The 'Lachish Reliefs' and the City of Lachish

DAVID USSISHKIN

Tel Aviv University

THE conquest of Lachish was one of the major events of Sennacherib's invasion of Judah during his third campaign in 701 B.C.E. The Bible informs us that Sennacherib encamped at Lachish and established his headquarters there during at least part of his sojourn in Judah (2 Kings 18:14, 17; 19:8; Isa. 36:2; 37:8; 2 Chron. 32:9). The Assyrian inscriptions relating the details of the campaign[1] do not specifically mention the conquest of Lachish, but this event was commemorated by the Assyrian king in the 'Lachish Reliefs' erected in his palace at Nineveh, one of the most remarkable series of bas reliefs depicting the siege and conquest of a city by the Assyrian army.

The ancient city of Lachish should almost certainly be identified with Tel Lachish (Tell ed Duweir).[2] This outstanding mound was extensively excavated by a British expedition directed by J.L. Starkey in 1932–1938, by Y. Aharoni in 1966 and 1968, and since 1973 by an expedition of Tel Aviv University and the Israel Exploration Society directed by the author.[3] The archaeological level representing the fortified city which was attacked in 701 B.C.E.—Level III—was identified and studied,[4] the main Assyrian siege ramp was discovered,[5] and evidence of the fierce battle and ensuing destruction of the city was unearthed.

We thus see that literary, artistic and archaeological data combine to inform us about the siege and conquest of Lachish. Therefore, we are provided with a unique opportunity to compare a detailed Neo Assyrian relief with the topographical and archaeological data of a major ancient site. This was carried out in 1958 by R.D. Barnett,[6] on the
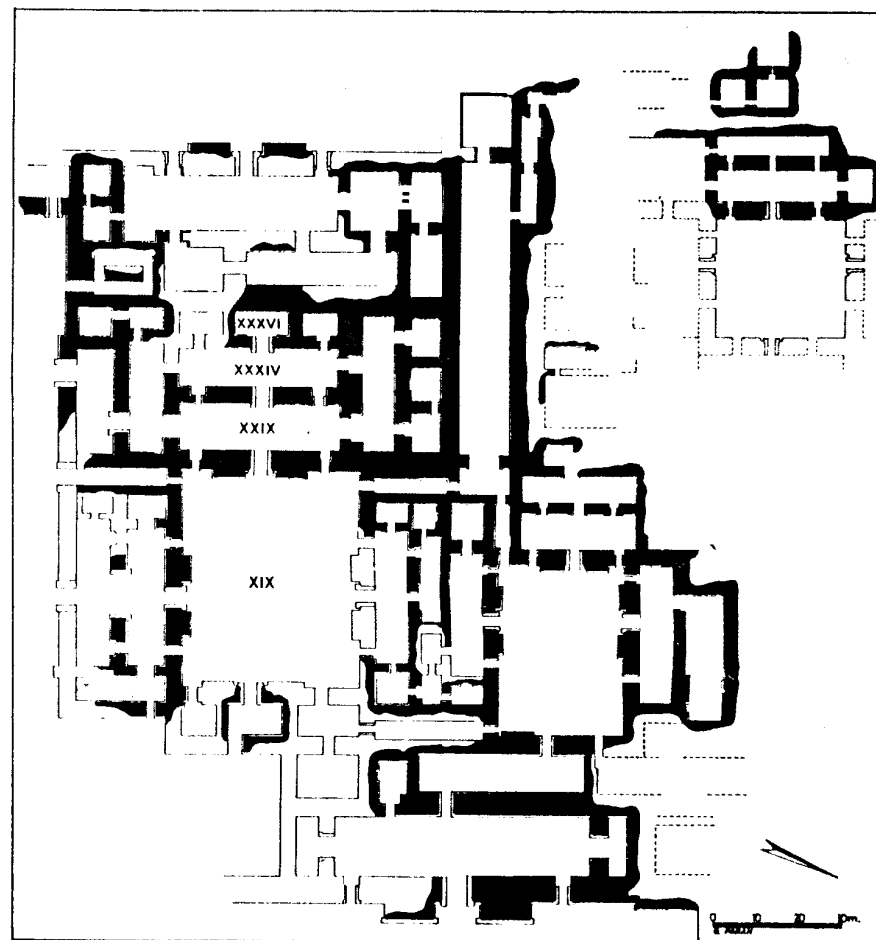

Fig. 1. Plan of the South-West Palace at Nineveh (drawn after Layard).

basis of the archaeological data uncovered in the British excavations. Barnett claimed that the reliefs portray in the main actual features of Lachish and the siege rather than merely depicting an imaginary enemy stronghold being assaulted, and thus they could be relied upon in an attempt to reconstruct the siege. The present study will make similar claims; it is basically an elaboration of Barnett's work, largely founded on archaeological data recovered in the recent excavations at the site which were not available to Barnett.

[1] ANET, p. 288.

[2] This identification is generally accepted today. Nevertheless, it is based on circumstantial evidence and thus cannot be definitely proven; a few scholars advocate identifying Lachish with other sites. See most recently G.W. Ahlström: Is Tell ed-Duweir Ancient Lachish?, PEQ 112 (1980), pp. 7–9.

[3] D. Ussishkin: Excavations at Tel Lachish—1973–1977, Preliminary Report, Tel Aviv 5 (1978), pp. 1–97.

[4] Idem: The Destruction of Lachish by Sennacherib and the Dating of the Royal Judean Storage Jars, Tel Aviv 4 (1977), pp. 28–60. A few prominent scholars adhere to the view that Level III was destroyed in 597 B.C.E. and not earlier; see most recently Kathleen M. Kenyon: Archaeology in the Holy Land,⁴ London 1979, pp. 295–301; A.D. Tushingham: The Western Hill under the Monarchy, ZDPV 95 (1979), pp. 49–50. On the basis of this view Level IV must be identified with the city attacked by the Assyrian army.

[5] Ussishkin (above, n. 3), pp. 67–74, Pls. 21–23.

[6] R.D. Barnett: The Siege of Lachish, IEJ 8 (1958), pp. 161–164.

THE 'LACHISH RELIEFS'

Sennacherib transferred the Assyrian capital to Nineveh (modern Kuyunjik), devoting considerable efforts in beautifying the city, and constructed his royal palace there. This extravagant edifice, its construction, size, magnificence and beauty, are recorded in detail in Sennacherib's inscriptions: he proudly called it the 'Palace without a Rival'.[7] Sennacherib's palace is now known as the South-West Palace; it was partially excavated by Henry Layard, who prepared a plan of the building (Fig. 1) and uncovered a large number of bas-reliefs adorning the walls.[8] Relevant to us are Rooms XXIX–XLI, which comprised a separate architectural unit within the palace complex. G. Turner[9] describes the unit as a reception suite of strictly ceremonial function. Symmetrically planned, the suite had two central adjoining halls, with a smaller, centrally placed room (No. XXXVI) flanked by subsidiary chambers at the rear. Three monumental doorways were built on a straight axis across the centre of the suite, leading the way from Court XIX to the outer hall (No. XXIX), thence to the central hall (No. XXXIV), and finally to Room XXXVI at the rear. Each of the three doorways was flanked by colossal winged bulls, descending in size from 18 feet (the outermost) to about 12 feet (the innermost). As Layard remarked, 'It would be difficult to conceive any interior architectural arrangement more imposing than this triple group of gigantic forms as seen in perspective by those who stood in the centre of the hall, dimly lighted from above, and harmoniously colored or overlaid, like the cherubims in the temple of Solomon, with gold.'[10]

The planning of the suite and arrangement of the doorways indicate the special significance of Room XXXVI at the rear. Here were erected the bas-reliefs depicting the conquest of Lachish. It seems that the whole room, and perhaps the entire suite, were intended to commemorate the conquest of Judah and the victory at Lachish.[11]

Our reconstructed ground plan of Room XXXVI is presented here in Fig. 2. Layard

[7] D.D. Luckenbill: *The Annals of Sennacherib*, Chicago, 1924, pp. 94-127; idem: *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, II, Chicago, 1927, pp. 160-179.

