the only means of softening up an enemy population in advance" (Saggs, 1963: 149, 154). Even in the process of occupation and de-culturation: the breaking down of the foreign ideologically active centres, the deportation of certain sections of populations, the impositioning of linguistic unification and the provincial administration - this ideology of terror enhanced the maintenance of control (Olmstead, 1921: 345-382).

A concept connected closely to that of authoritarianism is that of defeat (Ford, 1998: 45), which can also be seen against the backdrop of the values honour and shame – the one who defeats another gains or enhances honour, while relative to the person or nation defeated, defeat means shame, pure and simple (Ford, 1998: 45). Defeat may be individual, but much more commonly it is social in aspect – one party is conquered by another (Ford, 1998: 45). This may arise when that party fails to make a riposte to a challenge with regard to honour or when that party fails to defend his/her honour successfully (Ford, 1998: 45). Thus, to be defeated is to be dishonoured, to be reduced to shame, to become a nonentity – the condition of life most despicable in the eyes of the vast majority of Mediterranean peoples (Ford, 1998: 45).

Defeat is graphically depicted by certain actions perpetrated by the conqueror who seeks to shame the individual, group or nation, often reducing them to a status below that of a human being (Ford, 1998: 45). What the conqueror attempts to create is a reversal of status – which is shown in a number of ways closely associated with the physical body and all that it symbolises (Ford, 1998: 45). The conqueror seeks to eliminate all order and classification in the life of the victim and seeks to reduce the social and religious status of the person(s) by exile or deportation – destroying the familial and fictive kinship boundaries and the spaces sacred to the defeated one (Ford, 1998: 45-46). The victim is often obliged to live in a state of ritual impurity, he/she is

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[10] Liverani's understanding of ideology is influenced by Eco.

fettered, kept in darkness, stripped, shaved and forced to eat food which is against his/her dietary laws (Ford, 1998: 46). The victim may also endure physical violence, like scourging, a ring through the nose etc (Ford, 1998: 46). In addition to physical shame the conqueror often seeks to torment the victim with mockery, gloating and malicious glee. The verbal abuse is important because a word is dynamic, creating what it names (Ford, 1998: 46).

The opposite of authority is of course 'freedom' – the ability to choose to be free of obstacles in order to attain some end or goal (Malina, 1998d: 85). Freedom is synonymous with liberty, specifically the freedom of a group and its members not to be under the dominion of any other group and directed toward the service of their deity (Malina, 1998d: 85).

Freedom is a group freedom without submission to alien peoples, yet with limits defined by the goal of this group freedom – the service of the deity (Malina, 1998d: 85). The core value is thus the quality of the group being finite (limited by the deity's rights and honours) and free (political and social son-subjection and non-submission) (Malina, 1998d: 86). Yet the seeking of change or novelty is normally disapproved of and is met with hostility (McVann, 1998b: 19). Indeed, the general orientation is precisely the opposite – stability and constancy (McVann, 1998b: 19). This is because change is fraught with fear of the unknown, bringing pollution and chaos in its wake (McVann, 1998b: 19). There is one advocated form of change, conversion, which implies a call to return wholeheartedly to the demands of the covenant (McVann, 1998b: 20).

An attitude of compliance, of a willingness to conform one's actions to the wishes or desires of another or to cultural standards is a value highly regarded in the ancient world (McVann, 1998d: 33). Compliance is closely related to the virtues of humility, meekness, obedience and loyalty in a culture which commends persons for recognising and accepting the social rank in which they find themselves, and disapproves of jumping class, ethnic or other group boundaries (McVann, 1998d: 33). It is an integral aspect of cultural cohesion in societies in which strict adherence to social codes and patterns of living is demanded, enforced and rewarded, and resistance is punished (McVann, 1998d: 33).

Compliance figures significantly in the code of honour and shame (McVann, 1998d: 33). Adherence to the law, custom and tradition is a matter of honour; disregard for or defiance of them is cause for shame (McVann, 1998d: 33-34). But compliance should not be mistaken for passivity, for it represents the active upholding of and participation in a culture's value system which centres on respect for authority and tradition (McVann, 1998d: 34). Compliance then, occupies a place of central importance in the culture of the people of the ancient world, because the compliant person, by his/her actions and behaviour, demonstrates conviction regarding the

system of cultural and religious values which constitute and order the society of which he/she is a member (McVann, 1998d: 34).

The social and political picture relevant to this research shows various city-states, all governed by a ruler, mostly located in the plains and commanding only very small territories (Soggin, 1993: 19). The capital was surrounded by countryside in which there could have been lesser centres (Soggin, 1993: 19). The basic productive unit reflected in the Hebrew Bible is the farm; artisanship was a side line (Deist, 2000). These farms were not privately owned but belonged to the whole community: in some or other way the land was distributed among households for cultivation and often marked out by boundary stones (Deist, 2000). Since the property allotted to each household was determined by chance, some properties would have been better than others. But once the boundaries of each allotment had been settled, no one had the right ever to enlarge his property by shifting or removing the markers (Deist, 2000). Although allotted to it, the piece of land did not 'belong' to the household – meaning that people sharing the same allotted area are, of course, bound by fate – they belong to each other and stick to each other (Deist, 2000). It was this custom of property rights that provided Hebrew writers with two significant metaphors; the first concerns the ideology of ownership of the land, the second the relationship between Yahweh and his people.

The Deuteronomists represented the past through the employment of an economic custom – Joshua 13-22 tells how the land had initially been distributed among the Israelite tribes through the casting of the lot. On the other hand, there are the religious metaphors of Israel being Yahweh's 'inheritance' or 'allotted share', and Yahweh being the believers' share. A household's 'share' or 'inheritance' was its livelihood; the expression 'allotment and inheritance' therefore came to mean 'subsistence' or 'sustenance' (Deist, 2000). Because the land belonged to the village and nobody had title to it, it was there for the sustenance of the whole village (Deist, 2000).

The ancient world is a world of limited good; everything that exists is perceived to exist in limited and fixed amounts that simply cannot be increased by either more hard work or greater intelligence and diligence (Neyrey, 1998d: 122-123). In fact, any augmentation can only take place by depriving others (Neyrey, 1998d: 123). This idea is a social construct, a product of human imagination and reasoning, which views the world as a zero-sum game (Neyrey, 1998d: 122).

Several things tend to occur when people perceive the world in this manner. Firstly, they will be reluctant to advance beyond their peers, because of the sanctions they know will be levelled against them (Neyrey, 1998d: 123). Secondly, the one who is seen or known to acquire more

becomes much more vulnerable to the envy of his neighbours (Neyrey, 1998d: 124). Of course, the most precious of goods in the ancient world was honour (Neyrey, 1998d: 124). The zero-sum nature of the ancient world thus led to a rather static picture (Oakman, 1998: 173).

In the light of the foregoing one may say that the cultural world in the text of the Hebrew Bible displays a mixed economy, namely of reciprocity and of redistribution (Deist, 2000). The biblical text is deeply embedded into these specific economic contexts of production, distribution and consumption (Deist, 2000). Such knowledge may assist in finding the involved cultural meaning of terms and interpreting metaphors implied in the text.

2.3 <u>Historic Contextual Placing</u>

Now that a description has been given of the ideology and culture of the Ancient Near East, the texts that are going to be studied should be placed into their historical context. What follows is an exposition of the context in which the events, portrayed in the texts, took place. This serves as a further clarification for the actual study of the different texts in the next chapter.

The greater part of the history of Israel took place in the region to the west of the Jordan and the Dead Sea (Coote and Whitelam, 1987: 21). Here they necessarily came into conflict with the indigenous populations, but one thing must always be remembered in this connection: Canaan has almost always been a region whose destiny has been decided elsewhere, by the great powers and their politics (Coote and Whitelam, 1987: 21). "The domination of this area by non-Palestinian political powers is one of the most important constants of Palestinian history" (Coote and Whitelam, 1987: 21).

This situation arises from the fact that the region has always been the bridge between Africa and Asia, and therefore between Egypt on the one side and the Hittite and Mesopotamian empires on the other (Coote and Whitelam, 1987: 21). This meant that the region became the theatre for encounters which were often diplomatic (sometimes military) between whatever Mesopotamian power was in the ascendant and Egypt (Coote and Whitelam, 1987: 21). Moreover, Canaan was seen as the launching pad for any attack on Egypt, while for Egypt it was an advance defensive post (Coote and Whitelam, 1987: 21). It is clear that all of the great powers were ambitious to control it – from the end of the second millennium BC to the middle of the first millennium we find constant conflict between Egypt on the one hand and the Hittites, Assyrians and Babylonians on the other (Coote and Whitelam, 1987: 21).

The sources at our disposal, contained in the Hebrew Bible and the works of Flavius Josephus, are essentially religious and apologetic – they offer an idealised and partial framework of events (Coote and Whitelam, 1987: 21). But the Assyrian historical texts are also written from the point of view of the Assyrian political ideology, in which everyone has a precise role: the king of Aššur, the people of Assyria, the foreign kings, the foreign peoples and the dynamics of the encounter and opposition between the respective cultures (Zaccagnini, 1982: 418). The ethnographic remarks concerning the enemy are in most cases confined to derogatory, incidental and repetitive notations (Zaccagnini, 1982: 418). Except for descriptions of foreign landscapes, the descriptions are rarely concerned with foreign people, their culture, or their way of life (Zaccagnini, 1982: 418). When these are encountered in the texts, the purposes of their inclusion is "not to record and describe the diversities of the 'other cultures', but to celebrate the Assyrian self-legitimization as a hegemonic, unique power over the rest of the world" (Zaccagnini, 1982: 418).

