

## ASSYRIAN MILITARY PRACTICES AND DEUTERONOMY'S LAWS OF WARFARE

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In the authoritative *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Moshe Weinfeld wrote, "Deuteronomy has become the touchstone for dating the sources in the Pentateuch and the historical books of the Old Testament."<sup>1</sup> Following the work of W. M. L. de Wette in 1805, the temporal provenience or *Sitz im Leben* for Deuteronomy proposed by historical-critical scholarship generally reflected the Hezekianic-Josianic reforms of the seventh century B.C.E., and the book was considered the work of the Deuteronomist (D).<sup>2</sup> Today the single-author theory has been refined and revised by an increasingly complex number of hypothetical authors and/or redactors, including: (1) a Deuteronomistic (Dtr) school of traditionalists; (2) multiple exilic and postexilic redactions; (3) a double redaction that includes Dtr<sup>1</sup> (Josianic) and Dtr<sup>2</sup> (exilic), and other variations.<sup>3</sup>

The vigorous discussion over sources has caused some, such as Rolf Rendtorff, virtually to abandon the "documentary hypothesis,"<sup>4</sup> and there exists today a

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1. Moshe Weinfeld, "Deuteronomy, Book of," *ABD* 2:174.

2. W. M. L. de Wette, "Dissertatio critico-exegetica qua Deuteronomium a propriis pentateuchi libris diversum, alius cuiusdam recentioris auctoris opus esse monstratur" (doctoral diss., Jena, 1805).

3. For an overview of these positions and other proponents, see the surveys of Horst D. Preuß, *Deuteronomium* (EdF 164; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1982), 1–74; Thomas C. Römer, "The Book of Deuteronomy," in *The History of Israel's Traditions: The Heritage of Martin Noth* (ed. S. L. McKenzie and M. P. Graham; JSOTSup 182; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 178–212; Erik Eynikel, *The Reform of King Josiah and the Composition of the Deuteronomistic Historian* (OtSt 33; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 7–31; Thomas C. Römer and Albert de Pury, "Deuteronomistic Historiography (DH): History of Research and Debated Issues," in *Israel Constructs Its History: Deuteronomistic History in Recent Research* (ed. A. de Pury, T. C. Römer, and J.-D. Macchi; JSOTSup 306; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 2000), 24–141.

4. Rolf Rendtorff, *The Problem of the Process of Transmission in the Pentateuch* (JSOTSup 89; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990); idem, "Between Historical Criticism and Holistic Interpretation: New Trends in Old Testament Exegesis," *Congress Volume: Jerusalem, 1986* (ed. J. A. Emerton; VTSup 40; Leiden: Brill, 1988), 298–303; idem, "The Paradigm Is Changing: Hopes

trend to deny the existence of a Deuteronomistic History (DtrH) altogether<sup>5</sup> (not including revisionist proposals redating its composition to the third and second centuries B.C.E.<sup>6</sup>). Yet despite the intense debate, these dynamic hypotheses of the nineteenth century, designated by Römer and Brettler as “constructions of modern scholarship,” continue to have strong adherents even now in the twenty-first century.<sup>7</sup>

One impetus for Deuteronomy’s date, among others, revolves around the laws of warfare in Deuteronomy. According to Gerhard von Rad, the laws of warfare in Deuteronomy “presuppose conditions regarding politics and strategy such as are inconceivable before the period of the monarchy.”<sup>8</sup> A. D. H. Mayes cogently suggested that the siege prohibitions in Deut 20 were written as a polemic or protest against those practices.<sup>9</sup> If this law was written as a polemic, the question that follows is: What particular country or culture destroyed fruit trees for the purposes of building siege works? Could this protest or polemic provide a possible

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and Fears,” *BibInt* 1 (1993): 34–53; Erhard Blum, *Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch* (BZAW 189; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990); David M. Carr, *Reading the Fractures of Genesis: Historical and Literary Approaches* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996); on recent challenges to the existence of OK?, see Jan Christian Gertz, Konrad Schmid, and Markus Witte, eds., *Abschied vom Jahwisten: Die Komposition des Hexateuch in der jüngsten Diskussion* (BZAW 315; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002).

5. Ernst Würthwein, *Studien zum deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerk* (BZAW 227; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1994): 1–11; Claus Westermann, *Die Geschichtsbücher des Alten Testaments: Gab es ein deuteronomistisches Geschichtswerk?* (TBAT 87; Gütersloh: Mohn, 1994); A. Graeme Auld, *Joshua Retold: Synoptic Perspectives* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 120–26; James Richard Linville, *Israel in the Book of Kings: The Past as a Project of Social Identity* (JSOTSup 272; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1998), 46–73; Ernst Axel Knauf, “Does the ‘Deuteronomistic Historiography’ (DtrH) Exist?” in de Pury, Römer, and Macchi, *Israel Constructs Its History*, 388–98.

6. Philip R. Davies writes: “I doubt whether the term ‘Deuteronomistic History’ should continue to be used by scholars as if it were a fact instead of a theory” (*In Search of “Ancient Israel”* [JSOTSup 148; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992], 131); cf. Niels-Peter Lemche, “The Old Testament—A Hellenistic Book?” *SJOT* 7 (1993): 163–93.