[8] A.H. Layard: *Discoveries in the Ruins of Nineveh and Babylon*, London, 1853; idem: *A Second Series of the Monuments of Nineveh*, London, 1853; A. Paterson: *Assyrian Sculptures, Palace of Sinacherib*, The Hague, 1915.

[9] G. Turner, *The State Apartments of Late Assyrian Palaces*, *Iraq* 32 (1970), pp. 200-202, Pl. XLV:b.

[10] Layard, *Discoveries* (above, n. 8), p. 445.

[11] It is tempting to raise the possibility that the tribute received from Hezekiah, which is listed in the Assyrian annals (*ANET*, p. 288), and especially the spoils taken from Lachish, were kept here. The Lachish Reliefs (Slabs IV-V) portray the following items being carried away by Assyrian soldiers, all possibly ceremonial symbols of government taken from the governors's palace-fort: a sceptre, two halberds, a throne, a chariot, three spears, two round shields and six swords. A similar case is known from Calah (Nimrud). An inscription of Sargon II was found at the entrance to Room U in the North-West Palace, stating that in this particular room was kept part of the spoils taken from Pisiris, king of Carchemish (Luckenbill, *Ancient Records* [above, n. 7], p. 73; M.E.L. Mallowan: *Nimrud and its Remains*, I, London, 1966, p. 37).
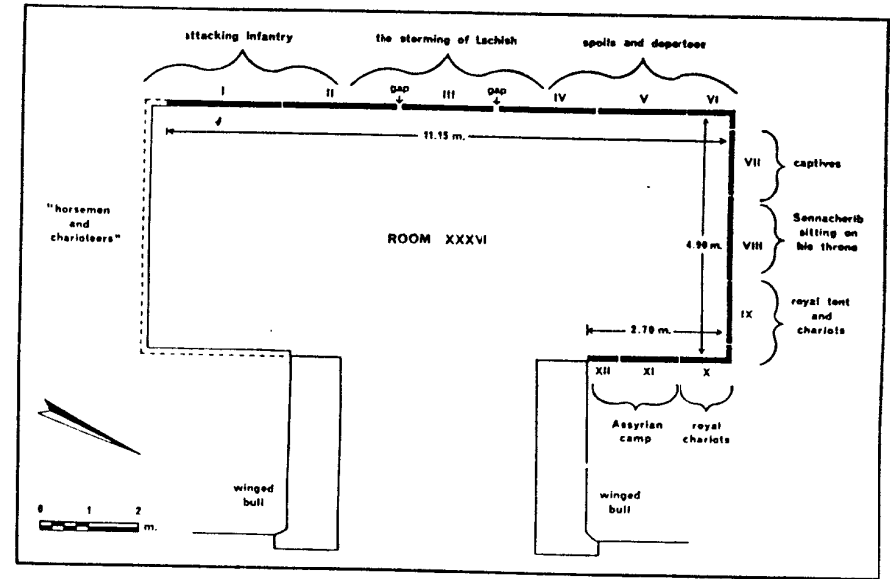
Fig. 2. Plan of Room XXXVI in the South-West Palace.

states that the room was 38 feet (11.5 m.) wide and 18 feet (5.45 m.) long,[12] but according to his ground plan of the edifice (Fig. 1) it was about 12 m. wide and 5.10 m. long. Our plan is based on the measurements of the reliefs—which indicate that the length of the room was 4.90 m. (see below)—and on Layard's ground plan. The width of the room is based on the assumption that the missing slab at the left-hand corner of the wall was 30 cm. wide. The width of the entrance and the width and length of the winged bulls are estimated, and may not be accurate.

The walls of Room XXXVI were probably entirely covered by the 'Lachish Reliefs'. Layard's plan of the palace marks thirteen numbered slabs around all the walls in the room, and in his written description he also mentions that this series contained 'thirteen slabs'.[13] Nevertheless, it seems that he was mistaken. Twelve slabs apparently arranged in consecutive order are preserved at present. They are equivalent to Layard's slabs Nos. 5-13—only nine slabs as numbered by him.

The twelve preserved slabs are numbered by us with Roman numerals in consecutive order from left to right.[14] Slab VI is a corner slab which stood in the back right-hand

[12] Layard, *Discoveries* (above, n. 8), note on p. 149.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 151.

[14] The British Museum numbers of the slabs, in consecutive order from left to right, are B.M. 124904-B.M. 124915. They were published by Layard, *Second Series* (above, n. 8), Pls. XX-XXIV, and Paterson (above, n. 8), Pls. 68-78.

corner, while Slab X, again a corner slab, stood in the front right-hand corner. The right hand edge of Slab XII, 10 cm. wide, is also carved, indicating that it was the edge of the series near the right hand jamb of the doorway. Slabs I–VI stretch for 11.15 m. from the left-hand edge of Slab I to the back right-hand corner (including an allowance of about 15 cm. for the missing edges of Slabs II, III and IV; see below). Slabs VI–X stretch for 4.90 m. between the two corners. Slabs X–XII stretch for 2.70 m. between the corner and the edge of the series. Thus we see that the preserved dado has an overall length of about 18.85 m. (11.00 + 0.15 + 4.90 + 2.70 +0.10). The length of the missing part of the series can only roughly be assessed, as the distance between the left-hand edge of Slab I and the back left-hand corner of the room is not known; it was probably 0.30 1.00 m. long. Assuming that the missing slab along the back wall was 30 cm. long, and that the left-hand side of the room was decorated similarly to the right-hand side, then the length of the missing part of the dado must have been 8.00 m. (0.30 + 4.90 + 2.70 + 0.10), and that of the entire series 26.85 m. (18.85 + 8.00). The slabs missing today (Nos. 1–4 according to Layard) were not documented, and the only hint as to their content is Layard's remark that 'the reserve consisted of large bodies of horsemen and charioteers'.[15] Further along, in consecutive order from left to right, are shown the attacking infantry, the storming of the city, the transfer of booty, captives and families going into exile, Sennacherib sitting on his throne, the royal tent and chariots and, finally, the Assyrian military camp.

Our chief interest lies in the section of the relief portraying the storming of the city. The scene is carved on three slabs, the right-hand part of Slab II, Slab III and the left-hand part of Slab IV (Fig. 3; Pl. 19). The section portraying the storming of the city was apparently placed exactly in the centre of the rear wall of the room, opposite the entrance. Given good lighting conditions, anyone who passed through the main entrance could see the storming of Lachish as he proceeded through the three doorways flanked by the colossi.

There is a slight gap in the battle scene between the side edges of Slabs II and III, and Slabs III and IV. The gap between the edges of Slabs II and III is very clear, as both slabs show sections of the same battering ram whose central section is missing; the exact width of the gap and the position of Slab II in relation to Slab III may be determined by this battering ram. The existence of a gap between the edges of Slabs III and IV is proved by the battering ram ascending the lower ramp at the left-hand side of Slab IV; its back part is shown here, but its front part does not appear on Slab III. The width of the gap and the exact position of Slab III in relation to Slab IV can therefore only be surmised.

