History in the Eye of the Beholder? Social Location and Allegations of Racial/Colonial Biases in Reconstructions of Sennacherib's Invasion of Judah

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HISTORY IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER? SOCIAL LOCATION & ALLEGATIONS OF RACIAL/COLONIAL BIASES IN RECONSTRUCTIONS OF SENNACHERIB'S INVASION OF JUDAH[*]

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INTRODUCTION

Sennacherib's third campaign is one of the more thoroughly investigated events that intersects with biblical history. The fact that there are three biblical narratives (2 Kgs 18–19; Isa 36–37; 2 Chr 32) concerned with the Assyrian campaign against Judah underscores its obvious importance to the biblical writers. The existence of multiple copies of Assyrian annals that refer to these events, as well as the "Lachish reliefs" pictorially depicting the Assyrian siege and sacking of the Judahite city during the same campaign, likely explains why the events have captured the imagination of biblical scholars and historians alike.[1] Some of the chief debates concerning

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[1] The Rassam cylinder is the oldest of the inscriptions, dating only one year after the campaign (700 BCE). The fullest accounts of Sennacherib's campaign remain the Chicago and Taylor Prisms, which date to 689 and 691 respectively. Cf. A. R. Millard, *The Eponyms of the Assyrian Empire 910–612 BC* (SAAS 2; Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1994), 50, 88 and 94. For the Lachish reliefs see C. Uehlinger, "Clio in a World of Pictures—Another Look at the Lachish Reliefs from Sennacherib's Southwest Palace at Nineveh," L. L. Grabbe (ed.), *'Like a Bird in a Cage': The Invasion of Sennacherib in 701 BCE* (LHBOTS 363; ESHM 4; London: Sheffield Academic, 2003), 221–305; D. Ussishkin, *The Conquest of Lachish by Sennacherib* (Tel Aviv Publications of the Institute of Archaeology, 6; Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1982), 76–93; and A. Paterson, *Assyrian Sculptures: Palace of Sinacherib. Plates and Ground-Plan of the Palace* (The Hague:

the historical reconstruction of the events surround how the Assyrian campaign ended, why Jerusalem was not captured, and how Hezekiah remained on the throne. Central to these debates has been the assessment of the various available sources and arguments for and against their trustworthiness or verisimilitude. What sources are available (biblical and non-biblical)? Which sources are reliable? Which sources are spurious or perhaps fictional? How do the evidences in the sources correlate? While there is no consensus amongst scholars as to the answers to these questions, there is, I would venture, a certain unanimity regarding the importance of the questions themselves. That is, these issues are central to any historical reconstruction that might be proposed. Material evidence is also relevant.[2] In particular, the so-called *lmlk* seals and the stratigraphy of Lachish have proven to be central to determining the extent of the destruction left in the wake of the Assyrian invasion.[3] However, answers to the chief questions surrounding the historical reconstruction of Sennacherib's invasion have not been found in the material evidence.[4]

Historical reconstructions of the events have not reached a consensus. There is disagreement among historians regarding various aspects of the Assyrian campaign in 701 BCE, chief of which surrounds whether or not there was anything that could be called a "deliverance" of Jerusalem.[5] Often the reasons for differences in

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Martinus Nijhoff, n.d., [several printings 1912–15]), Pls. 68–78.

[2] For a comprehensive source of information on relevant sites see E. Stern (ed.), *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land* (4 vols.; New York: Simon & Schuster; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1992); idem, *The Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian Periods, 732–332 BCE* (vol. II of *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible;* ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 2001).

[3] Cf. D. Ussishkin, "The Destruction of Lachish by Sennacherib and the Dating of the Royal Judean Storage Jars," *TA* 4 (1977), 28–60; N. Na'aman, "Sennacherib's Campaign to Judah and the Date of the *lmlk* Stamps," *VT* 29 (1979), 61–86 "Hezekiah's Fortified Cities and the LMLK Stamps," *BASOR* 261 (1986), 5–21; and A. G. Vaughn, *Theology, History, and Archaeology in the Chronicler's Account of Hezekiah* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999).

[4] Archaeological evidence is obviously beneficial for fully understanding the Assyrian invasion in 701. Material evidence has helped to fill in the background to what we have learned from textual and epigraphic evidence. For example, the excavation of Lachish and the artwork of Lachish both help illuminate references to Sennacherib's conquest of Lachish in 2 Kgs 18. Strangely, the Assyrian annals are actually silent regarding Lachish.