7. For a recent example of combining two traditionally variant views, of having both a Hexateuch and the DtrH, see Thomas C. Römer and Marc Z. Brettler, “Deuteronomy and the Case for a Persian Hexateuch,” *JBL* 119 (2000): 401–19; see also de Pury, Römer, and Macchi, *Israel Constructs Its History*, and the discussion by Raymond F. Person Jr. (*The Deuteronomic School: History, Social Setting, and Literature* [SBL SBL 2; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002], 1–16) for current state-of-the-art appraisals of D and the DtrH.

8. Gerhard von Rad, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), 132–33; see also idem, *Der Heilige Krieg im Alten Israel* (4th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965), 70.

9. A. D. H. Mayes states, “Israel shared with many others the common practice of destroying the natural resources of life in the country invaded by her armies. The prohibition here [in Deut 20:19] is a deuteronomic protest against a practice considered unnecessarily destructive” (*Deuteronomy* [NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979], 296).

means for finding a provenience for this law? Already in 1886 August Dillmann proposed that these laws reflected Assyrian military practices based on earlier source-critical analysis.<sup>10</sup> Later commentators assumed that the laws of warfare reflected either Assyrian<sup>11</sup> or Babylonian<sup>12</sup> siege tactics reflecting the sociopolitical milieu of the seventh–fifth centuries B.C.E. Despite the fact that Peter Craigie, Jeffrey Tigay, and most recently James K. Hoffmeier have recognized that the types of siege warfare described in Deuteronomy are common to several periods of history, including contexts in the second millennium,<sup>13</sup> others, including Van Seters, Frankena, and Weinfeld, have focused solely on first-millennium comparative studies to the exclusion of second-millennium sources, assuming an Assyrian *Vorlage* to the treaties<sup>14</sup> and military practices<sup>15</sup> outlined in Deuteronomy through Judges. Because of this preconceived provenience, the comparative sources are often limited within the Assyrian corpus of literature.<sup>16</sup>

10. August Dillmann, *Die Bücher Numeri, Deuteronomium und Josua* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1886).

11. S. R. Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy* (ICC 5; New York: Scribner's, 1916), 240; George Adam Smith, *The Book of Deuteronomy in the Revised Version: With Introduction and Notes* (Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1918), 249; Götz Schmitt, *Du sollst keinen Frieden schließen mit den Bewohnern des Landes: Die Weisungen gegen die Kanaanäer in Israels Geschichte und Geschichtsschreibung* (BWANT 91; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1970), 138; Walter J. Harrelson, "Law in the OT," *IDB* 4:85; Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School*, 50–51.

12. Norbert Lohfink, *Theology of the Pentateuch: Themes of the Priestly Narrative and Deuteronomy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 55–75; A. D. H. Mayes, "Deuteronomy 4 and the Literary Criticism of Deuteronomy," *JBL* 100 (1981): 23–51; Georg Braulik, *The Theology of Deuteronomy: Collected Essays* (BIBAL Collected Essays 2; Richland Hills, Tex: BIBAL, 1994), 151–64; Ronald E. Clements, "The Deuteronomistic Law of Centralization and the Catastrophe of 587 BC," in *After the Exile: Essays in Honour of Rex Mason* (ed. J. Barton and D. J. Reimer; Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1996), 5–25; Frank Crüsemann, *The Torah: Theology and Social History of Old Testament Law* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 204–12.

13. J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary* (TOTC; Downer's Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1974) 224; Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 276–77; Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy* (JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996) 190–91; James K. Hoffmeier, trans., "The Annals of Thutmose III (2.2A)" *COS* 2.2A:12 n. 61.

14. R. Frankena, "Vassal-Treaties of Essarhaddon and the Dating of Deuteronomy," in *Oudtestamentisch Werkgezelschap in Nederland* (ed. P. A. H. de Boer; OtSt 14; Leiden: Brill, 1965), 122–54; Moshe Weinfeld, "Traces of Assyrian Treaty Formulae in Deuteronomy," *Bib* 46 (1965): 417–27; idem, "Deuteronomy: The Present State of Inquiry," *JBL* 87 (1967): 254.

15. Von Rad, *Deuteronomy*, 132–33; see also idem, *Der Heilige Krieg*, 70; Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School*; John Van Seters, "Joshua's Campaign and Near Eastern Historiography," *SJOT* 2 (1990): 12.

16. Both Weinfeld and Van Seters restricted their study to first-millennium examples. Van Seters only surveyed three Assyrian texts from Sargon II, Esharhaddon, and Ashurbanipal ("Joshua's Campaign," 6–12); see the critique by James K. Hoffmeier, "The Structure of Joshua

Most assuredly the Assyrians are known for their sophisticated military tactics, their use of extensive siege equipment, and their psychological warfare in their efforts to expand and maintain their empire.<sup>17</sup> Life-support sources were always essential for the survival of both a besieged city and for the attacking armies. But what relationship did these have to the construction of siege works as outlined in Deut 20:19–20? Were fruit trees ever destroyed? What was the motivation for such destruction? Was it as reprisal for an uncooperative enemy? Was it part of a general “scorched earth” policy? Were these fruits and produce used for the feeding of enemy troops? If such destruction of life-support systems took place, it would be significant in this line of questioning to establish when the destruction began. Was it before, during, or after the siege? If the destruction occurred before or during the siege, one may assume that some of the wood from felled trees may have been used for the building of siege works. If these activities took place after a siege, there would no longer be a need for siege works.