Assuming that the slabs were placed adjacent to one another and that they portrayed a continuous scene, we must conclude that the original edges of Slabs II, III and IV are now missing. At present the side edges of the slabs are partly restored with gypsum and cannot be examined. Therefore, the drawings of the Lachish reliefs prepared in Nineveh

15 Layard, Discoveries (above, n. 8), p. 149.

Fig. 3. The 'Lachish Reliefs': the siege scene (Slabs II–IV), drawn by Judith Dekel.

at the time of their discovery by Layard are the main available clue to the history of the missing edges. The reliefs were unearthed at the end of 1849, left *in situ* though injured by fire, and were not removed from their position till the arrival at the site of H. Rassam. He began to take them down in April 1853, finding great difficulty in their fragile condition. The fragments were all packed and sent to Baghdad in June 1853, and thence to London via Basrah and Bombay.[16] Prior to their removal and packing for dispatch, the slabs were drawn in two series by the artist Charles Doswell Hodder and by Layard. The first series of nine drawings by Hodder was not published.[17] These were key sketches in which the fragments of the slabs, as detached from the walls, were shown and numbered, to facilitate their reassembly in London. The drawings indicate the miserable condition of the slabs at that time. Slab II was dismantled into 82 parts, Slab III into 32 parts (Pl. 20:B), and Slab IV into 36 parts. Thus we see that the siege scene as displayed today in the British Museum was reassembled from 150 different parts. An examination of Hodder's key sketches (compare Fig. 3 to Pl. 20:B) indicates that the contents of the missing sections of the slabs do not appear in the sketches, and we can safely assume that the edges of the slabs did not deteriorate after their dimantlement for dispatch to England. The second series includes the drawings of the 'Lachish Reliefs' which were later published by Layard and since reproduced many times.[18] The siege of the city, drawn by Layard,[19] is shown as a continuous scene, with two vertical lines marking the division into three slabs. The gaps between the slabs are not shown here, and the elements which should appear in the missing sections, e.g. parts of the battering rams mentioned above, are depicted in the drawing. It therefore seems possible that the missing edges were still extant when Layard prepared his drawing, but that they were not properly dismantled and dispatched; this could be the reason for their absence in Hodder's key sketches. Another possibility—which seems to us more likely—is that Layard reconstructed the missing sections in his drawing in order to present a continuous and uninterrupted scene. This possibility is supported by the fact that in general the drawing of the siege scene is schematic and inaccurate (in Slab IV, for example, a chariot thrown down by the defenders is drawn as a tower in the upper city wall).

The upper parts of Slabs II, III and IV are now broken and missing, and so are the lower parts of Slabs III and IV. Slab X,[20] positioned in the front right-hand corner of the room, is the only slab of the series which was partly preserved to its full height, and can be of aid in reconstructing the full height of Slabs II, III and IV.

16 C. J. Gadd: *The Stones of Assyria*, London, 1936, pp. 78–79, 105–106, 174.

17 C. D. Hodder: *Original Drawings of Assyrian Sculptures* (MS kept in the British Museum), II, Pl. - Pl. 13—the drawing of Slab III—is reproduced here in Pl. 20:B with the kind permission of the ... of the British Museum.

18 ... I, Pls. ... Layard, *Second Series* (above, n. 8). Pls. XX-XXIV.

19 *Ibid.*, Pl. XXI; Paterson (above, n. 8), Pl. 77.

20 No. B.M. 124913; Layard, *Second Series* (above, n. 8), Pl. XXIV; Paterson (above, n. 8), Pls. 74-76.

The full height of the left-hand part of Slab X is 2.74 m. It contains an upper margin 4–5 cm. thick, and the upper part of the relief, about 25 cm. high, is merely a background with trees shown above the wavy line of the hilly horizon; thus the scene proper was about 2.44 m. high. Assuming that the scene depicting the storming of the city was similar in height, we see that considerable parts of the slabs in question are now missing. Slab II is now 1.72 m. high on its right-hand side; thus a section of the upper part of the scene about 70 cm. high could well be missing. Similarly-sized sections are probably missing in the upper parts of the other two slabs. In addition, a section about 10–20 cm. high is missing at the bottom of Slabs III and IV.

A very interesting observation was recently made by Mr. Eli Yanai, and is mentioned here with his kind permission. In the centre of the scene depicting the storming of the city, a row of deportees or refugees carrying their belongings is shown coming out of the city-gate. While the storming of the city is shown in the midst of battle, the refugees are certainly departing for exile once the battle has ended and the city has been destroyed. This combination of differently timed scenes can now be explained. Mr. Yanai observed that a row of deportees proceeding to the right was also carved at the bottom of the scene. Due to the miserable condition of the lower part of Slabs III and IV these figures were not recognized, and their remains hardly feature in the published drawings of the siege scene,[21] including the recently prepared drawing reproduced here in Fig. 3. On Slab III the remains of six heads, and possibly the hand of a seventh person, can be recognized beneath the bottom of the siege ramp; three more heads can be recognized below the siege ramp on Slab IV (some of these heads are shown as circles or semi-circles in Fig. 3). A long row of deportees can, in fact, be restored. Starting towards the right from the city-gate down the roadway, it turns left along the lower part of the siege ramp, and then proceeds to the right at the bottom of the relief to join the line of deportees shown to the right of the besieged city. The deported citizens of Lachish proceed towards Sennacherib who sits on his throne, and several of them are being brutally stabbed by Assyrian soldiers (Slabs IV–VIII). Thus it seems reasonable to assume that the three impaled prisoners shown at the bottom of the siege ramp are associated with the line of deportees rather than with the attack and siege ramp. In conclusion, two separate scenes, each representing a different stage in the conquest of Lachish, are interwoven here to create a harmonious and continuous series of reliefs. Significantly for us, the deportees and the impaled prisoners are apparently irrelevant to the scene of the storming of the city.

THE RELIEFS AND THE CITY

A comparison between the battle scene relief and the remains at the site leads one to the

21 They include Layard's drawing mentioned above, and a drawing by G.L. Harding published as a frontispiece in the text volume of Olga Tufnell: *Lachish III, The Iron Age*, London, 1953.
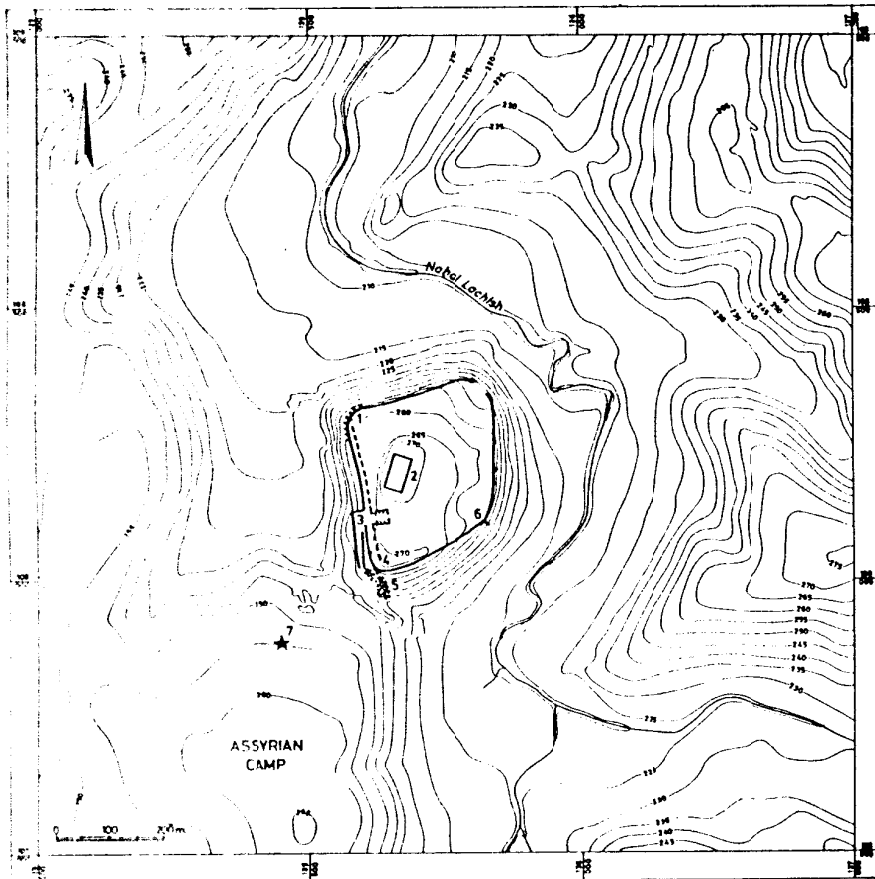
Fig. 4. Tel Lachish and its surroundings: (1) North west corner of the mound; (2) Judean Palace-Fort; (3) Outer city gate; (4) South west corner of the mound; (5) Siege ramp; (6) South east corner of the mound; (7) Probable view point of Lachish as portrayed in the relief and as portrayed in our reconstructions in Figs. 5-7.