The Assyrian armies, (who after the *coups d'etat* in Israel and Damascus) invaded Aram, Israel and the Phoenician city-states, forcing them to pay tribute, now became the dominant feature of the second half of the eighth century BC and the beginning of the seventh (Lawson Younger., 1990). While it had been possible for statelets to contain the threat of the great Eastern Empire in the time of the dynasty of Omri, the occupation of the throne of Israel and Damascus by less gifted (perhaps pro-Assyrian) rulers destroyed a century of balance which had been laboriously achieved between the nations of the regions (Coote and Whitelam, 1987). The ancient hostilities between Israel and the Arameans began again, and this paved the way for the Assyrian armies to move westwards. Now any resistance offered, tended to be local (Coote and Whitelam, 1987).

The Assyrian expeditions very quickly led to the incorporation into the empire, first of the Aramaean kingdoms and Phoenician cities, and then, bit by bit, Israel (Donner, 1977: 416). In addition, the kingdom of Judah was made a vassal of Assyria (Donner, 1977: 416). Babylon had been the cultural centre of Mesopotamia from time immemorial, but it was Assyria that controlled the destinies of the region and its adjacent territories for centuries; from the last years of the second millennium BC to the end of the seventh century (Donner, 1977: 416). Its seizure of power was gradual but led to "an empire of a completely different type, an unparalleled power structure" (Donner, 1977: 416).

Assyria's main characteristics were that it maintained a permanent and professional army equipped with war chariots and mounted cavalry, and that it had a complete lack of scruples which led it to perpetuate all kinds of atrocities which terrorized people into submitting (Lawson Younger, 1990). It sacked cities and wrought destruction which left little behind in an enemy

country, followed by heavy tributes which drew off the little that had been left (Lawson Younger, 1990). Babylonia was the only nation to which Assyria seemed to have shown some respect. Assyria recognised its intellectual debt to Babylon and the Babylonian contribution to civilisation generally, so although Babylon had submitted under Tiglath-Pileser III, it was allowed a degree of autonomy by means of a form of personal union, even if the governor was always an Assyrian of royal blood. However, this situation, with privileges extending up to a certain point, did not prevent the Assyrians from dealing extremely harshly with their *alma mater* where they thought it necessary (Lawson Younger, 1990).

The successive stages of the incorporation of a nation into the empire can be summed up as follows: First a vassal relationship of the traditional type (limited sovereignty, foreign policy completely dependant upon that of Assyria, exaction of heavy tribute) was established with the nation in question (Donner, 1977: 418). At the first sign of rebellion there was direct military intervention, followed by the nomination of a pro-Assyrian ruler (Donner, 1977: 418). This operation was often combined with drastic changes of frontier, followed by the incorporation of new territory thus obtained into the empire (Donner, 1977: 418). Alternatively, the land was ceded to loyal vassals (Donner, 1977: 418). With all this of course went a marked increase in the tribute exacted. At the first sign of any form of opposition, however small, there was again decisive military action – this time definitive – followed by the deportation of the ruler responsible and his replacement by an Assyrian governor (Donner, 1977: 418). The remaining territory was then incorporated into the empire, and the leading class was deported so as to leave the country leaderless (Donner, 1977: 418). New ethnic groups were also imported (Donner, 1977: 418).

At this point the intrinsic weakness of all these empires should be pointed out – a feature which often led to their rapid decline (Lawson Younger, 1990). They were all made up of a multitude of nations which had been subjected in a more or less violent and brutal way, were inhabited by different populations and had one thing in common: hostility towards the dominant power (so they were basically centrifugal) (Lawson Younger, 1990). This very mass of people who had to be controlled, coupled with the extension of these empires which had grown up in a completely inorganic way, and the difficulties and slowness of communications made them virtually ungovernable after a time (Lawson Younger, 1990). This meant that more and more resources had to be devoted to repression, with a consequent waste of men and means and the destruction of riches.

That said, in the eighth century BC, the power of Assyrian arms ranged far to the west, taking up permanent station in the region of the Mediterranean littoral (Tadmor, 1958: 37-39). In the last

quarter of the eighth century BC Judah had remained one of the few nations in the region which were still independent, a survivor of the Assyrian invasions – a vassal of the empire in the first phase of subjection (Donner, 1977: 418). Judah could thus now consider itself the sole heir of Israelite tradition and worship, as well as of the Davidic ideology and state (Donner, 1977: 418). Typically, Assyria faced coalitions of western petty states (Tadmor, 1958: 37-39).

During the above-mentioned century, the western defence strategy underwent a shift (Tadmor, 1958: 37-39). They started electing the dilatory technique of fortress warfare – this was the only option open to those who sought Assyrian aid; to hold out until relief arrived (Tadmor, 1958: 37-39). But the same pattern soon began to characterize anti-Assyrian forces – western strategy from about 720 BC onwards was to huddle behind city walls (Tadmor, 1958: 37-39 and Lie, 1929: 53-57).

The Assyrian policy was to deport certain elements of a defeated nation, in order to undermine the region's capacity for revolt (Lie, 1929: 20-22, 120-123). By the last quarter of the century, these deportations had depleted western manpower and resettlement had thinned the rebel ranks – resulting in reduced resistance against Sennacherib in 701; no power that had suffered deportations joined the revolt, only Sidon, Ashkelon and Judah stood up. The deportation tactic left the allies with no choice; they were thrown back on their terrain, forts and storehouses and were consequently driven from unified field-force tactics to conscript-based, static defence tactics, because this 'hedgehog defence'[11] (a pattern of self-contained, fortified nodes) required fewer skilled troops and less expensive weaponry than field tactics would have demanded (Tadmor, 1958: 37-39).

In the Deuteronomistic history and Chronicles Hezekiah, along with Josiah, is considered one of the greatest kings that Judah ever had (Botha, 2000b). A political judgement however, which takes into account the results he obtained rather than his intentions and his religious faith, would certainly have to be much more severe. Hezekiah left the country divided and almost in ruins apart from the capital, which, moreover, suffered the after-effects of a long siege.

Ahaz left to his successor, Hezekiah, a vassal kingdom of Assyria, torn and impoverished by its predatory neighbour (Reviv, 1979: 194-201). During the first decade of his reign Hezekiah followed the political line of his father and refrained from making far-reaching changes (Reviv, 1979: 194-201). A first anti-Assyrian coalition, formed in 720 by some city-states of the region (including what was left of the Aramaean and Philistine kingdoms of Gaza, the subject peoples of Samaria and supported by Egypt), does not seem to have included Judah in its ranks (Pritchard, 1969: 285). The forces of this coalition were defeated and the few remaining

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[11] Term invented by Liddel Hart, B.F.

independent nations were attacked – the repression seems to have been harsh everywhere (Pritchard, 1969: 285). This could possibly have led to his change of attitude in the course of the rebellion of 713-711 (Reviv, 1979: 194-201). Judah was the main political and military power in the region after 712 (Reviv, 1979: 194-201). It is depicted as comparatively large, strong and prosperous. Encouraged by and aware of the established position of the kingdom and its widespread political affiliations, the inhabitants of Judah had confidence in their future and their prestige (Reviv, 1979: 194-201).

Hezekiah revolted irrevocably shortly after Sargon's death in 705 (Bright, 1966: 282). In 705, on the death of Sargon II, his successor Sennacherib found the empire in revolt and had a long struggle to secure the throne (Bright, 1966: 282). The general uprising centred in Babylon – Indeed, 2 Kings 20: 12-23, though displaced because of thematic organization, relates that Babylonian emissaries were sent to Jerusalem to coordinate political and military activity and to examine Hezekiah's treasury (Reviv, 1979: 198). The delegation was warmly received in the Judean capital and informed by Hezekiah of his preparations – see 2 Kings 20, 2 Chronicles 32, Isaiah 39 (Reviv, 1979: 198). So strategically central was the Babylonian role in the revolt that it took Sennacherib four years to sufficiently secure his southern front, enabling him to risk a march to the west (Bright, 1966: 282-283).

Hezekiah seems to have taken the initiative in the region (Bright, 1966: 282). According to 2 Kings 18 Hezekiah began his career with a religious reform (the text of 2 Chronicles 29-31 describes this reform in much more detail). The kingdom of Judah was re-organised on closely connected political, cultic and military levels (Bright, 1966: 280-282). The first step, according to Chronicles (2 Chronicles 20), was taken in Jerusalem, when the Temple and its priestly corps were sanctified and ritual was renewed in accordance with the custom before the days of Ahaz. But this purifying of the Temple of foreign cults introduced by Ahaz can be interpreted as an announcement of political independence from Assyria as well as the expression of a campaign for strengthening national unity (Bright, 1966: 277-280). That the cult was purified in areas dominated by Assyria suggests that the Assyrian government was unable to counter Hezekiah's agitation and his influence over the local Israelite population, which was probably related to his political influence in the central hill-country (Reviv, 1979: 198).

Just as purifying the cult had a political tone, so Judah's expansion towards the plain of Philistia implied territorial ambitions (Reviv, 1979: 198). He defeated the Philistines as far as Gaza, thus succeeding in incorporating into the kingdom some of the territories lost in the time of Ahaz (Reviv, 1979: 198). Judah's conquests in the region were made possible after the year 712 and before 701, probably in collaboration with Ashkelon, the ascending power in Philistia (Bright, 1966: 278ff).