The law concerning siege works was recently reinvestigated in order to develop an understanding of what the laws of warfare in Deuteronomy expressed to Israel and to compare the laws against the contextual framework of ancient Near Eastern military activity.<sup>18</sup> This cross-cultural, comparative approach is essential in order to elucidate the historical and cultural background of the text on the basis of contrasts and parallels.<sup>19</sup>

#### ASSYRIAN TEXTUAL SOURCES

The written records of the Assyrians describe in vivid detail their confiscation and destruction of trees, fruit trees, grain, and other life-support subsistence

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1–11 and the Annals of Thutmose III,” in *Faith, Tradition, and History: Old Testament Historiography in Its Near Eastern Context* (ed. A. R. Millard, J. K. Hoffmeier, and D. W. Baker; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 166; idem, *Israel in Egypt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 40–42; the exception is Edward Noort (“Das Kapitulationsangebot im Kriegsgesetz Dtn 20:10ff. und in den Kriegserzählungen,” in *Studies in Deuteronomy in Honour of C. J. Labuschagne on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday* [ed. F. García Martínez, A. Hilhorst, J. T. A. M. G. van Ruiten, and A. S. van der Woude; VTSup 53; Leiden: Brill, 1994], 199–207), who investigates Egyptian sources but restricts his analysis to the reign of Ramses III.

17. On the Assyrian practice of psychological warfare, see H. W. F. Saggs, *The Might That Was Assyria* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1984), 248–50; Erika Bleibtreu, “Grisly Assyrian Record of Torture and Death,” *BAR* 17/1 (1991): 52–61, 75.

18. Michael G. Hasel, *Military Practice and Polemic: Israel’s Laws of Warfare in Near Eastern Perspective* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 2005); idem, “The Destruction of Trees in the Moabite Campaign of 2 Kgs 3:4–27: A Study in the Laws of Warfare,” *AUSS* 40 (2002): 197–206.

19. For a detailed exegesis of Deut 20, see Hasel, *Military Practice and Polemic*, 21–49.

strategies of the enemy.<sup>20</sup> The first military reference to cutting down orchards comes from the Middle Assyrian ruler Tiglath-pileser I. In his campaign against Suhi he claims, “Their orchards I cut down.”<sup>21</sup> Later it is purported, “How many of their lofty cities he smashes! (From) their [fi]elds of sustenance he rips out the grain. He cuts down their fruit; the orchard he destroys. [O]ver their mountains he makes the Deluge pass.”<sup>22</sup> Tukulti-Ninurta II (890–884 B.C.E.), in his attack against the land of Mushki, claims to burn their cities with fire and “the crops of their fields (orchards)...”<sup>23</sup> Unfortunately, the text is incomplete. However, the context suggests confiscation or destruction.

Ashurnasirpal II destroys the cities of Lakê and Suhi and says, “I reaped their harvest.”<sup>24</sup> Later he asserts, “I reaped the barley and straw of the land of Luḫutu (and) stored (it) inside.”<sup>25</sup> At the city of Amedu he boasts, “I fought my way inside his gate (and) cut down his orchards.”<sup>26</sup> On the Kurkh monolith (BM 125) Ashurnasirpal says, “I reaped the harvest of the land(s) Nairi (and) stored (it) for the sustenance of my land in the cities of Tušḫa, Damdammusa, Sinabu, (and) Tidu.”<sup>27</sup>

This same claim is repeated on the Nimrud monolith.<sup>28</sup> Shalmaneser III (858–824 B.C.E.) states in Year 3, “Ahuni, son of Adini, I shut up in his city, carried off the grain (*lit.* crops) of his (fields), cut down his orchards.”<sup>29</sup> In his eighth year in battles against the rebels in Babylonia, he claims to have defeated the king

20. Erika Bleibtreu, “Zerstörung der Umwelt durch Bäumefällen und Dezimierung des Löwenbestandes in Mesopotamien,” in *Der orientalische Mensch und seine Beziehungen zur Umwelt, Beiträge zum 2. Grazer morgenländischen Symposium (2.–5. März 1989)* (ed. B. Scholz; Grazer morgenländische Studien 2; Graz: GrazKult, 1989), 219–33; Steven W. Cole, “The Destruction of Orchards in Assyrian Warfare,” in *Assyria 1995: Proceedings of the 10th Anniversary Symposium of the Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, Helsinki, September 7–11, 1995* (ed. S. Parpola and R. M. Whiting; Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1997), 29–40. Hammurabi’s Code, no. 59, states that it is forbidden to cut down trees without consent (Theophile J. Meek, trans., “The Code of Hammurabi,” *ANET*, 169; see also Thompson, *Deuteronomy*, 224). Evidently this was not enforced for military campaigns.

21. *ARAB* 1:99 §310.

22. LKA 63 r. 14–18; see Victor Hurowitz and Joan Goodnick Westenholz, “LKA 63: A Heroic Poem in Celebration of Tiglath-pileser I’s Musru and Qumana Campaign,” *JCS* 42 (1990): 14–18.

23. *ARAB* 1:132 §413.

24. *RIMA* 2:214, iii 32; *ARAB* 1:161 §472.

25. *RIMA* 2:218, iii 82.

26. *RIMA* 2:220, iii 109; *ARAB* 1:168 §480.