... conclusion that the relief depicts the city as it appeared from the south-west. The two published reconstructions of the siege, by A. Sorrell under R.D. Barnett's direction,[22] and by H.J. Soulen under G.E. Wright's guidance,[23] view the besieged city from that

22 Barnett (above, n. 6), Pl. 30:B.
23 H.W.F. Saggs, The March of Empires, in *Everyday Life in Bible Times*, National Geographic Society, 1967, pp. 258-259. I am indebted to Fr. C.F. Gavin who drew my attention to the fact that the preparation of the reconstruction was done under Wright's guidance.
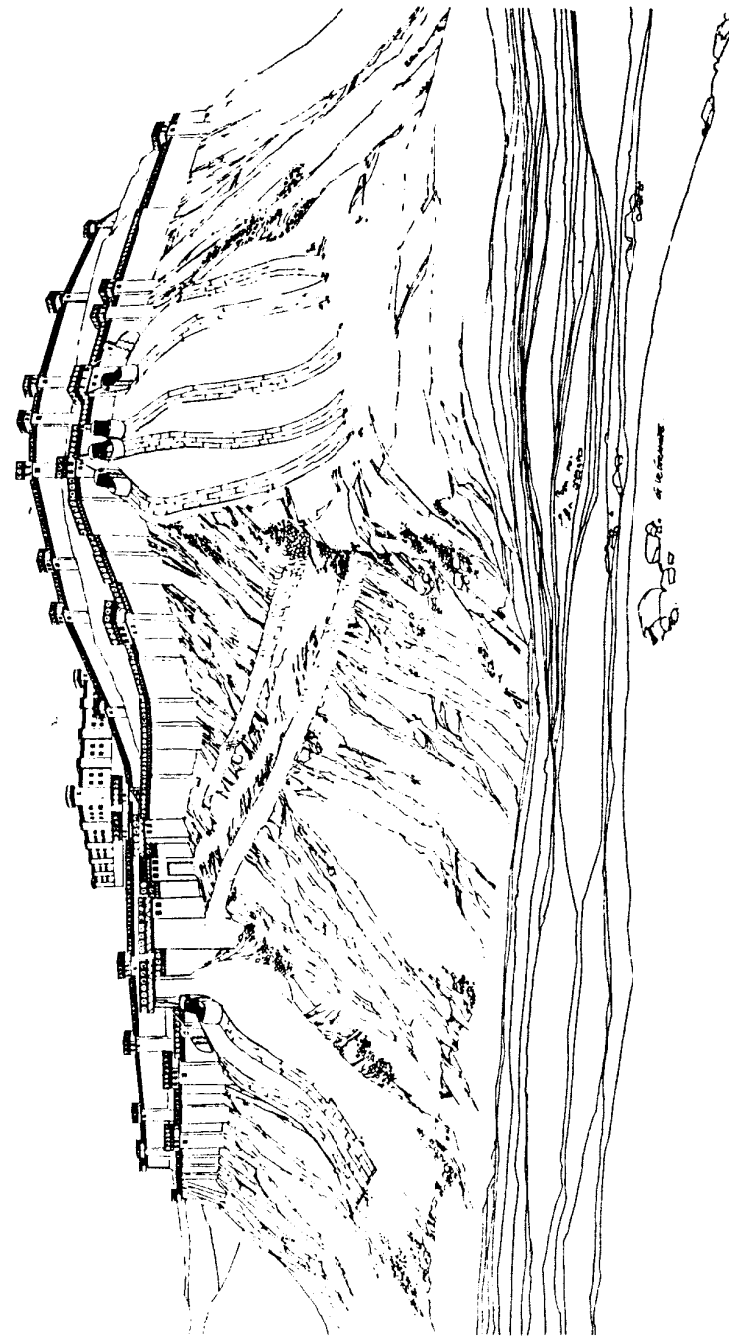
Fig. 5. Reconstruction of Lachish as viewed by the Assyrian artist, drawn by Gert le Grange.
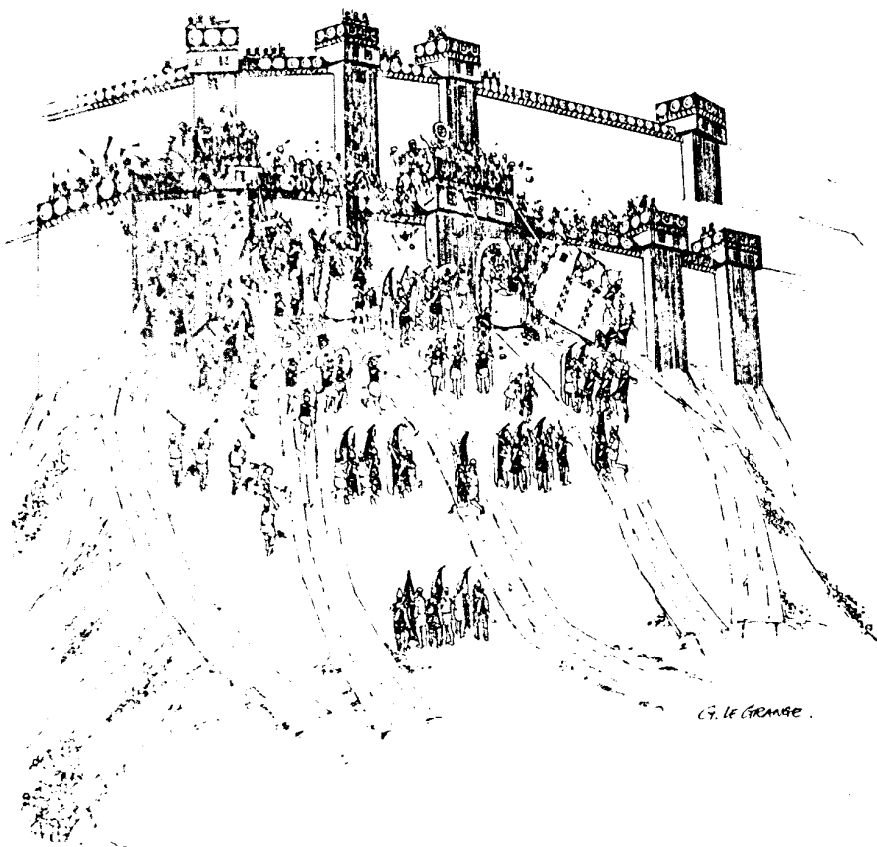
Fig. 6. Reconstruction of the assault on the main siege ramp, drawn by Gert le Grange.

general direction. In our opinion this conclusion can be further elaborated; it seems that the reliefs portray the city not only as viewed from a certain direction but as viewed from one particular spot. The various features of the city are depicted in the usual rigid and schematic fashion of Assyrian artists, but they are shown in a certain perspective, roughly maintaining the proportions and relationships of the various features as would appear to the onlooker at one specific point. This suggestion seems to be firmly based, even though the city walls as depicted in the relief may well have differed in appearance from the fortifications which surrounded the city.