Hezekiah was allied with Sidon, which had been in open revolt since 709, hoping to preserve their advantage in rare earths and other trade (Bright, 1966: 283). He was also backed by Egypt, who had been routed by Sargon in 720 and was hoping to recoup its influence in Asia (Bright, 1966: 283). One suspects that Sidon, Egypt and Hezekiah together engineered a coup in Ashkelon: The Assyrian friendly government of Sharruludari was annexed and replaced with a rebel party headed by Sidqa, who annexed the forts of accomodationist Ashdod (Bright, 1966: 283). Hezekiah himself deposed the pro-Assyrian king Padi and installed a puppet government in Eqron (between Judah and Ashdod) (Bright, 1966: 283).

During the years 703-702, because Sennacherib was campaigning in the southern and eastern parts of his kingdom, he was unable to take immediate action against the newly-formed alliances and the subversion of the allies (Bright, 1966: 282). The delay helped Hezekiah to fortify his kingdom (Bright, 1966: 283). For notwithstanding his elaborate fabric of alliances, Hezekiah's national defence strategy remained fortress-based – his measures all reflect the expectation of protracted siege operations (Tadmor, 1958: 37-39). Hezekiah's object, however, can only have been to buy time until Babylonian, Elamite or Egyptian intervention, or logistical interruption, compelled the Assyrians to withdraw; Hezekiah expected outlying fortifications to occupy the besieger's energy until relief materialized (Tadmor, 1958: 37-39).

For this reason he devoted special attention to his capital, particularly to its water supply system (Bright, 1966: 283). Preparing a hedgehog defence involved three mechanical tasks:

- The forts had to be refitted; evidence of this was found at Jerusalem – the Siloam tunnel (Tadmor, 1958).
- Hezekiah had to stock the forts for large numbers both of conscripts and of professional garrison troops, whose job it will have been to prevent popular defection (Tadmor, 1958).
- The third step was to concentrate the rural population in the forts, thereby so far as possible preserving it as an economic resource against Assyrian depredations (Tadmor, 1958).

When Sennacherib arrived in 701 to deal with Syria and Palestine, he faced a well-organised military opposition (Reviv, 1979: 199). On his way to Palestine, Sennacherib replaced the rebellious king of Sidon, who had fled from him (Bright, 1966: 283). Near Tyre he received tribute from the rulers of Ashdod, Ammon, Moab, Edom, and elsewhere, who themselves might have belonged to the potential rebels (Bright, 1966: 283). On their way south, the Assyrian forces passed Achzib and Acco, conquering cities as they passed (Bright, 1966: 283).

Apparently the approach of the Assyrian army was known even before they had set foot in Palestine, since the rebels managed to alert the Egyptian army that had been despatched – the Egyptian forces confronted Sennacherib on the Plain of Eltekeh on the border of Eqron (Reviv,

1979: 199). But the Assyrian king repelled the Egyptians and conquered Eqron (Reviv, 1979: 199). One wing of the Assyrian army turned towards Ashkelon and the other wing conquered Timnah (Reviv, 1979: 199). The way to Jerusalem now lay open to Sennacherib; Lachish was besieged and fell (Reviv, 1979: 199). Sennacherib established his headquarters in Lachish, from where he directed his army's activities. He proceeded to conquer forty-six fortified cities and provincial towns in their neighbourhood, exile 200,150 persons and take quantities of booty.

Then Sennacherib besieged Jerusalem – Hezekiah refused to surrender (Reviv, 1979: 199). The outcome of Hezekiah's policy was predictable; if centralization was a measure for herding the peasantry into forts, Assyrian invasion was the way to herd them out again (Halpern, 1991: 30-31). Abandonment of the countryside invited this kind of devastation, especially when conditions forbade access to the ruler of the revolt (Halpern, 1991: 30-31). If the king and ruling classes could not be got at, the rest of the land had to go (Halpern, 1991: 30-31). Hezekiah was insulated in the capital, and Sennacherib maintained form by reducing as much of the country as time and his troop strength allowed (Halpern, 1991: 30-31).

Hezekiah had invited destruction, and it was a matter of Assyrian honour that the invitation be taken up (Halpern, 1991: 30-31). Deportation was the highest form of devastation, and Sennacherib was a master of both (Oded, 1979: 21). This could have been because Sennacherib was erecting a new capital in Nineveh at the time, and needed to draw enormous quantities of labour from the west (Luckenbill, 1924: 54-56, 71). Sennacherib's appetite for manpower was voracious, and the high pitch of his deportations reflects this need (Luckenbill, 1924: 54-56, 71). To this can be added the idea that whatever drove Sennacherib to leave Judah before consummating his victory may in itself have demanded additions to his labour reserves (Luckenbill, 1924: 54-56, 71). In any case, it was essential for Sennacherib to provide against a fresh renewal of the revolt – rural depopulation was a way of purchasing insurance against immediate upheaval on the Egyptian border (Oded, 1979: 21).

On the record then, Sennacherib left the countryside in ruins (Halpern, 1991: 30-31). But, presumably, Sennacherib's victory was rather less than he himself suggested. This conjecture is supported by the fact that neither the Old Testament nor the Assyrian records suggest that Hezekiah was deposed as king (Jagersma, 1982: 164-165). For reasons unknown, Sennacherib stopped his activity in Palestine and returned to Assyria with his army (Jagersma, 1982: 164-165). Yet the rebellion caused Hezekiah heavy losses – large areas of his territory, Lachish continued to be occupied by the enemy under an Assyrian governor, and as vassal he himself had to pay substantial tribute to Assyria (Jagersma, 1982: 164-165).

Chapter 3   Textual analyses

The various texts will now be discussed individually in the light of the previous chapter's discussion of the context of the Ancient Near Eastern World and the different values that were significant for the functioning of their society. In this way elements of the various texts may come to the fore in a different way and may add new meaning and significance to the way the texts are read and understood.

3.1 The Assyrian texts

3.1.1 The Annals of Sennacherib

Six sided clay prisms inscribed with an account of the first eight military campaigns of Sennacherib (king of Assyria 705-681 BC), were found at Nebi Yunus by Colonel R. Taylor in 1830 (Mitchell, 1988: 59). Much the same text is preserved on a prism (the Oriental Institute prism) in the University of Chicago (Mitchell, 1988: 59). In the discussion below, the main emphasis falls on the account as represented by the Taylor Prism in the British Museum and the Oriental Institute Prism of Sennacherib in Chicago.

In these Annals, special emphasis is placed on Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem, the problems he presented to Hezekiah of Judah and the large tribute taken from the city (Wiseman, 1958: 64-70). After a short introduction six campaigns of the king against various rebellious regions in his vast empire are described (Mitchell, 1988: 59). The section relevant to our discussion is the description of his third campaign.

In the account of his third campaign, which took place in 701 BC, Sennacherib describes his march to the west, where he defeated the Phoenicians, notably at Tyre and Sidon, and his move southwards, where he received tribute from Pudu-ilu of Ammon, Kammusunadbi of Moab and Airammu of Edom, all in the Transjordan (Oppenheim, 1955: 287-288). In Philistia Mitinti of Ashdod paid tribute, but Sidqa of Ashkelon was rebellious so Sennacherib replaced him with Sharruludari (Oppenheim, 1955: 287-288). According to the Annals, Sennacherib now encountered an Egyptian army which was coming to the aid of the inhabitants of Palestine (Oppenheim, 1955: 287-288). The Egyptian commander is not named in the Annals, but parallel biblical accounts identify him as Tirhaqa – Taharqa in the Egyptian sources – a Nubian who ruled as Pharaoh from about 690-664 BC (Mitchell, 1988: 59).

Though Sennacherib's invasion took place some ten years before Taharqa became king, he was probably about twenty years old at the time and could have been in titular command of the Egyptian army (Mitchell, 1988: 59). The biblical description of him as king could simply reflect an

edition of the text dating from a time after he became king. The best known passage in this description states that because Hezekiah had not submitted to the Assyrian 'yoke', Sennacherib laid siege to forty-six fortified Judean cities, deported 200,150 people and invested Hezekiah in Jerusalem (Oppenheim, 1955: 287-288). However, the Assyrian Annals make no claim that Jerusalem was taken – it only describes tribute from Hezekiah of gold, silver, precious stones, and valuable woods, furniture decorated with ivory, iron daggers, raw iron and musicians (Oppenheim, 1955: 287-288). The prism makes no mention of the siege of Lachish, which took place during the same campaign, and which is illustrated by the famous series of reliefs found in Sennacherib's palace (Mitchell, 1988: 59).

When studying the Annals, it becomes clear that Sennacherib's written account of his campaign against Syria-Palestine in 701-681 BC is filled with elements of honour and shame (cf. Prinsloo, 2000). All italics are taken from the translation of the Annals by Oppenheim (1955: 287-288).

Special emphasis is placed upon the power of the Assyrian king and his army and the help provided them by the god Ashur (Prinsloo, 2000: 356). The power of Sennacherib is depicted by his ability to overwhelm the land of Hatti and all the kings of Amurru (Prinsloo, 2000: 356). This is done by means of the *terror-inspiring glamour of my lordship* and *the awe-inspiring splendour of the 'weapon' of Ashur, my lord*. It is also mentioned that the conquered cities were *strong cities* or *fortress cities*. Time and again the Assyrian conqueror boasts that he *imposed* on the unfortunate Syrian or Palestinian king *tribute (due) to me (as his) overlord (to be paid) annually and without interruption*. These were *sumptuous gifts* and *heavy presents*. Sennacherib *deported and sent to Assyria* many of the conquered kings, their families and the population of their cities and *carried their spoils away*. About *Sidqia, king of Ashkelon* Sennacherib says that he deported and sent to Assyria *his family gods, himself, his wife, his children, his brothers* and *all the male descendants of his family*. This list greatly emphasises the power (the ability to exercise control over the behaviour of others) of the Assyrian king (Prinsloo, 2000: 356).