[5] There is a wide variety in scholarly opinion regarding explanations for the survival of Jerusalem and its monarchy in 701 BCE. Some view the survival of Jerusalem as nothing less than a "deliverance" (e.g., I. W. Provan, et al., *A Biblical History of Israel* [Louisville: Westminster John

historical reconstructions are based largely on the answers to the questions posed in the previous paragraph. However, some have recently suggested that the reason that there is no unanimity or consensus regarding the historical reconstruction of Sennacherib's invasion into Judah—and more specifically, Sennacherib's return to Nineveh without capturing Jerusalem—is racial bias. In short, they argue that, due to anti-African racial bias, scholars have failed to acknowledge that the Cushites rescued Jerusalem from Sennacherib in 701 BCE. The case was first put forth by journalist Henry T. Aubin in 2002 in a popular-level book entitled, *The Rescue of Jerusalem: The Alliance Between the Hebrews and Africans in 701 BC*.[6] More recently, Alice Ogden Bellis has taken Aubin's thesis and brought it into the world of academic scholarship in her article, similarly titled: "The Rescue of Jerusalem from the Assyrians in 701 BCE by the Cushites."[7] Bellis further uses the theory as a platform in order to argue that the social location of interpreters greatly affects their interpretation.[8]

In order to probe deeper into this issue, this essay will evaluate the arguments of both Aubin and Bellis in detail and show that the evidence does not support their hypothesis. I will then consider to what extent social location affects interpretation and suggest that the conclusions that Bellis draws in this regard cannot be sustained but can only be affirmed in an ironic way. Despite the influence of

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Knox, 2003], 274), while others (W. Mayer, N. Na'aman) suggest that Jerusalem was not captured simply because the Assyrians did not set out to capture the city (e.g., W. Mayer, "Sennacherib's Campaign of 701 BCE: The Assyrian View," L. L. Grabbe [ed.], *'Like a Bird in a Cage'*, 168–200; N. Na'aman, "Updating the Messages: Hezekiah's Second Prophetic Story (2 Kgs 19.9b–35) and the Community of Babylonian Deportees," L. L. Grabbe [ed.], *'Like a Bird in a Cage'*, 200–220). E. Ben Zvi points out that Hezekiah was not the only rebel to retain the throne after an unsuccessful rebellion and that Hezekiah remained on the throne despite the fact his rebellion was unsuccessful (as noted in L. L. Grabbe, "Reflections on the Discussion," idem, *'Like a Bird in a Cage'*, 308–23). E. A. Knauf ("Sennacherib at the Berezina," L. L. Grabbe [ed.], *'Like a Bird in a Cage'*, 141–49) asserts that Jerusalem was left standing because it was strategic for "flanking Philistia" (149). Grabbe believes the failure to take Jerusalem signals some problems for the Assyrians (Grabbe, "Reflections on the Discussion," 321) and Lemche concedes that "it is a mystery as to why Hezekiah was left on the throne" and thinks it was likely do to with the "difficulty of taking Jerusalem" ("Reflections on the Discussion," 322).

[6] H. T. Aubin, *The Rescue of Jerusalem: The Alliance Between the Hebrews and Africans in 701 BC* (New York: Soho, 2002).

[7] A. O. Bellis, "Rescue of Jerusalem from the Assyrians in 701 B.C.E. by the Cushites," K. L. Noll and B. Schramm (eds.), *Raising Up a Faithful Exegete: Essays in Honor of Richard D. Nelson* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 247–60.

[8] Ibid., 256.

social location on interpreters, the evidences available to historians serve as controls in guiding the range of historical reconstructions.

THE AUBIN-BELLIS HYPOTHESIS

In order to assess this theory, it is first necessary to set out its arguments rather fully. The Aubin-Bellis hypothesis asserts the following:

> 1. There once was a scholarly consensus that the Cushites were instrumental in the deliverance of Jerusalem in 701 BCE from the Assyrian invasion under Sennacherib.

> 2. In the 1880s, there was mass scholarly abandonment of this "Cushite-rescue theory."

> 3. The reason for the abandonment was a negative view of the Cushites and their capability to rescue Jerusalem.

> 4. The reason for this negative view of the Cushites was the effect of racism and the contemporary colonization of Africa on scholars.