In our opinion, this particular spot is located south-west of the site, on the slope of the neighbouring hillock. Farms of Moshav Lachish, the modern village, as well as trees, presently cover the face of the slope, thus partly obstructing the view and making

it more difficult to identify our particular spot. Nevertheless, it seems that it should be located roughly at the point marked by us (No. 7) on the map in Fig. 4. This place is at an approximate elevation of 255 m. above sea level, about 200 m. from the south-west corner of the mound. The photograph reproduced in Pl. 20:A, which was taken here, gives a clear idea of the appearance of the site from this particular angle.[24]

In Fig. 5 we present a reconstruction of the ancient city as seen during the siege from our selected view point. It was prepared during the 1977 excavation season by the South African artist Gert le Grange. The reconstructed structures and main siege ramp are first and foremost based on the archaeological data as understood in 1977, and are complemented by the data provided by the reliefs. Naturally, the reconstructed city is drawn on a relatively small scale and except for the attacking battering rams it shows only the topographical and architectural features. Therefore, Mr. le Grange prepared two additional drawings (Figs. 6–7), each presenting a section of the reconstructed city, drawn from the same angle but on a larger scale. Here the artist has made a painstaking and successful effort to convey the confusion of battle, interpreting in his own style the data presented in the reliefs.

We shall now proceed to compare the topographical and archaeological data as observed from our selected view point to the features of the city as shown in the relief.

The city-gate of Levels IV–III was located on the western side of the mound (1, 3 on Fig. 8).[25] A wide, built roadway led to the city-gate from the south-west corner of the mound, ascending along its western slope. On its western side the road was supported by a retaining wall (Starkey's 'wall a'), and another wall (Starkey's 'wall b') demarcated the eastern side of the roadway. The gate complex was composed of an outer and an inner gatehouse with an open court between them. The structure of the outer gate (Starkey's 'bastion') protruded from the line of the slope; the gate faced southwards, its axis parallel to the edge of the mound. The outer gatehouse must have been severely damaged during the battle. Furthermore, its remains are now covered by the remains of the superimposed Level II outer gate and so far have been investigated only partially. Thus the ground plan of the outer gate is yet unclear. In any case, it must have been a massive structure. The inner gatehouse was built along the upper periphery of the mound and faced westwards; thus its axis was vertical to the edge of the mound. A person approaching the city would have to walk along the ascending roadway to the outer gate, turn sharp right after passing it, and then pass through the inner gate. In general, the gate complex probably resembled that of Stratum IV in Megiddo as restored by the excavators.[26]

The gatehouse prominently depicted in the centre of the siege scene clearly must be

A photograph taken in 1933 from about the same direction was published by Tufnell (above, n. 21), Pl. 1:2.

Ibid., pp. 93–98; Pls. 14:5–6, 108, 111, 114; Ussishkin (above, n. 3), pp. 55–63, Pls. 18–19.

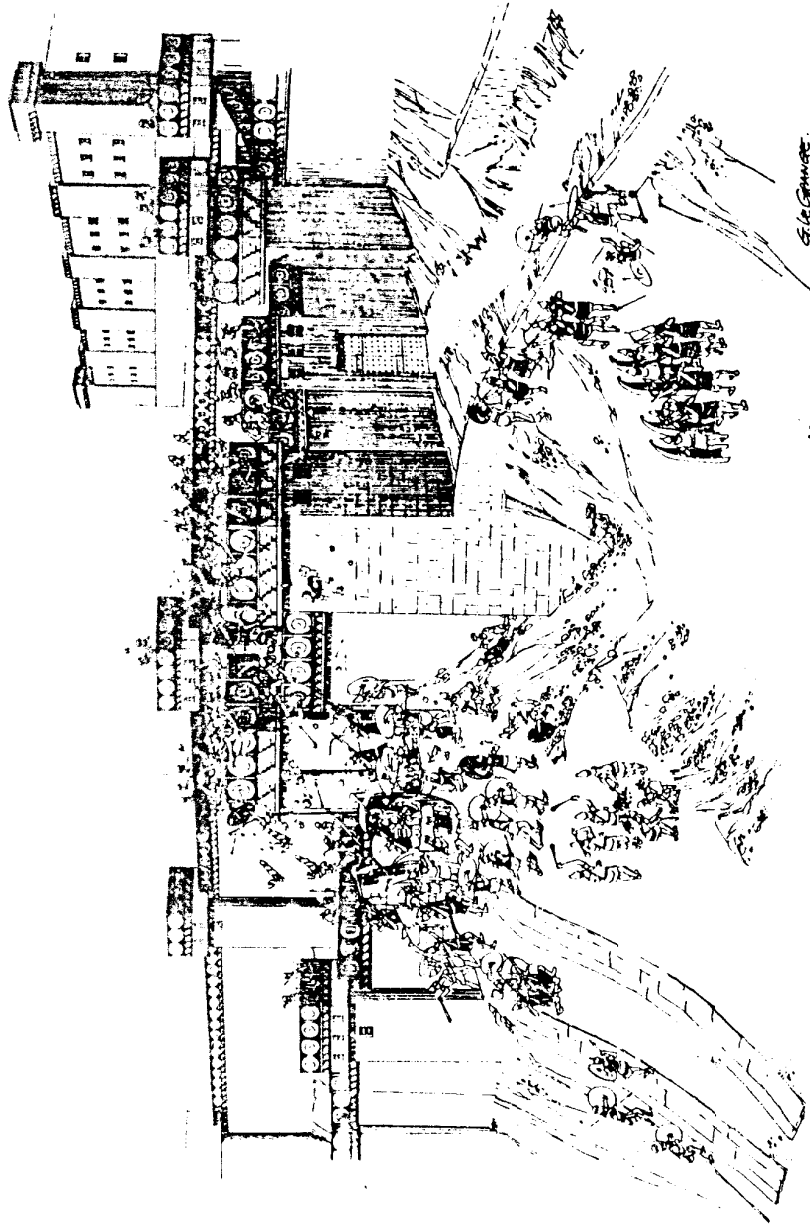G. Loud: Megiddo II, Seasons of 1935–39, Chicago, 1948, p. 50, Fig. 107.