This picture of a powerful king becomes even more vivid in the description of the battle against a strong coalition led by Egypt (Prinsloo, 2000: 356). The coalition was raised by *the officials, the patricians and the (common) people of Eqron, who had thrown Padi, their king, into fetters (because he was) loyal to (his) solemn oath (sworn) by the god Ashur, and had handed him over to Hezekiah, the Jew – (and) he (Hezekiah) held him in prison, unlawfully, as if he (Padi) be an enemy – had become afraid and had called (for help) upon the kings of Egypt.* The Egyptians in turn acquired the assistance of *the bowmen, the chariot (-corps) and the cavalry of the king of Ethiopia, an army beyond counting.* But even this mighty force was no match for the power of Assyria. *Upon a trust (-inspiring) oracle (given) by Ashur, my lord, I fought with them and inflicted*

defeat upon them. In the mêlée of the battle, I personally captured alive the Egyptian charioteers with their princes and (also) the charioteers of the king of Ethiopia.

Hezekiah is singled out for special attention and remarkable detail is given (Prinsloo, 2000: 357). Of Hezekiah it is said that he *did not submit to my yoke.* This clear challenge to Sennacherib's honour is met with severe measures, as could only have been expected (Prinsloo, 2000: 357). To not answer a challenge to one's honour, even if made by a perceived lesser man, would be to lose honour – an unacceptable situation in the ancient world. Sennacherib *laid siege to 46 of his strong cities, walled forts and the countless small villages in their vicinity.* He *conquered them* by means of a comprehensive military assault which includes *well-stamped (earth-) ramps, and battering-rams brought (thus) near (to the walls) (combined with) the attack by foot soldiers, (using) mines, breeches as well as sapper work.* This list obviously serves to emphasise the Assyrian military abilities and power, as does the list of booty taken in tribute (listed above) (Prinsloo, 2000: 357).

Being as powerful as he was, Sennacherib could make Hezekiah *a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage.* He *surrounded* Hezekiah *with earthwork in order to molest those who were leaving his city gates,* he *took away* the *towns which I had plundered* and *reduced his country.* Hezekiah was overwhelmed by *the terror-inspiring splendour of my lordship* and tried to strengthen Jerusalem, but to no avail. Even his elite troops *deserted him.* And the best is, of course, saved for last: *He sent me, later, to Nineveh, my lordly city, together with 30 talents of gold, 800 talents of silver, precious stones, antimony, large cuts of red stone, couches (inlaid) with ivory, chairs (inlaid) with ivory, elephant-hides, ebony-wood, boxwood (and) all kinds of valuable treasures, his (own) daughters, concubines, male and female musicians. In order to deliver the tribute and to do obeisance as a slave he sent his (personal) messenger.*

Curiously enough, not a word is said about conquering Jerusalem (Mitchell, 1988: 59). Also significant is that Hezekiah is not once referred to as 'king', like the other Syrian and Palestinian royal figures (Wiseman, 1958: 68). This deliberate omission only emphasises Sennacherib's honour and Hezekiah's shame even more (Wiseman, 1958: 68).

The exaltedness of Sennacherib is also emphasised often in the Annals by means of various terms indicating his royal splendour (Prinsloo, 2000: 358). Sennacherib is described as a mighty king of overwhelming proportions (Prinsloo, 2000: 358). The *terror-inspiring glamour of my lordship* overwhelmed the rival kings. The *awe-inspiring splendour of the 'weapon' of Ashur* brought strong cities to a fall. He could *impose tribute* as *overlord* and extract *sumptuous gifts* and *heavy presents.* He *conquered them* and *carried their spoils away.* He struck fear into the

hearts of rival cities, *defeated* a mighty coalition, *captured* soldier and prince alike and *carried their spoils away.*

Conversely, the lowly position of the rival kings and princes is expressed by terms indicating their obeisance in the face of Assyrian power (Prinsloo, 2000: 358). They are described as people without any power or standing. In the face of the Assyrian onslaught, *Luli, king of Sidon, fled far overseas and perished.* The inhabitants of Luli's fortress cities *bowed in submission to my feet.* Moreover, *all the kings of Amurru* brought their tribute and *kissed my feet.* Sennacherib deposed *Sidqia, king if Ashkelon* and replaced him with *Sharru-ludari, son of Rukibtu.* It is clear that he is nothing more than a puppet king, because *he now pulls the straps of my yoke.* About a number of cities belonging to Sidqia it is said that they *did not bow to my feet quickly enough,* therefore he *conquered them and carried their spoils away.* The *officials and patricians* of Eqron, who instigated a rebellion against Sennacherib with the help of Egypt, were singled out for special attention: He *hung their bodies on poles surrounding the city.* Hezekiah was made *a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage,* and was overwhelmed by the *terror-inspiring splendour of my lordship.* In the end he had to *do obeisance like a slave.* In this way, the honour of King Sennacherib and the shame of his rivals are indicated once again.

Though the above is meant to put all his rival nations to shame, the special attention given to Hezekiah can lead to no other conclusion as that the purpose of the descriptions in the third campaign were to emphasise the honour of Sennacherib and the shame of Hezekiah specifically (Prinsloo, 2000: 359).

3.1.2 The Lachish Reliefs

Neither Sennacherib's own Annals nor the Old Testament say much about the fate of Lachish, but the long series of reliefs from his palace at Nineveh illustrate exactly what fate befell the city. The reliefs will be handled as a text in this mini-dissertation, since it has long been recognised in the abstract that most Ancient Near Eastern orthographic systems are – or at least once were – connected with relative closeness to their respective pictorial arts (Keel, 1978: 7). They were not intended to be viewed (*sehbild)*, but to be read (*denkbild*) (Keel, 1978: 7).

The reliefs of Lachish will for this reason be read as a text and not simply viewed as an ancient picture. But unlike other ancient texts, these 'calligraphs' markedly simplify the intended meaning (Keel, 1978: 7). Like a monument, they tend to summarise a particular concept in one or two grand 'gestures' (Keel, 1978: 7). Of course, this simplifying, iconographic description of the Ancient Near East can itself be criticised as a simplification (Keel, 1978: 7). But if it is considered that every description, including the literary, implies simplification, and every simplification

results in vagaries and ambiguities, that critique fades away (Keel, 1978: 7). Especially when one considers that, as opposed to the scholarly, literary simplification, the iconographic simplification has the advantage of having been produced by the Ancient Near East itself (Keel, 1978: 7). With powerful strokes that world has drawn its own main lines and can therefore claim originality and authenticity (Keel, 1978: 8).

Iconography allows our pre-understanding considerably less latitude than does the abstract phenomenon (Keel, 1978: 8). It can make evident more quickly and effectively than written records a number of very common peculiarities of the Ancient Near Eastern reasoning and imagination – it compels us to see through the eyes of the Ancient Near East (Keel, 1978: 8). In the Ancient Near East, the usual purpose in literary or visual representations of an event or object is to secure the existence of that event or object and to permit him who represents it to participate in it (Keel, 1978: 10). Ancient Near Eastern thought and discourse are, as a rule, intensely engaged and thoroughly determined by their objective (Keel, 1978: 10-11). The iconographic approach thus presents its own particular and unique advantage for the study of the ancient world and the significance of the events portrayed therein for the bigger picture of Sennacherib's third campaign.

The reliefs described in brief are as follows: In the reliefs, the Assyrian troops are shown advancing from the left (Mitchell, 1988: 60). The city is attacked with wheeled, armoured, battering rams onto which one soldier is pouring water against burning brands thrown by the defenders (Mitchell, 1988: 60). To the right the defeated inhabitants are led out by Assyrian troops, some of whom carry braziers or incense stands, perhaps from unorthodox religious rites (Mitchell, 1988: 60). Further along, Sennacherib is shown on a throne in front of his camp receiving the capitulation from an official (Mitchell, 1988: 60). Some of the upper details on the slabs are lost as a result of damage to the reliefs when the Palace of Sennacherib was destroyed in 612 BC (Mitchell, 1988: 60).

The relief as a whole has two foci: the besieged city of Lachish to the left, and the king on his throne to the right of the middle (Prinsloo, 2000: 354-355)[12]. It should be noted, however, that, with few exceptions (a small number of Assyrian soldiers attacking on the right-hand part of the city's fortifications, Assyrian high officials directly beneath the king, the Judean defendants on the left side of Lachish, some Judean deportees of which a number have already been killed and two Assyrian priests) all figures in the relief face the king on his throne (Prinsloo, 2000: 355).

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[12] According to Ussishkin (1982: 11), the centrally positioned city is the element that integrates the two events depicted in the whole composition, namely the attack on Lachish and the victory ceremony afterwards.

Even more, the whole sequence is identified by an inscription over the figure of Sennacherib which runs: 'Sennacherib, king of the world, king of Assyria, on a seat he sat and the booty of Lachish before him it passed' (Mitchell, 1988: 60-64). The central focus is indeed on King Sennacherib. This indicates that the Lachish reliefs were more than a mere memento of one of Sennacherib's campaigns (Prinsloo, 2000: 349); they form a claim to honour for the king and clearly display the importance of honour and shame as social values (Prinsloo, 2000: 349), as well as the role these values played in military campaigns in the Ancient Near East (Prinsloo, 2000: 350).