> 5. The reason that scholars today still do not accept the Cushite-rescue theory is their reliance on previous racist colonial scholarship which left a legacy of a negative view of Cushites and their capabilities.

Each of these points will be dealt with in turn, though the theory is actually dependent on how the different arguments hang together as a linear whole (so that refuting one premise invalidates the subsequent premise).

1. THE CUSHITE-RESCUE THEORY "CONSENSUS"

Through their survey of scholarly (and more popular) literature from "pre-critical" times to scholarship dating to near the end of the 19th century, Aubin and Bellis argue that prior to the 1880s there was a fairly broad consensus that the Cushites were instrumental in rescuing Jerusalem from the Assyrians in 701 BCE. Aubin notes the interpretation of John Calvin (relying on Herodotus) who, though viewing the angel of the Lord as ultimately repulsing Sennacherib, allowed that the advance of the Cushite king Tirhakah caused Sennacherib's initial withdrawal from Jerusalem and that Sennacherib's army may also have been weakened by a defeat at Pelusium.[9] Similarly, Aubin notes the medieval Radak (David Kimchi), who viewed the Cushite role as instrumental.[10] Of course, Radak's opinion was that Sennacherib had to withdraw from Jeru-

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[9] Aubin, *Rescue of Jerusalem*, 240.
[10] Ibid., 241.

salem in order to return to Nineveh and defend his capital city from an assault by Tirhakah—an obviously indefensible reconstruction.

Aubin also notes Lowth's 1730 commentary, which suggested that Tirhakah created a "diversion" that contributed to the Assyrian downfall.[11] A. H. L. Heeren's 1832 *Historical Researches*[12] is cited as claiming that Cushite Egypt "was *exclusively* responsible for turning back Sennacherib."[13] However, Heeren says nothing of the sort. The only relevant statement is that "Tarhaco [Tirhakah] … deterred him [Sennacherib] … from the invasion of Egypt, merely by the rumour of his advance against him."[14] The turning back of Assyria envisioned by Heeren does not suggest that Cush turned Assyria back from conquering Judah, but rather merely from invading Egypt.[15]

Aubin also points to other early 19th century sources. The 1817 *Mant's Bible* held that after the plague (=angel of Yahweh) that devastated the Assyrian camp, the subsequent report of Tirhakah's approach was heard and Sennacherib then abandoned his campaign.[16] Similarly, Ewald viewed Sennacherib's retreat as due to the devastating plague, combined with the "terror" of the Ethiopian armies' approach.[17]

Both Aubin and Bellis cite the *Imperial Bible Dictionary* (1867) and the article "Tirhakah" by Henry Constable, which states that "Tirhakah overthrew Sennacherib."[18] Aubin and Bellis both point to J. G. Wilkinson's opinion (1878) that Tirhakah defeated "the

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[11] W. Lowth, *A Commentary Upon the Larger and Lesser Prophets: Being a Continuation of Bishop Patrick* (3d ed.; London: printed for James and John Knapton, Arthur Bettesworth, et al., 1730), 541. Cited in Aubin, *Rescue of Jerusalem*, 238.

[12] A. H. L. Heeren, *Historical Researches into the Politics, Intercourse, and Trade of the Carthaginians, Ethiopians, and Egyptians: Translated from the German* (Oxford: D. A. Talboys, 1832).

[13] Aubin, *Rescue of Jerusalem*, 236.

[14] Heeren, *Historical Researches,* 416. Cited by Aubin, *Rescue of Jerusalem*, 236. Note that Heeren says it was merely a rumour that did it. Later Aubin finds this suggestion in another scholar (Stade) and angrily concludes that this opinion "nullifies Africa's true performance" (*Rescue of Jerusalem*, 244).

[15] Also, the reference to the rumour is clearly based entirely on the biblical text (2 Kgs 19:9).

[16] The source was unavailable to me. Cited in Aubin, *Rescue of Jerusalem*, 237.

[17] H. Ewald, *The History of Israel* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1878).