Fig. 7. Reconstruction of the assault on the city-gate, drawn by Gert le Grange.
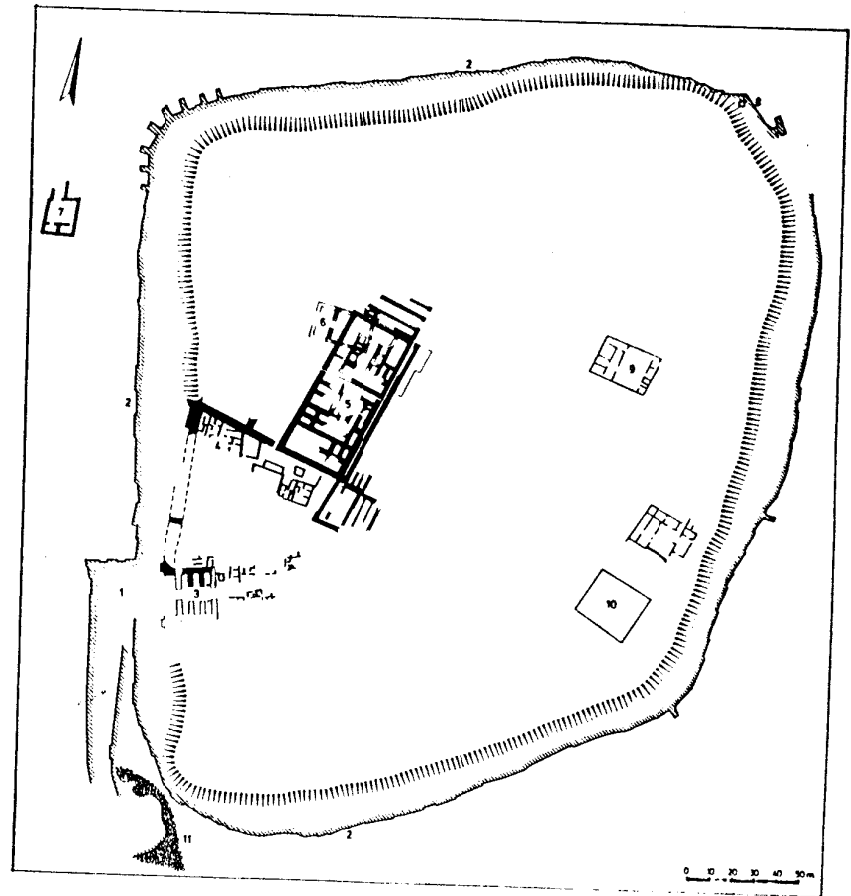
Fig. 8. Tel Lachish. (1) The bastion (outer city gate); (2) Outer city-wall; (3) Inner city gate; (4) Inner city-wall; (5) Judean Palace-Fort; (6) Late Bronze Age temple; (7) Fosse Temple; (8) Well; (9) Solar Shrine; (10) Great Shaft; (11) Siege ramp.

identified with the gate complex discussed above. As interpreted by Olga Tufnell[27] and Barnett, it must represent the outer gatehouse, prominently located on the slope and protruding from it, rather than the inner gatehouse which was hidden behind the outer one and could not be directly assaulted. The relief portrays the façade of the gate structure. Our view point does not directly face the façade of the outer gatehouse; nevertheless, it provides a clear view of the façade and of the gate proper.

27 Tufnell (above, n. 21), p. 55.

In the relief, the deportees leaving the city follow a path descending from the gate to the right. Though the deportees do not concern us here, the path they are using certainly does; it is clearly the roadway which ascends to the gate from the south-west corner of the mound. From our view point the roadway is seen as in the relief, descending from the outer gate to the right.

The Judean palace-fort of Levels IV–III is the largest, most massive and most impressive edifice of the Iron Age as yet known in Palestine (No. 5 in Fig. 8).[28] This fortress-like building must have been a central governmental or royal palace-fort of the kingdom of Judah. It crowns the centre of the mound and commands a beautiful view from the hills of Judah to the coastal area. The superstructure of the edifice is entirely missing, and the present remains are merely its raised foundations. The builders constructed stone walls for both the outer and inner foundations and the spaces between them were filled with soil, giving the substructure the appearance of a large box (Starkey's 'podium'). The massive character of the foundations is a clear indication that the superstructure of the building rose to a considerable height. For instance, at their highest point, at the south-west corner of the building, the foundation walls were more than 3 m. thick and stood to a height of more than 11 m.

Turning to the relief, we see in Slab III a large structure above the city-gate. In Layard's drawing (discussed above) it is interpreted as part of the upper city-wall carved on Slab II, and it is drawn in line with and as a continuation of that wall. The left-hand edge of the structure, and its connection with the city-wall, fall within the missing section of the scene between Slabs II and III, and thus it is difficult to judge if and how they were interconnected. Nevertheless, the structure in Slab III is carved at a level slightly higher than that of the city-wall in Slab II, an indication that they were two different structures. The structure on Slab III includes seven towers, the one at the left-hand corner now missing. The tower at the right hand corner and the fifth tower from the right rise higher than the other towers, and we can safely assume that the tower at the left hand corner was also higher than the others. It seems to us that the building should be interpreted as the palace-fort, although its architectural details are portrayed exactly as those of the city-walls. Although soldiers (?) are standing on it as on the city-wall (remains of a few people can still be discerned here) the structure is clearly placed beyond the scene of the battle. The battering ram shown below it is attacking a feature depicted by a single, angled line probably representing the city-wall. The falling torches, square stones, ladder and round shields are all carved far below the structure and are clearly dissociated from it. Furthermore, no enemy arrows are stuck in its walls as in the city walls on the two sides of the city.

Our suggestion that the palace-fort is shown in the relief is partly based on the assumption that the palace-fort must have been represented in the scene. Even today, when only the substructure of the edifice still stands, the palace-fort is the

[28] Ibid., pp. 78-86, Pls. 16-19; Ussishkin (above, n. 3), pp. 27-41, Pls. 10-14.

most impressive structure on the mound, and we can only imagine its formidable appearance when it was complete. Its position as seen from our selected view point fits well its position in the relief. The edifice stands behind, but high above, the gate structure; in fact its lower part may well have been seen from this point above the outer gatehouse when the latter was undamaged. In the relief the lower part of the building is shown at a level higher than that of the city-walls, and we can only speculate that it rose to a higher level in the missing, upper part of Slab III.

Sennacherib's main siege ramp was discovered at the south-west corner of the mound (No. 11 in Fig. 8).[29] Its attribution to the Assyrian campaign cannot be proved in the absence of proper stratigraphy, and is based on the assumption that the Assyrian attack was made on a grand scale and was extremely ferocious. Theoretically, the siege ramp could have been laid during the Babylonian attack of 588/6 B.C.E. which is historically and archaeologically attested. The siege ramp is composed of enormous amounts of rubble heaped on the surface of the open area at the foot of the mound and laid against its slope. The upper layer of the ramp consisted of stones bound with hard mortar. This layer was the mantle of the ramp, added on top of the loose boulders in order to create a compact surface. The siege ramp—according to the existing surface remains—was relatively wide and probably fan-shaped, narrowing towards its apex which reached the bottom level of the outer city-wall. We estimate that the overall width of the siege ramp at its bottom was about 55–60 m. and its height about 16 m.; in its centre the stones are heaped to a height of several metres.

The main siege ramp shown in the relief to the right of the city-gate is undoubtedly the siege ramp at the south-west corner of the mound. The upper part of the siege ramp and the city-wall above it were carved on the upper, missing parts of Slabs III and IV. From our selected view point, located relatively nearby and nearly opposite the south-west corner of the mound, the siege ramp appears relatively large in proportion to other features of the mound. In the relief the siege ramp is depicted in a similar way. From our view point the palace-fort and the outer city-gate appear to the left of the south-west corner and the siege ramp, exactly as depicted by the Assyrian artist. Furthermore, the left-hand side of the siege ramp reaches the lower edge of the roadway which leads to the outer city-gate; they appear adjacent to one another from our view point, and they are similarly portrayed in the relief.