The conquest of Lachish or, for that matter, any military conquest, was largely seen by both attacker and defendant as a contest for honour (Prinsloo, 2000: 350). Within Assyrian society, the erection of the reliefs in itself also formed a claim to honour (Prinsloo, 2000: 350). There are thus two different levels on which honour functions in this discussion: the very fact that the room where the reliefs occurred received special emphasis already underlines the quest for honour (Prinsloo, 2000: 350). "The architectural setting of the Lachish Reliefs was ingeniously designed to impress the beholder and instil in him awe, respect and admiration for the deeds and triumphs of the great monarch who inspired them" (Ussishkin, 1982: 67). More importantly, the reliefs themselves are filled with references to and portrayals of the core values of the ancient world – further strengthening Sennacherib's claim to honour and worth. The Lachish reliefs are all about the honour of Sennacherib – his power and his exalted position (Botha, 2000: 280).

When studying the reliefs from an ideological and sociological perspective, Sennacherib's claim to honour is firstly and most clearly reflected in the manpower, machines and techniques he mustered for the attack on Lachish (Prinsloo, 2000: 350). On the left, in slabs I and II, the advancing columns of soldiers are schematically presented (Ussishkin, 1982: 94). They are portrayed as marching toward the city, two abreast (Ussishkin, 1982: 94).
A hint at the number and diversity of infantry used in the attack is given through the different types of soldiers portrayed: there are archers, slingers and men armed with spears (Ussishkin, 1982: 94). To emphasise the great numbers of soldiers even more, it is possible to discern a number of groups of differently clad archers, who probably represent the different contingents in the Assyrian army (Ussishkin, 1982: 96). "Each of the fifth, sixth or seventh pairs of the lower regimen can be considered a separate type (of archer) due to the difference in their uniforms and accoutrements" (Ussishkin, 1982: 96).
Also significant is that Lachish is being attacked by no less than seven battering rams (Slabs III and IV), the largest number of battering rams shown in any Neo-Assyrian relief in an attack on a single city (Ussishkin, 1982: 102). This may serve as an indication that Lachish was considered

to be a great prize to be won, but also (and more importantly) that Sennacherib had the power to launch different attacks simultaneously (Prinsloo, 2000: 350-351). If it is considered that power is described as the ability to exercise control over the behaviour of others, and superiors are considered to be honourable when subordinates accept and respect their power, then Sennacherib is portrayed as a most powerful person – all the many (and powerful) men and weapons depicted are at his command.

A second, also very visual claim to honour is the symbolic correspondence of topographic height with honour (well known from Ancient Mediterranean texts) (Prinsloo, 2000: 351). Height and heads correspond with honour; low ground, feet and dust impart shame[13]. The Lachish reliefs provide confirmation of this idea: In Slab VIII Sennacherib is portrayed sitting on his special throne which stands on high-rising ground (indicated by the thick, rising line running from Slab IV to VIII in the schematically rendered stony landscape surrounding Lachish (Ussishkin, 1982: 109)).

Sennacherib's power and honour are further enhanced by the rows of captives, to the left of the king, on a lower level, depicted in Sections IV-VIII – all of whom must pass before the king sitting on his throne (Ussishkin, 1982: 109). Especially significant are the captives kneeling before the throne, pleading for mercy (Slab VIII). A number of the captives brought before Sennacherib (Slabs VII and VIII) were probably Hezekiah's men who were stationed in the city (Ussishkin, 1982: 109). They are depicted as having curly hair and short, curly beards and are shown without headdress. These bare-headed captives, with their hands raised upwards in a plea for mercy, are kneeling or crouching before the king on his high throne (Ussishkin, 1982: 109). The fact that they are bare-headed and their posture suggest submission and respect before him (Prinsloo, 2000: 352). The king's head is also depicted at a higher level than those of the people around him, even his chief officials and his own men behind his back (Ussishkin, 1982: 115). This makes his honour evident to all in the wide panorama (Prinsloo, 2000: 352).

The reference to the throne (found in the inscription above the king), which was specially brought along on the campaign (Mitchell, 1988: 60), also enhances the king's honour. Add to this the fact that the throne is beautifully and richly ornamented and decorated with ivory (an expensive commodity available only to rulers and people of high rank), has very high legs (enabling the king to look down from above at the people standing in front of him) and a high footstool on which the king's feet rest (Ussishkin, 1982: 115), and it becomes clear that the focus of the relief is evidently on Sennacherib; his honour and stature are of the utmost importance.

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[13] Cf. the curse on the serpent in Gn 3:14 as an example in this regard.

Also important to note is the lavish and luxurious clothing of the king; especially compared to the simple, and in some cases absence of, clothing on the part of the captives (Prinsloo, 2000: 352). The king has a long beard, wears the royal Assyrian peaked cap, and is clothed in a long robe with a tasselled hem which is covered by a long mantle falling from his left shoulder (Ussishkin, 1982: 115). Both his robe and mantle are decorated with the symbol of a double circle, which was probably a royal emblem (Ussishkin, 1982: 115). Clearly, the king's honour is as great as his clothing is lavish. The clothing of the senior commander in Slab VIII closely resembles that of the king, an indication of his high status (Ussishkin, 1982: 115). He also has long hair and a long beard, a large rosette on the side of the scarf binding his forehead and a bracelet adorned with rosettes on his right hand (Ussishkin, 1982: 115). The main difference between his clothing and that of the king is the lack of the royal concentric circle pattern on his clothes (Ussishkin, 1982: 115).

The shame of the captives, on the other hand, is displayed in the lack of headdress, the simple clothing and the nakedness of some of the prisoners (Prinsloo, 2000: 352). Three of the prisoners in Slab III are depicted as stripped and impaled on stakes – their heads are sagging forward, indicating that they are already dead (Ussishkin, 1982: 102). As described in chapter 2, a man was shamed if he was stripped of his clothes by an aggressor so that his male member was displayed. The higher the social ranking of the naked captive, the greater the shame induced. All the captives pleading for mercy are without headdress, two others (in Slabs V and VI), who are already dead, are not only without headdress, but also stripped (Ussishkin, 1982: 109). They have apparently been flayed alive by the two pairs of archers who grab them by the legs (Ussishkin, 1982: 109).

Those prisoners who were stripped and killed were probably singled out for severe punishment because they had been in a position to surrender the city (Prinsloo, 2000: 353), serving as a dire warning to any who might think of protesting against the Assyrian might. Of course, the shame of these defeated Israelites, so graphically shown, also add to the honour and power of Sennacherib.

Honour is limited, so it can only be increased by taking another man's honour away from him. The honour of which the Israelites have been stripped is powerfully emphasised in the reliefs, visually adding to the honour of the king, who was able to defeat them so severely. The subjugation of Lachish and the disempowerment and shame of its rulers, as means of focus upon the honour of Sennacherib, is further depicted in Slabs IV and V. Nine Assyrian soldiers are shown carrying the spoils of the city after the surrender (Ussishkin, 1982: 105). "They walk in procession, carrying various items, all presumably ceremonial symbols of state taken from the

Judean governor's palace-fort. The first soldier carries a sceptre or a mace, its round top pointing – probably deliberately – downwards. The second and third soldiers bear large ceremonial chalices…the fourth soldier holds a chair with rounded top and armrests…this must have been the governor's seat of state" (Ussishkin, 1982: 105). Two soldiers pull a chariot which must have been the official conveyance of the governor (Ussishkin, 1982: 105). The spears, shields and swords carried by the other soldiers were perhaps ceremonial weapons (Ussishkin, 1982: 109).

In contrast to this, the king is shown holding a bow in his right, and two spears pointing upward in his left hand – royal attributes symbolising battle and victory (Ussishkin, 1982: 115). The eunuchs behind the king's throne (identified by their being beardless and their gross facial features (Ussishkin, 1982: 115)) each hold a fan in the right hand and another article in the left (Ussishkin, 1982: 115). Both types of objects seem to be royal attributes (Ussishkin, 1982: 115). Both the ceremonial and battle chariots of Sennacherib are depicted as well, lavishly decorated with the royal rosettes and concentric circles (even the axle-spindle of the battle chariot is decorated with a rosette) (Ussishkin, 1982: 118). The four attendants standing in front of or behind the chariots are also holding a mace or sceptre in each left hand (Ussishkin, 1982: 118). The shame of the Israelite defeat, and conversely the honour of Sennacherib's victory, is clearly illustrated in the reliefs.

3.2 Preliminary conclusions:

It is clear from both the Annals and the reliefs that Sennacherib is depicted as a man of great honour (Prinsloo, 2000: 359).

In the reliefs the focus falls upon the king seated on his throne, while various features in the relief emphasise his power and exaltedness (Prinsloo, 2000: 359). The honour of the king is contrasted and heightened sharply by the depiction of his enemies as bare-headed, sometimes naked, shamed people (Prinsloo, 2000: 359). They are clearly helpless and yielding in obeisance to the king (Prinsloo, 2000: 359). Even the gods are relegated to a position on the periphery of the scene (Prinsloo, 2000: 359 and Botha, 2000: 280): a (visually) small offering is being brought before the god by two priests in the Assyrian encampment depicted in Slabs XI and XII (Ussishkin, 1982: 118).

When taking into account that these reliefs occurred centrally in the palace of the king, they clearly convey a message – Sennacherib is not a man to be taken lightly and he deserves all the honour he can get (Prinsloo, 2000: 359). The detail of the relief also conveys a message –

Lachish was a strong city and yet Sennacherib overpowered her and took rich booty from her (Prinsloo, 2000: 359). Sennacherib is powerful beyond measure!