[18] Bellis, "Rescue of Jerusalem," 250; citing Constable, "Tirhakah," P. Fairbairn (ed.), *The Imperial Bible Dictionary* (2 vols.; London: Blackie, 1867), 2:1042–43. Cf. Aubin, *Rescue of Jerusalem*, 240.

numerous army of Sennacherib."[19] Aubin further cites the nine-teenth century Rabbi Malbin (Meier Loeb ben Jehiel Michael), who suggested that the rumour of Tirhakah led to Sennacherib's with-drawal.[20] As well, the 19th century Rabbi Isaac Meyer Wise believed that after Assyria's army had been devastated by the pestilence (=angel of the Lord), the Assyrians heard that Tirhakah ap-proached, so Sennacherib withdrew.[21]

This is actually all the evidence that Aubin and Bellis marshal in support of this supposed consensus supporting the Cushite-rescue theory. Yet Aubin provides the following summary:

> The point, then, should be made emphatically. Prior to the 20th century, those who stated that the Kushite Dynasty had played some sort of major role (whether supporting or leading) in turning back Sennacherib included some of the West's leading figures in Christian and Jewish thought.[22]

This statement is tempered compared to Aubin's subsequent claims that the "Kushite-rescue theory" was prominent prior to the end of the 19th century. However, even at this point only three sources cited by Aubin and Bellis suggest that the Cushites were solely responsible: Radak, with his theory that Tirhakah attacked Nine-veh, Constable's Tirhakah article, and Rabbi Malbin. The rest only held to a *contribution* by the Cushites, and this contribution only assisted after the main reason for Assyrian defeat—the pesti-lence/plague.[23] In sum, the evidence that Aubin and Bellis present hardly shows a "Cushite-Rescue theory" at all, but merely that some commentators/scholars viewed the rumour or actual pres-ence of a Cushite force to have been a factor (but not the key fac-tor) in Sennacherib's withdrawal from the Levant in 701 BCE.

Without even attempting an exhaustive treatment of the liter-ature, it will be immediately obvious that pre-1880 there were vari-ous opinions regarding the survival of Jerusalem in the face of the Assyrian threat in 701 BCE. For example, the Babylonian Talmud (and some Targums) viewed Sennacherib's retreat as due to light-ning storms.[24] Going back to 1725, H. Prideaux attributed Sen-

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[19] Bellis, "Rescue of Jerusalem," citing J. G. Wilkinson and S. Birch, *The Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians* (3 vols.; London: Murray, 1878), 1:94–95, 97. Cf. Aubin, *Rescue of Jerusalem*, 240.

[20] Aubin, *Rescue of Jerusalem*, 241.

[21] Ibid., 241.

[22] Ibid., 241.

[23] In fact, some of the sources they cite only viewed this "contribu-tion" as nothing more than a rumour. As Ewald (*The History of Israel*, 183) writes, "we do not know whether the Ethiopian monarch actually crossed the gulf of Elath into Asia or not."

[24] As cited in F. W. Farrar, *The Second Book of Kings* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1894), 342; and H. Prideaux, *The Old and New Testament*

nacherib's withdrawal to a simoom.[25] In 1871, G. Rawlinson argued that Sennacherib's army was defeated due to a miraculous happening analogous to the final plague of the exodus.[26] Furthermore, in *The Imperial Bible Dictionary*—the *very same dictionary* cited by Aubin and Bellis to show a pre-1880 consensus that Cushites rescued Jerusalem—the article "Assyria" by J. Bonomi suggests Tirhakah did not actually fight Sennacherib's armies at all, since, "before any battle took place, the Assyrian host was cut off by that signal catastrophe which is described with such beautiful simplicity by Isaiah."[27] (Obviously, this dictionary can hardly prove a consensus when different articles espouse diametrically opposed theories to explain Sennacherib's withdrawal).

Abraham Keuenen (1875) argued that a number of factors led to Sennacherib's withdrawal: a plague (=angel of the Lord); rumours of insurrection elsewhere in the Assyrian empire; and losses in their battle with Egyptian-Cushite forces (which was an Assyrian victory, but one which weakened Sennacherib's forces greatly).[28] Similarly, Julius Wellhausen viewed Sennacherib's withdrawal as due to multiple factors.[29] In light of Sennacherib's claims in the Assyrian annals, Wellhausen views the battle of Eltekeh (between Assyria and Egyptian/Cushite forces) as an Assyrian victory, but suggests it was only a temporary setback for the Egyptians and posits a second battle with Egypt from which Sennacherib was "unable to retrieve the loss he had sustained."[30] However, Wellhausen also posits "a still unexplained catastrophe … on the fron-

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Connected in the History of the Jews and Neighbouring Nations: From the Declension of the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah to the Time of Christ (4 vols.; London: Printed for R. Knaplock, et al., 1725), 34.