27. *RIMA* 2:261–262, iii 96–97; *ARAB* 1:182 §502. This appears to be the first direct reference that the grain is being used as food for the military; see Barbara Cifola, “Ashurnasirpal II’s 9th Campaign: Seizing the Grain Bowl of the Phoenician Cities,” *AfO* 44/45 (1997/1998): 156–58.

28. *RIMA* 2:251, iv 107–108.

29. *ARAB* 1:229 §620.

Marduk-bêl-usâte. “I shut him up in his city, I carried off the grain of his fields, I cut down his orchards, I turned aside (*lit.* dammed) his river.”<sup>30</sup> In year 18 Shalmaneser marches against Hazael of Aram and likewise shuts him up in his city. “His orchards I cut down.”<sup>31</sup> In the so-called Suḥu Annals the leaders of certain Aramaic tribes plot to make war against the land of Suḥu. They state, “We will go and attack the houses of the land of Suḥu; we will seize his cities of the steppe; and we will cut down their fruit trees.”<sup>32</sup> This inscription clearly indicates that the destruction of orchards was intended after the cities themselves were conquered. The land of Suḥu is depicted on Shalmaneser III’s Black Obelisk (Register IV), where five date palms serve as a background to the scene.<sup>33</sup> In his fourth campaign, Shamshi-Adad V (823–811 B.C.E.), the son and successor of Shalmaneser III, states of the cities Datêbir and Izduia, “Their plantations I cut down. Their cities I destroyed, I devastated, I burned with fire.”<sup>34</sup>

Already during this earlier period, references appear for the cutting of cedars and cypress timbers for tribute and export to Assyria. Tiglath-pileser I makes several references to the cutting of cedars.<sup>35</sup> Shalmaneser III likewise refers to this practice during year 1 when he advances to the Mediterranean,<sup>36</sup> in years 17 and 18 when he goes up to Mount Amanus,<sup>37</sup> and in year 26 during a campaign against the Cilician cities.<sup>38</sup>

This brief survey indicates that the destruction of orchards and the confiscation of grain had already begun in Assyria as early as the twelfth century B.C.E. (Tiglath-pileser I) and was predominant by the ninth century. In these texts there is rarely any explicit purpose stated for cutting down orchards. Several possible reasons may be suggested: (1) the overt destruction of the life-subsistence system of the inhabitants as either a part of siege tactics or a punishment for rebelling against Assyria; (2) the feeding of the Assyrian armies; (3) a reprisal for an unconquered city; or (4) the building of siege equipment.<sup>39</sup>

30. *Ibid.*, 1:230 §622.

31. *Ibid.*, 1:243 §672. This is confirmed by the Berlin statue from Ashur, which states of the same campaign against Hazael, “His orchards [I cut down]...” (1:246 §681).

32. I am grateful to Professor K. Lawson Younger for pointing out this reference. See his translation, “Ninurta-Kudurri-Uṣur—Suḥu,” *COS* 2.115B:279. He states further, “Clearly, the intent of these Arameans was the destruction of the fruit trees after their conquest of the cities” (personal communication with K. Lawson Younger, 14 June 2004).

33. *ANEP*, 122.

34. *ARAB* 1:258 §724.

35. *Ibid.*, 1:96 §297, 1:98 §306, 1:99 §306.

36. *Ibid.*, 1:201 §558, 1:216 §600, 1:234 §633.

37. *Ibid.*, 1:205 §574, 576.

38. *Ibid.*, 1:208 §583.

39. On these possibilities, see Cole, “Destruction of Orchards,” 34.

The contextual setting of the statements makes the last suggestion unlikely. In all the texts surveyed, the cutting down of orchards occurs after the claim that the city is captured, destroyed, defeated, and the booty carried away. In many cases the destruction of fruit trees occurs when “describing incomplete sieges.”<sup>40</sup> As Hayim Tadmor observes, the cutting down of trees may have served as a “face-saving device employed in a report about an uncompleted siege.”<sup>41</sup> In other words, because of frustrated efforts to defeat a city, the army is forced to move on but first destroys the fruit trees in reprisal. Since these orchards “would have been a potential source of tax revenue for state treasuries,”<sup>42</sup> the attitude of the Assyrians may have been one of open hostility. Since they could not use trees for their benefit, certainly they would ensure that their enemy could not use them for their own.

Significantly, the grain in only two texts is used for the feeding of the Assyrian army, and there is no indication in the texts of the ninth century and earlier that the orchards were cut down for food. Indeed, why cut down the trees when all that is required to feed the army is the fruit?<sup>43</sup> The texts point to a blatant destruction of the life-support system, not as part of siege tactics but as recompense for a rebellious enemy—one that was either defeated or that could not be defeated. This conclusion is supported by the texts of the eighth and seventh centuries.

In the eighth century B.C.E., the major military tactic of confiscating and destroying the life-subsistence economies continues. The annals of Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 B.C.E.)<sup>44</sup> record an attack against the land of Mukania. “His gardens . . . . plantations, which were without number, I cut down, not one escaped.”<sup>45</sup> Likewise concerning Kîn-zêr, son of Amukkâni, “I shut up in Sapie . . . The mulberry (?) groves which were (planted) along his (city) walls, I cut down; not one was left (*lit.* escaped). The date palms within the confines of his land I destroyed.”<sup>46</sup>

Sargon II boasts in annals at Dur-Sharrukin, year 12, “I let my army eat (the fruit) of their orchards; the date palms, their mainstay, the orchards, the wealth

40. *Ibid.*

41. Hayim Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III, King of Assyria: Critical Edition with Introductions, Translations, and Commentary* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1994), 79.