But strangely enough, there is a total absence of any mention of Lachish in his Annals (Prinsloo, 2000: 359). The king of Judah, Hezekiah, whom is explicitly not called 'king', may well be singled out for special attention, but one gets the impression that the highlight of the third campaign was in fact the subjugation of Hezekiah, and not the victory over Lachish (Prinsloo, 2000: 359). Mention is made of the rich booty taken from Jerusalem and the surrounding areas and Hezekiah is depicted as helpless, while Sennacherib is described as the great and honourable king (Prinsloo, 2000: 359). In doing so, Hezekiah, his opponent, is put to shame and a warning is sent out to all other nations that this is the fate of any who rise against Sennacherib (Prinsloo, 2000: 359).

If the Annals and the reliefs are read in isolation, the message is clear: Sennacherib is a man who deserves the greatest honour (Prinsloo, 2000: 359). But the fact that the Annals do not mention Lachish, and that the reliefs do not mention Jerusalem, causes the nagging feeling that all is not what it seems to be (Prinsloo, 2000: 359).

For this missing piece of the puzzle the ideology of the ancient world, specifically the concepts of honour and shame, can provide a clue (Prinsloo, 2000: 359). One thing is very clear; Sennacherib was unable to conquer the city of Jerusalem (Mitchell, 1988: 59). This must have been an element of great shame in the otherwise flawless curriculum of this successful military leader (Prinsloo, 2000: 360). So it can be speculated that, in order to save his honour, Sennacherib carved out his victory over Lachish (the lesser, albeit still important garrison city) in the greatest detail on the walls of his palace in Nineveh (Prinsloo, 2000: 360). The idea was to disguise the shame of his failure to defeat Hezekiah of Judah completely with the reliefs of his triumph over Lachish. Wiseman (1958: 69) is probably correct when he says that "…the prominence given by the sculptures of Sennacherib to this event underlines his failure to capture Jerusalem, despite the emphasis given to the siege of the capital of Judah in his written record." In the reliefs Sennacherib goes to great lengths to emphasise his honour (Prinsloo, 2000: 360). It might just be that it was done exactly to save his honour in the face of his adversaries in Nineveh, who maintained that he was shamed by his inability to defeat Jerusalem (Prinsloo, 2000: 360).

Ironically, even this attempt to save his honour did not last – the head and hands of Sennacherib's depiction, with the royal symbols, were symbolically mutilated in the riots following his murder at the hands of his sons (Ussishkin, 1982: 115).

Looking at these two very different texts through an ideological lens thus provides the researcher with much insight into the reasons for and meaning of the texts for the ancient Assyrians. They do not differ because of a lack of knowledge about the events or because of faulty writing; they differ because their ideological aims differ. The Annals were recorded to praise the might, power and honour of Sennacherib in his many campaigns. They could not leave his siege of Jerusalem out, but they could change the narrative in such a way that the focus was taken away from Sennacherib's failure to defeat Jerusalem. A failure further hidden behind the reliefs of the victory over Lachish placed so centrally in his palace at Nineveh – not necessarily a denial of the facts, but rather a shift in focus.

3.3 The Biblical texts

The chapters in 2 Kings describing the siege of Jerusalem form part of a greater whole known as the Deuteronomistic History, encompassing the books Deuteronomy to 2 Kings (Long, 1991: 3-5). It is accepted that the corpus underwent two redactional processes, one in the time of Josiah, and the other in the time of the exile (Conroy, 1983: 12-14). This is of importance, because the context in which the books were redacted, affected the message they portray (Riley, 1993: 26 and Duke, 1990: 30). Research has shown that 'memory' and 'significance' go hand in hand (Riley, 1993: 26-27 and Duke, 1990: 31-33). People try to find the significance of events they experience through a reinterpretation of their memories. This is especially true in times of crises. So, in difficult times, people tend to re-evaluate their history in order to encompass an understanding of their present circumstances (Riley, 1993: 27-29; Duke, 1990: 33 and Duke, 1999: 100-135).

In this case, the Israelites were attempting to make sense of the exile (Conroy, 1983: 15-18). They found this much-needed clarity in the importance that God gave to the covenant made between Himself and the Israelites in Deuteronomy: He would be their God and they would be his people (Conroy, 1983: 15-18). The rest of the book is used to explain the working of this relationship. A clear understanding is made between them, if the covenant is not obeyed, God would be forced to punish them (Long, 1991: 190ff).

From that point forward, the Deuteronomistic History portrays the sad tale of a people incapable of obeisance, for such is the nature of man. The work is filled with the sins and rejections of a nation, symbolised through the actions of the leaders (kings). A repetitive cycle is found: Israel becomes faithless and disloyal, God punishes them, they repent and He saves them (Bosman, 1987: 50). Yet, in the end, even the small repentances of obedient kings could not save the

nation from the punishment it had brought on itself through ages of disobedience (Long, 1991: 192-193).

In this way, the exile is made to be the just punishment of a God who had been forgotten by his people and his chosen leaders (Conroy, 1983: 15-18 and Long, 1991: 192-193). In this way, the utmost importance of obeisance to God is emphasised. If Israel had been obedient to the stipulated laws and rituals they had received, they would not have been in the situation they were in (Long, 1991: 193) – exiled in a strange land, far away from their promised land and their God in his Temple.

The Chronicler, composed in the period after the exile had ended (Auld, 1999: 91-99; Duke, 1990: 11-29; Japhet, 1993: 1-49; Jones, 1993: 86-96; McKenzie, 1999: 70-90 and Riley, 1993: 17-26), continues in this vein. God had heard his people's pleas for forgiveness, and had ended the exile through the actions of the Persians. His people had systematically gone back to their promised land, now only ruins. It was of the utmost importance that they not repeat the actions that had gotten them into exile (Jones, 1993: 98-110; Riley, 1993: 141-149; Siedlecki 1999: 229-266 and Williamson, 1977: 60-70).

For this reason, their history is re-evaluated once more (Duke, 1990: 30ff and Riley, 1993: 27-29). The importance given to obeisance in the Deuteronomistic History is emphasised even more in the Chronicler, through the use of direct and immediate punishment (Japhet, 1989: 85-125, 199-265, 395-491; Riley, 1993: 98 and Williamson, 1977: 60-70). If the nation was obedient, they were blessed; if not, they were punished. Because it was written in the time of the Second Temple, the importance of the centralisation of the cult is also emphasised (Riley, 1993: 37-39, 97, 127). Kings who attempted religious reforms and centralisation were blessed with success and long reigns, while disobedient kings were punished immediately (Japhet, 1989: 395-491 and Riley, 1993: 99-100).

In both these histories Hezekiah is portrayed as an obedient and loyal king (cf. Botha, 2000b). He starts his reign with many religious, political and social reforms – attempting to restore Judah to the illustrious nation it once was under the reign of David. Both histories claim that his faithfulness and these actions are the reason behind his success, thereby encouraging their readers to do the same if they want to be blessed by God (Japhet, 1989: 59-81, 85-125; Jones, 1993: 112-130; Mangan, 1982: 127-134; Riley, 1993: 108-109, 131-134 and Williamson, 1977: 119-130).

3.3.1 2 Kings 18-20

The account in 2 Kings 18-20[14] introduces Hezekiah as a man who *did what was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father David had done.* A description is then given of the things he did that pleased the Lord: he *removed the high places*, *broke the sacred pillars, cut down the wooden images and broke into pieces the bronze snake that Moses had made.* The reason for this was that *until those days the children of Israel burned incense to it.* Hezekiah thus purified the nation of its many gods and places of worship, leading to the description that *after him there was no man like him among all the kings of Judah, or those who were before him.* The reason for the high esteem of Hezekiah is that he *held fast to the Lord; he did not depart from following Him but kept the commandments which the Lord had commanded Moses.* Because of Hezekiah's obedience and trust *the Lord was with him* and *he prospered wherever he went.* Hezekiah is thus the poster for the values of obedience, compliance and protection of the correct status quo. Because of this ideologically correct attitude, Hezekiah is blessed and made successful by God.

His successes are described in the following verses: he *rebelled against the king of Assyria* and he *subdued the Philistines.* The fact that the Lord was indeed with Hezekiah is emphasised when the destruction of Israel at the hands of Shalmaneser is described in the following verses. Though it is said that Hezekiah also rebelled against the Assyrian king and stopped serving him, Judah is spared in Shalmaneser's attack against the Israelites. Israel's destruction is due to the fact that *they did not obey the voice of the Lord their God but transgressed against his covenant and all that Moses, the Lord's servant, had commanded – They would neither listen to nor obey them.* Since Judah and Hezekiah have just been described as obedient and praiseworthy, there is no doubt as to their honour and worth in the eyes of the Lord, the reason that they were spared.

But even obedient kings sometimes experience difficulties. For Hezekiah, his difficulty started in the fourteenth year of his reign when Sennacherib rose against *all the fortified cities of Judah and took them.* The strong and honourable Hezekiah that we got to know in the first part of the chapter disappears – instead of trusting in the Lord that allowed him to conquer the Philistines and rebel against Assyria, Hezekiah immediately sends a message to Sennacherib in Lachish saying that he *has done wrong* and that Sennacherib must please *turn away from* him. His bowing, scraping and admittance of defeat cause him to lose honour. But even more shameful is that he ads that *whatever* Sennacherib *imposes on* him, he *will pay.* To forcefully re-establish his

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[14] All translations in italics are my own.

honour and his power in the region in the face of Hezekiah's plea, Sennacherib imposes a tribute of *three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold.* Hezekiah is unable to provide all the tribute from his treasury, so he *gave him all the silver that was found in the house of the Lord* and he *stripped the gold from the doors of the Temple of the Lord, and from the pillars which* he himself *had overlaid, and gave it to the king of Assyria.* This meant that now not only Hezekiah's honour had been affected, but the Lord had been shamed as well by the defamation of his Temple.