[25] Prideaux, *Old and New Testament*, 35.

[26] G. Rawlinson, *The Five Great Monarchies of the Ancient Eastern World* (3 vols.; New York: Dodd, 1964), 2:168.

[27] J. Bonomi, "Assyria," P. Fairbairn (ed.), *The Imperial Bible Dictionary*, 1:147.

[28] A. Kuenen, *The Prophets and Prophecy in Israel: An Historical and Critical Enquiry* (trans. A. Milroy; London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1877), 296–97. The original Dutch dates to 1975 (Cf. *De Profeten en de Profetie onder Israël: Historisch-dogmatische Studie.* [Leiden: P. Engels, 1975]). Kuenen holds that although Egypt "suffered a defeat" at Eltekeh, it appears that the Assyrians gain "no spoil, nor derive any advantage; for they do not penetrate into Egypt and very soon commence their return march" (*Prophets and Prophecy*, 296).

[29] J. Wellhausen, *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1865). ET: *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (Edinburgh: A. & C. Black, 1885).

[30] Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, 485.

tier between Egypt and Palestine" that accounted for Sennacherib's withdrawal.[31]

Further contradictory evidence will be covered in the next section; however, even at this point it is obvious that, as far as establishing that the "Cushite-Rescue theory" was the prominent or consensus view prior to the closing decades of the 19th century, Aubin and Bellis have hardly done what one could call a scholarly treatment, and their research does not approach the thoroughness necessary to support such wide-reaching statements.

2. THE ABANDONMENT OF THE CUSHITE-RESCUE THEORY

Aubin claims there was a "mass abandonment of the Kushite-rescue theory" in the 1880s.[32] As evidence that opinion quickly shifted in this time period (1880–1900) both Aubin and Bellis point to Geikie's 1897 *Hours with the Bible,* which asserts that the Cushites lost their battle with the Assyrians.[33] Furthermore, Aubin and Bellis suggest that as this "Cushite-defeat theory" gained prominence, other theories to explain Sennacherib's withdrawal took their place. One such theory was what Aubin calls the "troubles-elsewhere theory," citing L. von Ranke as an example—that is, Sennacherib had to withdraw due to troubles elsewhere in his empire.[34] Both Aubin and Bellis cite Edersheim (though Bellis misspells his name as Edelsheim), and George Adam Smith as those who "threw their weight behind the epidemic theory."[35] Aubin also adds Delitzsch (in his 1890 Isaiah commentary) to this list of those who abandon the Cushite-rescue theory in favour of the plague explanation.[36]

However, the evidence marshalled here is unconvincing. First, the "troubles-elsewhere theory" dates to before the 1880s (and predates von Ranke). Already in 1875 Kuenen viewed this as a key factor in explaining Sennacherib's withdrawal.[37] Secondly, this theory did not emerge out of thin air due to scholars' racism. For ex-

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[31] Ibid., 483.

[32] Aubin, *Rescue of Jerusalem*, 247.

[33] Bellis, "Rescue of Jerusalem," 250; referring to J. C. Geikie, *Hours with the Bible: Or The Scriptures in the Light of Modern Discovery and Knowledge* (7 vols.; New York: J. B. Alden, 1890), 4:472, 475. Cf. Aubin, *Rescue of Jerusalem*, 243–44.

[34] Aubin, *Rescue of Jerusalem*, 244 (citing L. von Ranke), G. W. Prothero (ed.), *Universal History: The Oldest Historical Group of Nations and the Greeks* (New York: Scribner, 1884), 77. Of course the latter is an English translation of a German original (1881), but Aubin only references the English translation and it is this English translation which will be cited in this essay.

[35] Aubin, *Rescue of Jerusalem*, 244; and Bellis, "Rescue of Jerusalem," 250.

[36] Aubin, *Rescue of Jerusalem*, 244.