42. *Ibid.*

43. *Ibid.*, 79, on the time required to grow date palms and other fruit trees.

44. The most recent work on these inscriptions is found in Tadmor, *Tiglath-pileser III*; see also Bustenay Oded, “The Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III: Review Article,” *IEJ* 47 (1997): 104–10.

45. *ARAB* 1:279 §776.

46. *Ibid.*, 1:285 §792.

of their province, I cut down.”<sup>47</sup> In year 13 he states, “the palms I cut down...”<sup>48</sup> The letter to Ashur recounting the events of the eighth campaign states, “their crops (and) their stubble I burned, their filled up granaries I opened and let my army devour the unmeasured grain. Like swarming locusts I turned the beasts of my camps into its meadows, and they tore up the vegetation on which it (the city) depended, they devastated its plain.”<sup>49</sup> In the same text, Sargon states, “Their bounteous crops I burned up, [their filled up granaries I opened] and let my army devour the unmeasured grain.”<sup>50</sup> This theme is repeated again in more detail.<sup>51</sup>

This is quite a vivid and extensive description with its emphasis on the totality of the destruction of gardens, orchards, and forests. However, it must be pointed out that Sargon does not make use of the timber of these trees for siege works. Instead, this description appears after Sargon says of the city wall, “with iron axes and iron hoes I smashed like a pot and leveled it to the ground.”<sup>52</sup> This indicates that Sargon had already gained entrance into “Ulhu, the store city of Ursá.”<sup>53</sup> After entrance has been made and his soldiers eat from the granaries, they level the city and gather the trees into a pile and burn them. It is the final act ensuring total destruction. Here we have the wanton destruction of the life-support system, which is completely wasted. Such treatment of fruit-bearing trees is repeated several times in this important inscription; each time cut trees are piled together, followed by a massive conflagration of orchards and forests.<sup>54</sup> The conclusion again is that this Assyrian tactic was a part of the punishment for rebellion.

Like Sargon, the campaigns by Sennacherib also testify to similar campaign tactics.<sup>55</sup> During his first campaign against Babylonia, recorded on a text now located in the British Museum,<sup>56</sup> Sennacherib boasts, “A total of 88 strong, walled cities of Chaldea, with 820 hamlets within their borders, I besieged, I conquered, I carried away their spoil. The grain and dates which were in their plantations,

47. *Ibid.*, 2:16 §32.

48. *Ibid.*, 2:20 §39.

49. *Ibid.*, 2:85 §158.

50. *Ibid.*, 2:86 §159.

51. *Ibid.*, 2:87 §161, 2:88–89 §161.

52. *Ibid.*, 2:87 §161.

53. *Ibid.* On the location of these polities, see Oscar White Muscarella, “The Location of Ulhu and Urse in Sargon II’s Eighth Campaign, 714 B.C.,” *JFA* 13 (1986): 466–75.

54. *ARAB* 2:90 §164, 91 §165.

55. Daniel David Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib* (OIP 2; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1924).

56. BM 113203; first published by S. Smith, *The First Campaign of Sennacherib, King of Assyria, B.C. 705–681* (London: Luzac, 1921).

their harvest of the plain, I had my army devour.”<sup>57</sup> In the same text he states, “The Arabs, Aramaeans, Chaldeans, who were in Uruk, Nippur, Kish, Harsag-kamma, together with the citizens, the rebels (sinners), I brought forth and counted as spoil. The grain and dates which were in their plantations, the planting of their garden-beds, the harvest of their plain and highlands (?) I had my troops devour.”<sup>58</sup> On the Bellino Cylinder his attack against the land of Elippi resulted in first the destruction of cities and then the cutting down of orchards: “over their fertile (?) fields I poured out misery.”<sup>59</sup>

These records testify that the fruit-bearing trees and grain were confiscated to feed the Assyrian army. Again the context implies that the confiscation of grain and dates occurred *after* the besieged cities were conquered or destroyed and the spoil carried away. There is no record that vegetation or orchards were used for the construction of siege works, nor is there any *written* record of trees being cut down for such a purpose.

#### ICONOGRAPHIC SOURCES

The iconography of Assyrian military tactics affirms that fruit trees remained standing during the siege and were cut down only subsequent to the defeat of the enemy city. In order to recognize this pattern, it should be pointed out that the Assyrians portrayed their military activity against cities in two ways: (1) by depicting the siege and battle in progress; and (2) by showing the city after it had been conquered and while the spoils and captives were being carried away.<sup>60</sup> Some of the reliefs depict a narrative progression from one scene to another. In most cases, the reliefs depict the battle as it is taking place. The king or army is in action against the city.

As already noted, battering rams, tunneling, sapping, and scaling ladders are all tactics used against the enemy cities. In the midst of these scenes, which show the Assyrians at war, the artisans provide details of the surrounding countryside. These depictions often include fruit trees, vines bearing grapes, and other vegetation.<sup>61</sup> At the northwest palace of Nimrud, Ashurnasirpal II is shown leading with fire of arrows the assault of a city. As a battering ram attacks the walls,

57. Luckenbill, *Annals of Sennacherib*, 54:51.

58. *Ibid.*, 54:53.