The relief depicts five battering rams standing one beside the other on top of the siege ramp. The number of battering rams depicted here is another indication of the importance of the battle, as the Assyrian reliefs usually depict no more than two battering rams in a single attack. Assuming that the overall width of a battering ram was about 1.50–2 m., five battering rams could have easily been arrayed for battle on top of our siege mound (Fig. 6). The relief depicts each battering ram standing on a track made of large wooden logs. According to the reconstruction of Barnett and Sorrell[30] the whole

[29] Ibid., pp. 67-74, Pls. 21-22.
[30] Barnett (above, n. 6), Pl. 30:B.

surface area of the siege ramp was covered with such logs, but it is more likely that a narrow track of wooden logs or beams was laid along the sloping surface of the ramp for each of the attacking machines to enable its smooth ascent to the top of the siege ramp.

Four chariots or carts are shown in the relief being thrown by the defenders onto the Assyrian soldiers and their battering rams on the ramp. The vehicles are depicted above the right hand side of the ramp, and more vehicles were probably depicted above the left hand side, in the missing section of Slab III. The vehicles are identically shown in a schematic though detailed manner: one wheel, with a thick felloe and six spokes, and a yoke with attachments for harnessing two animals. Tongues of fire indicate that the vehicles were set on fire by the defenders before being dropped. The fact that a group of identical vehicles is shown strongly suggests that these were chariots rather than carts. The vehicles were probably standard war chariots of the royal Judean garrison stationed in Lachish; they could not be used as such in the battle, and thus were thrown burning by the defenders in a last, desperate attempt to repulse the Assyrians. The other possibility, that these were various carts belonging to inhabitants of Lachish, seems to us less likely.

Turning to the ring of fortifications surrounding the city in Levels IV–III, we see that the outer city-wall (Starkey's 'stone and brick revetment') encircled the mound half-way down the slope and joined the outer city-gate (No. 1 in Fig. 8).[31] The south-west corner of the mound rises considerably, forming the highest point of the mound, and here the outer city-wall rises to within nearly 6 m. of the summit. The elevation of the wall in the south-west corner is 265.34 m. above sea level as compared to 248.10 m. in the south-east corner of the mound and 247.29 m. in the the north-west corner. The fortifications in the south-west corner were apparently specially reinforced, and here the excavation of the outer wall revealed 'a brick section which projected to form the base of a tower'. In the north-west corner of the site the wall turns in a sharp curve: here it was strengthened by at least eight massive buttresses founded on bedrock. They projected between 4 and 5 m. from the line of the wall and were about 2 m. in width. The wall was constructed as a revetment, about 3.50 4. wide, leaning against the debris of the mound. The façade of the wall is built throughout with salients and recesses; significantly, no towers protruding from the line of the façade were constructed along the wall.

The inner city-wall (Starkey's 'six-metre wall') extended along the upper periphery of the mound, and joined the towers of the inner gatehouse; it was studied only at the western side of the mound (No. 4 in Fig. 8).[32] The wall was built of bricks on stone foundations. Till 1978 it was believed that massive towers 6 m. thick protruded from the line of the wall, which was 4 m. thick. This interpretation was expressed in the interim

[31] Tufnell (above, n. 21), pp. 87 93, Pls. 1 2, 11 12, 108 109; Ussishkin (above, n. 3), pp. 43–44, Pl. 15:1 2.
[32] Tufnell (above, n. 21), pp. 72 73, 87, Pl. 109; Ussishkin (above, n. 3), pp. 47-50, 58, Pl. 17.

and popular reports of the current excavations. Nevertheless, it now seems that the data available at present should be interpreted in a different way; apparently the inner city-wall was about 6 m. thick throughout its length without protruding towers.

The relationship between the contemporaneous outer and inner city-walls is of cardinal importance. Starkey interpreted them both as being proper city-walls, thus concluding that the city was surrounded by two rings of fortifications, both of similar character. This conclusion formed the basis for the city's reconstruction with two city-walls, drawn by H.H. McWilliams, published by Starkey in his first preliminary excavation report,[33] and reproduced many times since. Naturally, this situation was compared to the relief, which was interpreted as portraying two lines of city-walls.[34] This interpretation is clearly stressed in Layard's drawing discussed above. The assumption that the city was surrounded by two city-walls also formed the basis for the reconstructions of Sorrell and Soulen.[35]

With the renewal of excavations, the problem of the relationship between the two city-walls was studied afresh. Till 1980 it was believed that there were two parallel city-walls as interpreted by Starkey; on that basis our reconstruction of Lachish published here in Figs. 5–7 portrays two city-walls. During the 1980 excavation season, however, it became apparent that the accumulated archaeological evidence should be interpreted in a different way and that in fact Lachish was surrounded by a single ring of fortifications. It now seems that the outer city-wall served merely as a strong retaining wall supporting the bottom of a glacis which in turn supported the bottom of the inner city-wall. Thus it seems that the inner city-wall was the sole free-standing city-wall defending the city, while the outer wall served as the initial defence barrier, obstructing the advance of the attackers and their battering rams, and preventing them from undermining the glacis and the wall proper.[36]

We shall now turn to the fortifications depicted in the relief, and discuss them with reference to this new interpretation of the city's fortifications. A section of the city-wall is shown on Slab IV at the right-hand side of the siege scene. This is clearly the edge of the city, and a diagonal groove descending from the bottom of the wall at its right-hand edge marks the steep slope below the city-wall. Further to the left we see the main siege ramp laid against a segment of the city-wall which is now missing. Significantly, it was depicted at a level much higher than the wall section to the right of the siege ramp. A single tower depicted above the latter wall section was interpreted as representing an inner city-wall, but it seems more likely to have belonged to the now missing wall segment

[33] J.L. Starkey: A Lecture Delivered at the Rooms of the Palestine Exploration Fund, on June 22rd, (1933), PEQ 1933, Pl. III.
[34] For instance Tufnell (above, n. 21), p. 55.
[35] See notes 22–23, above.
[36] A similar interpretation of the fortifications was suggested in my lecture on the fortifications of Lachish and their portrayal in the reliefs given at the Congress of Jewish Studies, Jerusalem, 1973. However, I later returned to the 'two walls' concept, which appeared then to be justified by the evidence.

depicted above the siege ramp. Also, the missing wall section above the siege ramp was portrayed at a level higher than that of the structure to its left, interpreted by us as the palace-fort. From our view point the city-wall appears in a similar way. In the south-west corner it rises higher than other parts of the wall, and as our view point is located near and directly opposite the south-west corner, the fortifications here seem even higher. The section of wall shown at the right-hand edge of the city probably represents the city-wall at the south-east corner of the mound (No. 6 in Fig. 4). From our view point both the palace-fort and the fortifications at the south-east corner would appear roughly level with the top of the siege ramp, and below the fortifications at the south-west corner as in the relief. Finally, from our view point the appearance of the slope at the right-hand edge of the city is very similar to that in the relief.

In Slab III the fortifications are schematically portrayed as an angled line attacked by a battering ram. This is probably the section of the wall (or glacis?) to the north of the city gate. In Slab II the fortifications at the left-hand edge of the city are depicted in detail in the heat of battle. A diagonal line descending from the bottom of the wall also marks the steep slope of the site on this side. The relief here clearly depicts two lines of manned city-walls; these must be the prominent fortifications at the north-west corner of the mound (No. 1 in Fig. 4) which form the left-hand edge of the city when seen from our view point. According to our new interpretation of the city's fortifications only a single proper city wall was constructed here, in clear contradiction to the two walls depicted on Slab II. In the absence of a definitive solution this question must be left open at present; nevertheless, there is one possible answer which should be raised here with due reservations. The outer wall at the north-west corner was supported by massive buttresses; they could well have supported temporary balconies with protective balustrades, which provided positions for warriors holding the first line of defence. In that case, the lower wall in Slab II would represent the outer wall with its balconies.