[37] Kuenen, *Prophets and Prophecy*, 296–97.

ample, von Ranke's argumentation included evidence (Babylonian evidence, and Sennacherib's account of the defeat of Egypt/Cush at Eltekeh) that supported his position—arguments that Aubin fails to acknowledge or address.[38]

Regarding Edersheim's holding to the "epidemic theory," Aubin and Bellis ignore (or are ignorant of) the fact that Edersheim does posit a significant Cushite contribution to the retreat of Sennacherib. Edersheim writes, "Sennacherib gained indeed the victory at Altaku [Eltekah]. But it was a virtual defeat, which … determined the final retreat of Sennacherib from Palestine."[39] What is more, Aubin and Bellis do not even interact with Edersheim's argumentation or stated reasons for his position, but simply assume it is due to the racist view of Cushite incompetence—which clearly does not fit with Edersheim's view of the battle of Eltekeh.[40]

Another weak link in the evidence is Aubin's appeal to Delitzsch's commentary as evidence for the abandonment of the Cushite-Rescue theory in the 1880s. Aubin dates Delitzsch's commentary to 1890 which fits his theory nicely (the first English translation of his commentary actually dates to 1884, but that is a moot point), but the German dates to 1866—well before Aubin's watershed date.

Furthermore, several sources dated to this period (1880–1900) actually credit the Cushites with contributing to the Assyrian retreat. For example, in 1885 E. Schrader suggested that the Assyrians did not actually win the battle of Eltekeh—at least not in the manner claimed by Sennacherib.[41] In fact, Schrader comes closest to espousing an actual Cushite-rescue theory when he suggests that in connection with the battle of Eltekeh "thus Jerusalem was delivered."[42] In 1893, W. L. Bevan concluded that an alliance of Sethos

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[38] von Ranke (*Universal History*, 79) only alludes to Babylonian evidence without explicitly citing it. He does, however, explicitly refer to Assyrian evidence in his argument (77). He takes Sennacherib's text as correct—the Assyrians defeated the Egyptian/Ethiopian armies at Eltekeh.

[39] A. Edersheim, *Bible History* (Boston: I. Bradley & Co., 1887), 151.

[40] Edersheim (ibid., 155) views the angel of the Lord mentioned in the biblical texts and the mice mentioned in Herodotus as indicating a pestilence.

[41] E. Schrader, *The Cuneiform Inscriptions and the Old Testament* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1885). He writes, "if it was actually a victory, it was at all events a very serious one—a Pyrrhus-victory" (300). Schrader writes of how "the great Aegyptian army" that was approaching "evidently emboldened Hezekiah to hold out bravely" (300).

[42] Ibid., 303. However, Schrader did not hold to an outright besting of Assyrian forces by the Egyptians/Cushites for two reasons: 1) the Egyptian forces were hurt at Eltekeh and there is no reference to a second battle in any of the sources; and 2) the lack of evidence of the advance of

and Tirhakah defeated the Assyrians and in effect rescued Judah from their oppressor.[43] However, in that same dictionary R. S. Poole suggested that Tirhakah's advance had nothing to do with Sennacherib's withdrawal but only led to further Assyrian threats against Jerusalem.[44] In connection with this, although first published in 1865, Wellhausen's *Prolegomena* continued to have massive influence in this time period (1880–1900) despite espousing a significant Cushite contribution towards an Assyrian defeat (an opinion which was not emended due to the rise of new consensus of Cushite incompetence). In sum, despite claims by Aubin and Bellis, there is no evidence whatsoever for a "mass abandonment of the Kushite-rescue theory" in the 1880s.[45]

3. THE REASON FOR THE ABANDONMENT OF THE CUSHITE-RESCUE THEORY: THE RISE OF THE VIEW OF CUSHITE INCOMPETENCE

Aubin asks, "having once known the answer [to the question of who saved Jerusalem—that is, Cushite Egypt], why has the West lost it?"[46] The assumption here is that the "true answer" has been lost, not that scholars have since discovered the "true answer" (due to new evidence or information), while the older, inaccurate theory has been abandoned. Aubin and Bellis explain this supposed change of scholarly opinion as the result of an unsubstantiated (racially and politically motivated) negative view of the Cushites ("Kushite incompetence").[47] They hold that this view of the incompetence of Cush is so "deeply entrenched" in modern scholarship that it is simply not questioned anymore.[48] Aubin and Bellis evidently do not seem to appreciate the subjectivity of this assumption, and so draw generalized conclusions too quickly. In fact, they do not even explore the reasons why scholars did not view Cush as instrumental to Sennacherib's withdrawal.[49] Apparently scholars' opinions are researched only in so far as to determine whether they viewed Cush as rescuing Jerusalem or not.

Egypt into the North West which would doubtless had followed a complete victory (301).

[43] W. L. Bevan, "Alliances," W. Smith (ed.), *A Dictionary of the Bible: Comprising its Antiquities, Biography, Geography, and Natural History* (4 vols.; Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1863), 3:67–68 (68).