So when looking at the text from an ideological perspective, another possibility for Sennacherib's continued attack on Jerusalem is found. Instead of it being only an inconsistency in the text, it can now be seen as God's just punishment for an unfaithful servant, who has disgraced God as well through his lack of faith. It can thus be said that because of this shameful lack of trust and the mutilation of the Temple of God, God allows Sennacherib another go at Jerusalem. Up to this point, no reference is made in the text concerning any defamation of God by the Assyrians – God's honour had thus not really been in play up to now. For Hezekiah's defamation of his Temple, God could thus be seen as wanting to punish him through a continued campaign.

Sennacherib does not leave Judah, but sends *the Tartan, the Rabsaris and the Rabshakeh from Lachish, with a great army, against Jerusalem.* Upon arrival, they go to the city and call upon the king. He also sends his highest officials to the wall to hear the message they have come to deliver. The Rabshakeh defames Hezekiah's plans of rebellion as *mere words* and his trust in the aid of Egypt as futile because it is a *broken reed* that will *go into the hand and pierce it.* To add fuel to the fire, he also mocks their trust in the Lord. His *high places* and *altars* (his presence) were *taken away* by Hezekiah, implying rejection in and his absence from the land. He continues with a description of the might of the Assyrian army, and Judah's complete lack of power in comparison, and he ends his speech in saying that it was *the Lord* that said to Sennacherib to *go up against this land* and to *destroy it.* Fearful of the reaction his words might cause, the Judean officials plead with the Rabshakeh to speak in Aramaic, rather than Hebrew, so that the men on the walls would not be able to understand his words. The Rabshakeh is not moved, and says that his master also sent him to *these men who sit on the wall, who will eat and drink their own waste with you.* He then cries out to the men on the wall, telling them to *not let Hezekiah deceive* them or make them *trust in the Lord.* Sennacherib is a much better bet, since surrender to him will mean peace and prosperity for every man in a *land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive groves and honey, that you may live and not die.* The futility of trust in the Lord is further accentuated by his description of all the nations that were not *delivered from the hand of the king of Assyria* by the gods they served. Through the threats

and mockery of the Rabshakeh, God's honour is now brought into play. If He does not answer the challenge, He will lose his honour.

Upon hearing this shaming challenge to the honour of Judah and its God, the officials came to Hezekiah with *their clothes torn* and told him what the Assyrian official had said. When he had heard it, he also *tore his clothes* and *covered himself with sackcloth* and he *went into the house of the Lord.* The tearing of clothes is an indication of mourning and repentance. In this case, it could be speculated that Hezekiah realised the sin and distrust of his earlier actions and that the appearance of the Assyrians was a punishment from God. For this reason he tears his clothes and wears sackcloth upon entering the house of God. Afterwards, he sent his officials to the prophet Isaiah to inform him of the shame imparted upon both Judah and the Lord by the words of the Rabshakeh, and to ask the Lord to intervene on their behalf. It is then that Isaiah prophesies that Judah need not fear Sennacherib, as the Lord would *send a spirit upon him that he shall hear a rumour and return to his own land,* where the Lord would *cause him to fall by the sword.* The Lord would not let his honour be turned to shame by an arrogant earthly king, one whom He had allowed his victories in the first place.

The scene in Jerusalem is interrupted by the Rabshakeh's return to Sennacherib, who is now in Libnah, where he receives a message that the king of Ethiopia is rising against him. Ethiopia was also called Nubia in those days, and formed part of the greater kingdom of Egypt. The king mentioned in the Annals and in the biblical sources, Tirhaqa, was a Nubian who started ruling over Egypt shortly after Sennacherib's third campaign. This could be the reason that the biblical sources refer to Egypt as Ethiopia.

From the Annals we know that he defeated the Egyptian forces totally. He then sends another message to Hezekiah wherein he once again advises him not to *let your God in whom you trust deceive you* by saying that *Jerusalem shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.* Once again, the many lands and cities and peoples that have been destroyed by Assyria are mentioned – their gods were powerless against the Assyrian might, so would Judah's God be also.

Hezekiah immediately goes to the Temple upon receiving the message, and pleads with God to *save* them from Sennacherib's hand, so *that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You, and You alone, are the Lord God.* Hezekiah is thus harping on the honour of the Lord, reflected in his care for his people. If the Lord does not intervene, He and his people will be greatly shamed. The Lord hears his plea and again sends a message via Isaiah, telling him that because of Sennacherib's arrogance and his challenge to God's honour he will not be allowed to

enter Jerusalem. He will be sent back to his land, because God will protect his city for his *own (honour's) sake,* and for his *servant David's (honour's) sake*.

This indeed then comes to pass on a certain night when the angel of the Lord goes out and kills one hundred and eighty-five thousand Assyrians, forcing the king to retreat to his country. The account ends with a description of Sennacherib's murder at the hands of his sons in the Temple of his god – as foretold by Isaiah. In the ultimate shame of Sennacherib's death and the mutilation of his reliefs, even though it is years later than the biblical account tells it to be, the unwavering honour of God is still confirmed.

3.3.2 <u>Isaiah 36-39</u>

The narrative in Isaiah 36-39 also presents the prophet Isaiah as foretelling that Sennacherib's attempt to take Jerusalem would fail, and assuring Hezekiah that he had nothing to fear from the Assyrians since Yahweh his God was with him. He foretells that the Assyrians will be dramatically and suddenly overthrown by the hand of God. Since the narrative in Isaiah very closely resembles that of 2 Kings, a full description of it is not necessary[15].

But what do the prophecies in the book of Isaiah have to do with the narrative in 2 Kings? A possibility is that both the 'deliverance' oracles in the book of Isaiah and the narrative accounts originated from the same circles and were intended to be understood in conjunction with each other (cf. Person, 1997). In this case we are evidently not dealing with an isolated 'legend' which presented a rather over-dramatised interpretation of one particular historical event, but with a more widely entrenched conviction that was closely related to the prophet Isaiah and his preaching (cf. Person, 1997).

An evaluation of the material in both the prophecies and the narratives must be made, since the main theological affirmations of the narrative are to be found quite extensively elsewhere in the Old Testament – specifically that Yahweh is quite uniquely concerned for Jerusalem, and that this concern is directly related to his support for the dynasty of David (cf. Clements, 1980). In fact, the incident reported in the narratives form a kind of high-point in the whole story of the monarchy which began in 1 Samuel 8 (cf. Clements, 1980). Jerusalem is designated as the place where Yahweh 'has chosen to set his name'[16], a designation that came to its fullest justification in the story of the city's rescue out of the grip of Sennacherib (cf. Clements, 1980). The idea of the protection of God for his divine residence (Temple) has come to be accepted as

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[15] See the description of the narrative in 2 Kings.

[16] 1 Kings 8:29ff.

part of the 'Zion tradition' (Childs, 2001: 259-266 and Widyanapranawa, 1990: 3-74). This tradition began simultaneously with the monarchy in the inviolable Davidic dynasty and the Temple in Jerusalem (Widyanapranawa, 1990: 3-74). When David wanted to build a house for God, God built a house for David and promised that the throne would always be occupied by some one from the Davidic line (Widyanapranawa, 1990: 3-74). The meteoric rise of the young king and the many successes he achieved was seen as a justification of their belief in the dynasty and the city (Widyanapranawa, 1990: 3-74). This meant that each descendant of David who sat on the throne was seen as God's chosen one and son (Widyanapranawa, 1990: 3-74). More importantly, it led to the origin of a belief in the inviolable nature of the dynasty and the city – nations would rise against her, but God would not let her be defeated (Seitz, 1991: 47-118). The presence of God in the Temple in Jerusalem only strengthened this belief; God would not abandon his home or his people (Seitz, 1991: 47-118).

The prophet could have been deeply influenced by the tradition, and this influence could have determined the language of his prophesies, even his expectations about the deliverance of Jerusalem. The proclamation of the holiness, exaltedness, might and sole reign of God forms the theological centre of the teachings of Isaiah. To deny this, is to sin to the highest degree (Seitz, 1991: 47-118). All forms of vanity are criticised as denial of the might of God (Seitz, 1991: 47-118). The positive side of this criticism against human vanity is to trust in God alone – to believe in Him, to wait on Him and to obey Him (Widyanapranawa, 1990: 3-74). For this reason Judah is advised by Isaiah to trust in God alone, and not to form coalitions with nations like Egypt and Assyria. For God is not only the God of Judah, He is also king of all the nations (cf. Botha, 2000a). For Isaiah, everything that does or does not happen has its origin in the will of God (Widyanapranawa, 1990: 3-74).

Because of this, the story makes the greatest measure of ideological play over what happened by describing the blasphemous boasts of the Assyrian king in much detail. As in the account in 2 Kings, the Rabshakeh twice confronts the people of Jerusalem with mockery and threats. He mocks their plan to rebel, their king and most importantly, their trust in their God. For all the other nations who trusted on their gods could not be delivered from the Assyrian might by these gods – implying that the same fate awaited the Judeans. In both these altercations, Sennacherib displays arrogance towards and lack of respect for Yahweh (Botha, 2000a: 275). He further mocks Yahweh by displaying pride in his military successes (Botha, 2000a: 277), and contempt for the conquered lands – clearly showing his ignorance of Yahweh's role in history (Botha, 2000a: 277).