The various segments of the city wall and the structure identified by us as the palace-fort are depicted in the relief as having towers whose façades protrude from the line of the wall. A balustrade, constructed with round shields held by wooden frames, is shown above the battlements on top of these structures as well as the city-gate. These towers and balustrades appear in our reconstructions in Figs. 5–7. According to the presently available archaeological data, i.e. the substructures of the palace-fort and the city-wall, towers as depicted in the relief were not constructed here. Nevertheless, these structures may have had towers only on their upper, now missing, parts. On the other hand, similar towers and balustrades appear in other reliefs from the South-West Palace in Nineveh,[37] and thus could be interpreted as the conventional method used by Sennacherib's artists to portray city-walls and citadels, rather than individual features of the city of Lachish.

There remains the problem of the second siege ramp shown in the relief to the left of

---

[37] See Layard, *Second Series* (above, n. 8); Paterson (above, n. 8).

the city-gate, along which two battering rams assail the city-gate and the city-wall to its left. The second siege ramp is shown similarly to the main siege ramp discussed above, but it seems clear that a separate ramp is portrayed here. Therefore, if indeed the relief conveys a realistic view of the besieged city, we would expect a second siege ramp to have been laid against the outer gatehouse and the city-wall to its north. Barnett reconstructed here the main siege ramp; he suggested that the earth glacis laid against the west wall of the outer gate represents the remains of the siege ramp.[38] It seems clear, however, that the earth glacis is part of the constructional fill supporting the foundations of the gatehouse. No other remains can be ascribed to such a siege ramp at present, and only future excavations can establish its presence or absence. On the basis of the relief, the reconstructions in Figs. 5 and 7 portray a second siege ramp laid against the back corner of the gatehouse. However, I now believe that it should be reconstructed against the front, left-hand corner of the gatehouse, because tactically this is a more logical point from which to assail the gate.

Finally, a few more details portrayed in the relief which support the view that the relief is not imaginary should be mentioned. The hilly landscape of the Lachish area is depicted in the relief in the conventional Assyrian way, in a pattern resembling fish scales or scale armour. The background vegetation includes vines and figs (and possibly schematically drawn olive trees) which are typical of the area. Both attackers and defenders are shown in the relief as using bows and arrows, as well as slings and sling-stones. In confirmation, large quantities of arrowheads and sling-stones were found in the excavations.[39] A crescent-shaped piece of bronze was found between the outer gate and the south-west corner and was identified as the mount of a helmet-crest. If the identification is correct this find may be compared to the Assyrian crested helmets portrayed in the relief.[40]

THE RELIEFS AND THE SIEGE

After presenting data in support of the view that the relief portrays the besieged city as seen from one particular point, we turn to a further question: why was this spot chosen by the artist from which to draw the city and immortalize the battle? A possible answer to this question is directly associated with some problems of the siege discussed below.

Tel Lachish is located in the Shephelah, in the midst of low hills which characterize the whole region. The mound is surrounded by deep valleys on nearly all sides (Fig. 4). On the northern and eastern sides it borders on Naḥal Lachish (Wadi Ghafr). On the western side, and partly also on the southern, the mound borders on small wadis which

---

[38] Barnett (above, n. 6), p., 163, Pl. 30:B.
[39] Tufnell (above, n. 21), pp. 385–386, 396, Pls. 39:4–6, 40:5, 60.
[40] Ibid., pp. 98, 387, Pl. 39:1–2; a similar comparison between the finds and the relief is discussed there by Tufnell.

run into Nahal Lachish. Only at the south-west corner does a topographical saddle (Starkey's 'saddle area') connect the mound with the neighbouring hillock where Moshav Lachish is now located.

The saddle at the south-west corner provided the best place from which to launch an attack on the city. This situation explains why the level of the upper periphery of the south-west corner was considerably raised and why the fortifications here were apparently especially strengthened. Even so, it remained the most attractive point for an assault, and here, not surprisingly, the main thrust of the Assyrian attack took place. The attack was centred around the huge siege ramp laid against the south-west corner. Remains of the fierce battle were uncovered by Starkey all over the saddle and the roadway leading to the outer gate. In Tufnell's words: 'Over the whole area there were abundant traces of burning, and the fuel for this destruction was still to be seen in the charred branches and blackened olive stones which were piled up against the walls. Stone slingshots and innumerable arrowheads testified to the war-like character of the assault.'[40]

A large Assyrian military camp was erected at Lachish, as was the common practice in Assyrian campaigns. The camp is mentioned in the Bible (see above) and is portrayed in the 'Lachish Reliefs'.[42] The choice of site for the camp must have been dictated by the following considerations: it had to be located not far from the spot where the main attack on the city would take place, but not in a tactically inferior position to the city walls and beyond the range of fire of the defenders; and it had to be pitched on an area large enough to accommodate the king's headquarters and the logistical support of the large army. These criteria fit only one place: the hillock to the south-west of the mound, where Moshav Lachish is now located (Fig. 4). The hillock is connected to the mound by the saddle discussed above, and thus the approach to the city was fairly easy and the camp was located opposite the place where the main attack was to take place. This hillock is fairly near to the mound: it is relatively high, its summit about 260–265 m. above sea level, nearly as high as the summit of the mound (about 270–273 m. at the south-west corner). Finally, the top of the hillock is flat and spacious.

Unfortunately, the reconstruction of the Assyrian camp at this place cannot be archaeologically substantiated. I scrutinized an aerial photograph of Tel Lachish and its vicinity taken on 10 January 1945;[43] the general area where we would locate the camp was systematically ploughed and cultivated at that time, and no structures or other remains could be discerned in the photograph. Furthermore, the construction of the houses and farms of the *moshav* in the nineteen-fifties must have completely eradicated any remains which were possibly still preserved.

---

[40] [illegible]
[41] Tufnell, *Second Season* (above, n. 8), Pl. XXIV; Paterson (above, n. 8), Pls. 74–76.
[43] The aerial photograph (No. 5065) is a section of 680 P.S. 15, photographed on a scale of 1:15,000. The photograph is kept in the archives of the Department of Geography, Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Our selected view point is located in front of the suggested site of the Assyrian military camp, and between it and the city. This place is roughly in line with the axis of the main siege ramp and close enough to the battle scene, but at more than 200 m. from the city-wall it is apparently beyond the effective range of the defenders' fire.[44] We would like to raise the suggestion that this is the very spot where Sennacherib, the supreme commander, sat on his *nimedu*-throne and conducted the battle. Therefore, we assume that the relief presents the besieged city as seen during the battle by the monarch from his command post. This conclusion fits the arrangement of the reliefs in Room XXXVI in Sennacherib's palace (Fig. 2). The king is shown sitting on his throne facing the city with the Assyrian military camp at his back as at Lachish. Sennacherib is shown in an 'after the battle' scene, reviewing captives and spoils, and this is also stated in the inscription carved on the relief.[45] Nevertheless, it seems that he is also associated with the central scene of the series, since he is portrayed as if looking at the besieged city as he watched it during the battle.[46]

[44] Given the lack of data and serious studies, the effective range of bows used by the defenders of Lachish in that battle can only be surmised at present.
[45] Luckenbill, *Ancient Records*, II (above, n. 7), p. 198, No. 489; *ANET*, p 288.
[46] The drawings in Figs. 1, 4 and 8 were prepared by Mrs. Ora Paran of the Institute of Archaeology, Tel Aviv University. The drawing in Fig. 2 is by Miss Carole Richards, Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto. The photographs in Pl. 19 are by Mr. Avraham Hay, and that in Pl. 20:A by Mrs. Michal Roche. This article was corrected and updated in October 1980.