[44] R. S. Poole, "Assyria," W. Smith (ed.), *A Dictionary of the Bible*, 1:1513–14.

[45] Aubin, *Rescue of Jerusalem*, 247.

[46] Ibid., 236–37.

[47] Ibid., 247.

[48] Ibid., 250.

[49] Aubin simply states that the "disdainful outlook has stuck" and that scholars ignore "all evidence to the contrary" (ibid., 284).

The charge that those who do not hold to a "Cushite-rescue theory" viewed the Cushites as incompetent cannot be sustained by the evidence. For example, Aubin claims that von Ranke's "troubles-elsewhere" explanation for Sennacherib's withdrawal is due to his acceptance of Cushite incompetence. However, in the very same book von Ranke argued that Assyria did not completely conquer the West due to "the counteracting influence of Egypt" which "rendered this impossible."[50] He clearly credits Cushite Egypt with Assyrian failure to conquer the West, so how can he be promoting Cushite incompetence with racial bias? Similarly, in 1894 F. W. Farrar viewed Sennacherib's withdrawal as likely due to plague or simoom, but clearly had a high view of Tirhakah, asserting that the Cushite king was "the greatest of the Egyptian sovereigns who came from Ethiopia. He reigned gloriously for many years."[51]

Aubin and Bellis see evidence for a scholarly bias against Cush (that of Cushite incompetence) not only in reconstructions that do not consider Cush to have rescued Jerusalem, but also in suggestions that Cush fomented rebellion in Judah.[52] In their opinion, such suggestions "vilify" the Cushites.[53] In other words, the Cushites can be blamed for Judah's rebellion that brought on the Assyrian invasion. However, this position is fraught with difficulties.

First, it is unclear why suggestions that Cushite Egypt encouraged the rebellion vilify the Cushites. Such suggestions are attempts at reconstructing the events and do not appear to be motivated by

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[50] von Ranke, *Universal History*, 77.

[51] Farrar, *The Second Book of Kings*, 338. In a footnote, Farrar even entertains the idea that the calamity was a "nocturnal attack of Tirhakah" (342).

[52] Bellis, "Rescue of Jerusalem," 251; Aubin, *Rescue of Jerusalem*, 387. Again their scholarship must be scrutinized. For example, Bellis cites K. A. Kitchen, *The Third Intermediate Period in Egypt (1100–650 B.C.)* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1986) as blaming the Cushites for fomenting rebellion in Judah (though she cites no page numbers). However, in *The Third Intermediate Period,* Kitchen clearly says that Hezekiah and others "opened negotiations" with Egypt in order "to obtain his support against Assyria" (385). Though elsewhere Kitchen also writes, "Perhaps not without good reason, Esarhaddon viewed Taharqa of Egypt as the source of unrest among his vassals in Palestine and Phoenicia" (391).

[53] Bellis, "Rescue of Jerusalem," 251. Aubin claims that "it had become so *de rigeur* [sic] to diminish the Kushite role at Jerusalem" that W. E. Barnes had to do so as well (244). Aubin claims Barnes was "vilifying" Tirhakah when he refers to him as Assyria's "contemptible foe" (244). However, in this commentary Barnes only states in a footnote that the "Egyptian was a contemptible foe (Isa. xxx. 3–7)" (W. E. Barnes, *The Two Books of the Kings*, 244). Aubin says Barnes is "clearly giving his own opinion" (*Rescue of Jerusalem*, 388, n. 38), but he is clearly relying on Isaiah's opinion. Besides, being the enemy of Assyria is hardly a bad thing in biblical perspective. The adage applies, "the enemy of my enemy is my friend."

a desire to cast Cush in a negative light. Secondly, it is actually widely held that Hezekiah was a ringleader in the rebellion against Sennacherib. It is thought that this accounts for the pejorative language used of Hezekiah in Sennacherib's annals and the fact that after Padi, a pro-Assyrian king of Ekron, was deposed he was held captive by Hezekiah.[54] Furthermore, this opinion was common before and after the "watershed" dates of the 1880s where Aubin and Bellis detect a massive change of opinion. In 1865 Wellhausen argued that Hezekiah was "the soul of the rebellion in these quarters."[55] Wellhausen further argued that the Babylonians urged Judah to rebel and that Judah therefore initiated "relations with Egypt" in order to "secure its support in time of need."[56] Similarly, Rawlinson (1871) and W. L. Bevan (1893) both maintained that Hezekiah sought Egyptian aid against Assyria.[57] This opinion continued after the nineteenth century. For example, in 1958 M. Noth argued that Hezekiah played "a leading part" and that Judah sought "Egyptian aid."[58] Similarly, Miller and Hayes (1986), whom Bellis incorrectly cites as an example of those who vilify Cush for fomenting rebellion in Judah, claim that "Hezekiah was one of the prime movers behind rebellion."[59] Using the logic of Aubin and Bellis, should we understand these studies to be anti-Semitic in vilifying Hezekiah for instigating rebellion against Assyria?