Hezekiah (correctly) understood both altercations as insults to the honour of Yahweh[17]. His blasphemous words are so carefully given to heighten the irony of this arrogant nation's fate. Hezekiah goes to the Temple after receiving the second message from Sennacherib and pleads with God to deliver Jerusalem, *so that all the nations of the world will know that Yahweh alone is God*. From Yahweh's reaction it is clear that the words of the envoy were interpreted as a challenge to the honour of Yahweh as the guardian of Jerusalem (Botha, 2000a: 274). The insult to his God was also meant to be a public insult to king Hezekiah, even though Hezekiah, in the eyes of the envoy (Is 36:9) was no match to the lowest Assyrian officials (Botha, 2000a: 274). Nevertheless, Sennacherib had made claims about his ability to invade Jerusalem and about the God of Israel being unable to save the Judeans from this invasion. Should he succeed in his campaign, he would have occasion to mock the God of Israel as he mocked the gods of other nations – Yahweh would then be seen as powerless to save his people (Botha, 2000a: 274). It was therefore the responsibility of Yahweh to save Israel from violation and so to defend his own honour (Botha, 2000a: 275).

Yahweh's reaction to the haughtiness of Sennacherib's claim and his arrogant actions is to promise salvation for Jerusalem and incapacitation of the Assyrian army's power (Botha, 2000a: 278). Yahweh would deliver the city for his own sake and for the sake of his servant David. In the view of the implied author, Yahweh's honour would thus be saved (Botha, 2000a: 275). So instead of the easy victory they boasted of, they were beaten back by the actions of the God they had mocked, and forced to flee back to their country. The shame they thought to bring on the Judeans and their king, they now brought upon themselves in a greater degree. The view of the implied author, expressed in the address of Yahweh to Sennacherib, is that it is not through his own ability that Sennacherib was able to subdue all those kingdoms, but through the grace granted him by Yahweh. There is an ironic contrast between Sennacherib's boastful claims and Yahweh's corrective note that He had planned these victories a long time ago (Botha, 2000a: 279).

The response that the Isaiah text seeks from its audience is the reaction of Hezekiah: Shock at the blasphemy, self-humiliation before the awesome power of Israel's God, and satisfaction at the fulfilment of Hezekiah's request that they may be rescued from the Assyrians *so that all the nations of the world will know that you alone are God* (Botha, 2000a: 280). This just emphasises once again that obedience to and trust in the one God is never in vain, He will always protect the

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[17] Cf. Botha's discussion of Hezekiah's reaction as being proper in these circumstances and his being commended for this by the Deuteronomist Historian (Botha, 2000b: 36-49).

honour of the people that believe in Him. Thus the importance of obedience, compliance and faith in the one God is legitimised.

3.3.3 2 Chronicles 29-32

Because the version in 2 Chronicles 29-32:23 was written in the period of the Second Temple, the legitimisation of the Temple and centralised worship was of utmost importance in the mind of the writer (Widyanapranawa, 1990: 3-74). This was achieved by a description of the positive effects of Hezekiah's centralisation of the cult, culminating in Jerusalem's rescue from Sennacherib in chapter 32.

The story is begun as in 2 Kings with the words that Hezekiah *did what was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father David had done.* A thorough description is then given in the following two chapters of the reforms Hezekiah made: his cleansing of the Temple and his restoration of worship there, his re-installation of the Passover and his destruction of other gods and places of worship. This was done so that the *children of Israel* would *return to the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel;* in turn He would *return to the remnant* of his people, for *the Lord your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn his face away from you if you return to him.* This indeed proved to be true, many times in the description is told that *the Lord listened to Hezekiah* and that *he prospered.*

As a highlight to the account of the successes Hezekiah experienced because of his obedience to God the tale of Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem is told in chapter 32. Since the narrative only forms the highlight of a much bigger tale about the positive effects of obedience to God, it is much more condensed than the narratives in 2 Kings and Isaiah. It is said that *after these deeds of faithfulness, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, came and entered Judah.* Because Hezekiah foresaw that Sennacherib's actual purpose was to *make war against Jerusalem,* he consulted with his leaders and commanders to fortify the city even more and to provide a safe water supply for the city. He then gathered his people in the city centre and encouraged them to be *strong and courageous* and not to be *afraid or dismayed before the king of Assyria* because there *are more with us than with them.* For Sennacherib only had flesh and bone at his disposal, the Judeans had the Lord their God to fight the battle with them.

The wavering and shameful king described in the first chapter of the narrative in 2 Kings is absent from this story, for any sign of fear or shame would detract from the heroic figure Hezekiah's reforms made him in the eyes of the Chronicler. Instead he is honourable and brave and unwavering, the ideal king and leader.

Sennacherib sends his officials from Lachish to Jerusalem, where they deliver a message similar to the one in 2 Kings; Hezekiah is portrayed as a hypocrite, persuading his people to *die by famine and by thirst* because he believes that the Lord will deliver them from Assyrian hands. A 'Lord' who is once again described as absent, since Hezekiah himself destroyed his altars and high places. An account is then given of the victories of the Assyrian army against a multitude of other lands, all of whose gods were unable to deliver them from the destructive might of Sennacherib. Hezekiah and his God are further blasphemed in a letter from the Assyrians saying that, just as *the gods of the nations of other lands* were unable to deliver their people from Sennacherib, so *the God of Hezekiah will not deliver his people* from his hands. They continued to shout and to threaten the people of Jerusalem in order to instil fear in them.

The threat is also ended much quicker in the narrative of the Chronicler. Because of these events Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah prayed to the Lord, and He sends an angel that cuts down every man of valour, every leader and every captain in the Assyrian camp. Sennacherib is forced to return to his country in the shame of defeat, literally represented by the death of all his highest and most honourable men. There he was killed by his own offspring in the Temple of his god. This was done so that *many brought gifts to the Lord and presents to Hezekiah* so that *he was exalted in the sight of all nations thereafter.*

Clearly, the account of the Chronicler also emphasises the importance of obedience to the Lord and his commandments as given by Moses and others in history. If the people are obedient, their honour will know no bounds, even in the face of possible defeat, and they will be blessed beyond measure (as seen in the miraculous saving of Jerusalem in the last chapter).

Chapter 4   Conclusion

4.1 <u>Problem statement/Hypothesis</u>

Research on the topic of Sennacherib's third campaign, especially the different sources and their varying narratives, has often been quagmired by modern researchers' focus on the chronology and factuality of, and the correspondence between the different narratives. In much of this research, the only conclusions to be reached are that there are no conclusions. In the light of this seeming chaos, the use of the ideological beliefs and social values of the ancients as point of reference and analytical tool in the study of the various texts has opened up a world of meaning and purpose.

Instead of focusing on the texts and their differences as a mere starting point for research into the truth behind the stories, the texts are shifted to the core of the research and allowed to speak for themselves with no more modern ideas and concepts being forced upon them. Instead of seeing the texts as loose bits and pieces whose significance can only be revealed after disassembling them, the texts are now handled as whole and correct in the face of their seeming incorrectness. They are given the opportunity to let the values and meanings instilled in them by the original writers shine through, without the bias of the researcher getting in the way.

4.2 <u>Final conclusions</u>

Because of the use of this proposed approach, the texts were allowed to speak freely, and new meaning, purpose and significance was allowed to shine through. Despite all the differences to be found when comparing the various texts, there is one major commonality – each of the narratives intended something; whether for the person indicated in the narrative, or the people that the narrative was addressed to. The texts can now be viewed as what they were intended to be, ideological narratives intending the education of the people they were addressed to; and not mere historical and factual representations of the events portrayed. All the narratives intended to convey ideologically and socio-culturally important messages to the people reading them. The writers of the different narratives had no intention of narrating the whole and uncut truth of the events, it was not important to them. What was important is that the people reading the narratives understand the significance of the events for their ideology and their understanding of themselves and their culture. For the ancients, no event had meaning on its own as an event; it only received meaning once the significance thereof could be found.

The above makes it all too clear that, to get stuck only on the chronology, historicity and inconsistencies of the texts studied can be to lose sight of their intention, thus often causing them to become nothing more than chaotic pieces of unsolvable history.

However, allowing the texts to also speak from within the context they were written in is to allow a much deeper and more significant (common) message to shine through. The texts are now more than mere differing narratives: they are powerful ideological messages used to create a certain feeling in and teach certain concepts to the people they were addressed to. Each story was told to: enhance the honour of the king and the deity in question and to assure the nation it was addressed to of continuing success along the lines of the stories told.

An ideological study of the texts thus enables the researcher to also focus on what is common to all the different texts, and prevents the reader being caught up in modern studies of the differences and inconsistencies in the various texts. And so the texts are revealed for what they were intended to be – ideological documents, not historical records. In the process, the message of each of the texts, so often lost in modern studies, is brought forth. Thus, through an ideological study it is possible to identify, and build upon, a different angle on and significance to the various texts and their relation to each other.

In using an ideological approach, the idea was not to declare other methods invaluable or outdated, but to possibly find a new way of looking at very old and well documented texts. In this way, new elements of the texts might come to the fore, elements not focused upon in the past. These elements and new meanings might then be combined with past findings in later studies, causing the texts to be seen in a balanced, well rounded way. Because it is only when looking at something from every possible angle that the total meaning can become clear. The ideological method is such an angle.

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