59. *Ibid.*, 59:29.

60. In some reliefs these stages of warfare are conflated and show a progression of the results of war. Such reliefs are the most instructive because they depict what happened before and after the battle. An example is the campaign by Sennacherib against the city of Lachish.

61. On the general depiction of vegetation in Assyrian art, see Pauline Albenda, “Landscape Bas-Reliefs in the *Bit Hilāni* of Ashurbanipal,” *BASOR* 224 (1976): 49–72; 225 (1977): 29–48; on the specific depiction of the destruction of orchards, see Bleibtreu, “Zerstörung der Umwelt,” 220–21; and Cole, “Destruction of Orchards,” 29–40.

fugitives flee for their lives, swimming on skin floats to another city while pursued by archers. In the background, trees, including a standing date palm with fruit, are depicted intact.<sup>62</sup> Also in the throne room at Nimrud, Ashurnasirpal is shown leading a chariot charge against a city. Above his chariot the enemies lie beheaded and strewn on the battlefield. Around them numerous shrubs and bushes remain standing.<sup>63</sup> Below the attacked city several fruit-bearing trees and a shrub are found standing. An enemy soldier is being killed behind one of the trees.<sup>64</sup>

At the central palace of Tiglath-pileser III in Nimrud, a city is shown empty after the siege is complete. Two battering rams stand abandoned at either side of the gate. Women and children captives are being carted off. Inside the city, a single date palm stands full of fruit.<sup>65</sup> In another scene, a fortified city is being stormed by battering rams while it is defended by archers. A date palm full of fruit is shown immediately outside the walls on the *tel*.<sup>66</sup> Above the battering ram another date palm with hanging fruit is standing.<sup>67</sup> Two more fruited date palms are depicted on either side of the archers and above a second battering ram (fig. 1).<sup>68</sup>

In Sennacherib's palace in Nineveh, the iconography associated with the siege of Lachish indicates that fruit and other trees remained standing during and after the city's siege and attack. This campaign against Judah is described in

62. BM 124536; BM 124539; Richard D. Barnett and Werner Forman, *Assyrian Palace Reliefs and Their Influence on the Sculptures of Babylonia and Assyria* (London: Batchworth, 1960), 22–23; John Malcolm Russell, "The Program of the Palace of Assurnasirpal II at Nimrud: Issues in the Research and Presentation of Assyrian Art," *AJA* 102 (1998): pl. IV, Room B, slabs 17–18. The upper portion of the slabs show the attack in progress, while the lower portion depicts the tribute presented to the king.

63. BM 124556; Barnett and Forman, *Assyrian Palace Reliefs*, 24; Russell, "Program of the Palace," pl. IV, Room B, slab 4.

64. BM 124555; Barnett and Forman, *Assyrian Palace Reliefs*, 25; Russell, "Program of the Palace," pl. IV, Room B, slab 3.

65. BM 118882; Barnett and Forman, *Assyrian Palace Reliefs*, 35–36; C. J. Gadd, *The Stones of Assyria* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1936), pl. 11.

66. BM 118903; Barnett and Forman, *Assyrian Palace Reliefs*, 38; Gadd, *Stones of Assyria*, 12.

67. The date palm is depicted at a strange angle and might appear to be falling. However, the enemy archer who has fallen with his head against it while an Assyrian is stabbing him with a spear from behind appears to be the reason for this angle. The context does not favor the interpretation that the date palm is being or has been cut down. No axes or other equipment are seen for this interpretation to be warranted.

68. Richard D. Barnett and Margarete Falkner, *The Sculptures of Aššur-nasir-pālī II (883–859 B.C.), Tiglath-pileser III (745–727 B.C.), Esarhaddon (681–669 B.C.) from the Central and South-West Palaces at Nimrud* (London: British Museum Press, 1962), 81, pl. XXXII; Gadd, *Stones of Assyria*, 12.

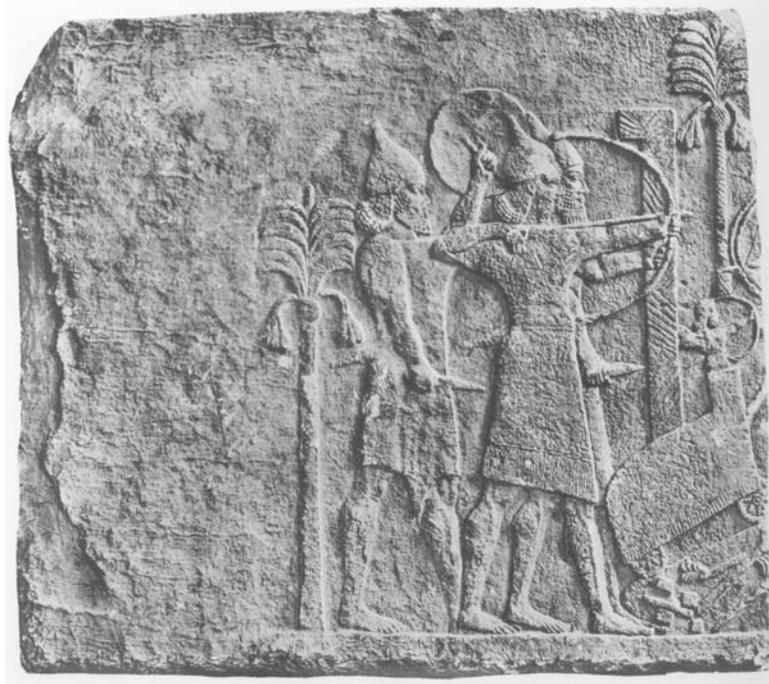


Figure 1. Nimrud. Tiglath-pileser III attacks a Babylonian city.  
C. J. Gadd, *The Stones of Assyria* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1936), 12.

biblical accounts and Sennacherib's annals<sup>69</sup> and is pictured on twelve slabs in a ceremonial room at Nineveh.<sup>70</sup> Finally, the reconstruction of this event is augmented by the archaeological record at the site itself.<sup>71</sup>

69. On the biblical description of these events and their correlation with historical records and archaeological evidence, see Siegfried H. Horn, "Did Sennacherib Campaign Once or Twice Against Hezekiah?" *AUSS* 4 (1966): 1–28; William H. Shea, "Sennacherib's Second Palestinian Campaign," *JBL* 104 (1985): 401–18; idem, "The New Tirhakah Text and Sennacherib's Second Palestinian Campaign," *AUSS* 35 (1997): 181–87; idem, "Jerusalem under Siege: Did Sennacherib Attack Twice?" *BAR* 25/6 (1999): 36–44, 64; and the responses by Mordecai Cogan, "Sennacherib's Siege of Jerusalem," *BAR* 27/1 (2001): 40–45, 69. For an overview, see Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis* (SBT 2/3; London: SCM, 1967). For Sennacherib's annals, see Luckenbill, *Annals of Sennacherib*, 29–35.

70. David Ussishkin, "The 'Lachish Reliefs' and the City of Lachish," *IEJ* 30 (1980): 174–95; idem, *The Conquest of Lachish by Sennacherib* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, Institute of Archaeology, 1982).

71. David Ussishkin, "Lachish: Renewed Archaeological Excavations," *Expedition* 20/4 (1978): 18–28; idem, "Excavations at Tel Lachish 1978–1983: Second Preliminary Report," *TA*

On slab 1 at Nineveh, three rows of infantry are shown attacking the city with arrows, spears, and sling stones. Above them are vines filled with grapes and other fruits. Trees remain standing even among the top row of archers.<sup>72</sup> After the siege and attack, the captives and spoil are carried by hand and by wagon to Sennacherib, who is seated in the royal tent on his throne (slabs 4–8). The countryside is depicted with standing trees, grape-bearing vines, and fruit-bearing trees (see also slabs 9–12). It appears that during the attack the fruit trees were preserved even with at least seven battering rams engaged, the largest number shown on any Assyrian relief. Even the use of logs in the construction of the siege ramp does not give a clear indication that these were fruit trees that were destroyed.<sup>73</sup> In another scene dating to Sennacherib, his infantry is shown advancing to the siege of a city. Between the two registers of advancing troops, alternating trees and fruit trees are depicted.<sup>74</sup> Sennacherib receives captives from the town of Sakhrina. In the background one sees a row of palms laden with dates.<sup>75</sup>

In the palace of Ashurbanipal in Nineveh,<sup>76</sup> a different scene shows the Elamite town Khamanu abandoned and in flames as its walls are systematically destroyed by Assyrian soldiers. In the foreground the Assyrians are carrying off the spoils from the city gate. Six trees stand behind them.<sup>77</sup> Another scene in the north palace of Kuyunjik depicts the triumph of Ashurbanipal over the allies of the king of Babylon. The uppermost register records the city under attack, its gatehouses on fire. The trees, however, remain standing on all sides (fig. 2).<sup>78</sup>

In the preceding survey of Assyrian military iconography, the focus has been on the depiction of standing fruit trees before, during, and after campaigns against cities. There are occasions, however rare, when trees are being cut down. Here again it is the sequence of events that is significant. The relief in Ashurnasirpal's northwest palace at Nimrud is not sufficiently clear in establishing a sequence.<sup>79</sup> However, the bronze reliefs of Shalmaneser III preserve a scene of the

10 (1983): 97–175; idem, “Lachish,” *NEAEHL* 3:897–911.

72. Ussishkin, *Conquest of Lachish*; Barnett and Forman, *Assyrian Palace Reliefs*, 44–47, 49.

73. Ussishkin, *Conquest of Lachish*, 100, 105.

74. Gadd, *Stones of Assyria*, pl. 16.

75. *Ibid.*, pl. 19.

76. On the depictions of grapevines in the iconography of Ashurbanipal, see Pauline Albenda, “Gravevines in Ashurbanipal's Garden,” *BASOR* 215 (1974): 5–17.

77. BM 124919, 134386; Richard D. Barnett, *Sculptures from the North Palace of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh (668–627 B.C.)* (London: British Museum Press, 1976), pl. LXVI; Gadd, *Stones of Assyria*, pl. 43; Barnett and Forman, *Assyrian Palace Reliefs*, 132.

78. BM 124945, 124946; Gadd, *Stones of Assyria*, pl. 26; see also Barnett, *Sculptures from the North Palace*, pl. D.

79. In this poorly preserved scene, only the legs of soldiers cutting trees down with axes can still be made out. It is not clear what the context of this scene is nor whether these are fruit or another type of tree; see Barnett and Falkner, *The Sculptures of Aššur-nasir-pal*, pl. CXIV; see also Bleibtreu, “Zerstörung der Umwelt,” 230, fig. 1.



Figure 2. Kuyunyik. Assurbanipal attacks while trees stand.  
C. J. Gadd, *The Stones of Assyria* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1936), pl. 26.

city of Urartu.<sup>80</sup> It is apparent that the city is defeated. Its walls are abandoned by defenders and consumed by flames. It is in this precise moment of annihilation that the city's orchards are being systematically cut down by soldiers wielding axes.<sup>81</sup>

The same pattern is found in other Assyrian reliefs depicting the cutting down of trees. During Sennacherib's campaign against Illubru, the city is shown next to a wide river, guarded by long, low walls and protected by equidistant towers. The city is surrounded by trees.<sup>82</sup> Several factors indicate that the city has been conquered and the siege is over. First, a long line of Assyrian soldiers can be seen exiting the city gate carrying the spoils and treasures of the city. Second, the walls are aflame. Third, the defenders of the city are not depicted, an indication that the fighting has ceased. In this state, after the defeat of the city, a single Assyrian soldier can be seen to the right of the city along the banks of the river, wielding an axe against a tree. This is not a fruit tree. Four other trees

80. Leonard W. King and E. A. Wallis Budge, *Bronze Reliefs from the Gates of Shalmaneser, King of Assyria, B.C. 860–825* (London: British Museum Press, 1915), pl. VIII, band II/2, upper register.

81. The destruction is consistently by means of various types of axes, never by the saw, which was introduced for felling trees in Europe during the eighteenth century (Bleibtreu, "Zerstörung der Umwelt," 226 n. 10).

82. A. T. Olmstead, *History of Assyria* (New York: Scribner's, 1923), fig. 128; Russell, *Sennacherib's Palace without Rival at Nineveh* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 70–71, fig. 39. There is no textual verification of this destructive action in the annals; see Luckenbill, *Annals of Sennacherib*, 61–62.

are also depicted as fallen immediately below the line of soldiers carrying the booty. In the lower left corner of the relief, a fruit-bearing vine remains standing. This relief demonstrates again that the destruction of trees occurred only after a city was defeated, not before.<sup>83</sup> In another scene found at Sennacherib's northwest palace, the Assyrians have apparently taken one of the principle cities of Babylonia,<sup>84</sup> and Assyrian soldiers are depicted cutting down palm trees laden with fruit outside and inside the walls of the city. The city has been defeated, as the Assyrians are within the city walls cutting down trees. The defeated enemy comes to greet them as men beat on drums and women proceed behind them clapping their hands.

The city of Dilbat is not mentioned in Sennacherib's annals, but its vivid depiction in Room III of Sennacherib's southwest palace is a graphic example of the destruction of fruit trees.<sup>85</sup> In this scene there is clear evidence once again that the city has been defeated. A line of soldiers in the lowest register carries off the spoils. Assyrians are shown in the towers of the city. Two Assyrians in the lower right are playing lyres in celebration of the defeat. Behind the city and in the upper register the Assyrians are shown cutting down the date palms. They work in pairs. One tree has been sufficiently cut, and two Assyrians are pushing it over. The next two trees are depicted with one Assyrian soldier harvesting the dates while his partner strikes the tree trunk with his axe. Once again, this occurs after the city has been defeated.

In summary, the analysis of the textual and iconographic evidence allows for several significant conclusions. First, trees are depicted standing during the onslaught and battle against the city. There is no evidence of trees being cut down during this stage of battle. Second, in many scenes, even after a city has been captured, both fruit-bearing date palms, vines, and other trees are illustrated intact, surrounding a captured city that is being destroyed by flames. Finally, in only a few instances are trees shown to be cut down. This consistently occurs only *after* the city has been conquered and the enemy is vanquished. These depictions confirm the annals and other historical records, which indicate that the destruction of trees and orchards occurs after a city is abandoned, defeated, destroyed, and/or burned to the ground. This sequence of events further supports the conclusion

83. Olmstead states that "the Assyrians cut down the trees to construct the 'great flies of the wall' which were to force the capture of the city. It was fired [set aflame] and the long line of warriors carried off the arms" (*History of Assyria*, 311). However, there is no evidence of this from the text or from the reliefs themselves (see n. 161). Luckenbill posits that the "great wall flies" were "some siege engine" (*Annals of Sennacherib*, 62).

84. This probably represented Sennacherib's first Babylonian campaign; see Richard D. Barnett, Erika Bleibtreu, and Geoffrey Turner, *Sculptures from the Southwest Palace of Sennacherib at Nineveh* (2 vols.; London: British Museum Press, 1998), 1:130–31, 2: pls. 460–61.

85. Russell, *Sennacherib's Palace*, 153, 154, fig. 78; Barnett, Bleibtreu, and Turner, *Sculptures*, pl. 49.

that the use of fruit-bearing trees for the construction of siege works, battering rams, and other major siege machines cannot be supported by the currently known textual and iconographic sources describing and depicting ancient Assyrian warfare. Parallels for this practice must be sought elsewhere.<sup>86</sup>

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86. For an extended discussion of further first and second millennium sources, see Hasel, *Military Practice and Polemic*, 95–123.