Recently Mayer has suggested that the only reason the Egyptians were brought into the conflict was that the people of Ekron appealed to Egypt for aid *against Judah,* not against Assyria.[60] Mayer points to the fact that Hezekiah already had the Ekronite king, Padi, imprisoned in Jerusalem, and suggests that when Sennacherib's annals record that Ekron (*not Judah*) appealed to Egypt, in reality it was "to avoid surrendering their city to Judah as well."[61] In this view, the Cushites did not get involved to rescue Jerusalem but Ekron—from the Judahites! Thus the Judahites are blamed not only for an unsuccessful rebellion against Assyria but also for drawing in the Egyptians (who were soundly defeated according to

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[54] See "Sennacherib's Siege of Jerusalem," translated by Mordechai Cogan (*COS* 2.119B: 303–304).

[55] Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, 483.

[56] Ibid., 481.

[57] Rawlinson, *Five Great Monarchies*, 2.165; W.L. Bevan, "Alliances," W. Smith (ed.), *A Dictionary of the Bible*, 3:67–68.

[58] M. Noth, *The History of Israel* (London: A & C Black, 1958), 267. Similarly, O. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament, an Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), 329; and I. W. Provan, et al., *A Biblical History of Israel*, 273.

[59] J. M. Miller and J. H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 353. It is this very edition (1986) which Bellis references. Cf. Bellis, "Rescue of Jerusalem," 251.

[60] Mayer, "Sennacherib's Campaign," 168–200.

[61] Mayer, "Sennacherib's Campaign," 177.

Mayer).[62] Does Mayer's reconstruction vilify Judah and therefore reveal itself as anti-Semitic simply because it ascribes the instigation of rebellion to Judah? By the logic of the Aubin-Bellis hypothesis it could be viewed this way (though it seems quite unlikely that any scholar would draw this conclusion).

Aubin-Bellis also see recent scholarship as continuing to have a negative view of the Cushites. However, the evidence does not support this assertion. For example, Fritz's recent commentary does not believe that the Egyptian/Cushite forces were involved in Sennacherib's withdrawal in 701 but he clearly has a positive view of the Cushite king. He writes, "[Tirhakah] made the Assyrians suffer a serious defeat in 673 …. Only after his death was Egypt finally made a vassal state by Ashurbanipal."[63] Furthermore, several recent studies have underscored the contribution of Cushite forces.[64] Yet Aubin and Bellis write dramatically as if some sort of conspiracy or cover-up is going on.[65]

4. THE REASON FOR THE VIEW OF CUSHITE INCOMPETENCE: RACISM AND EUROPEAN IMPERIALISM IN THE 1880–1890S

According to the Aubin-Bellis hypothesis, the change in historical reconstructions from the "Cushite-rescue theory" to other theories explaining the Assyrian retreat began in the 1880s when Africa became more thoroughly colonized by European (and especially British) powers.[66] (Despite the fact that, as I have shown above, there was no Cushite-rescue theory "consensus" and, therefore, could be no mass abandonment of the theory in the late 19th century, these arguments will now be dealt with in detail.) Aubin writes, "the turn-around in the European assessment of the ancient

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[62] He suggests that the Cushite forces were "retreating toward Egypt when the Assyrians caught up with [them] at Eltekeh" (ibid., 178).

[63] V. Fritz, *1 & 2 Kings* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 373.

[64] E.g., P. S. Evans, *The Invasion of Sennacherib in the Book of Kings: A Source-critical and Rhetorical Study of 2 Kings 18–19* (VTSup 125; Leiden: Brill, 2009); L. L. Grabbe, "Of Mice and Dead Men: Herodotus 2.141 and Sennacherib's Campaign in 701 BCE," L. L. Grabbe (ed.), *'Like a Bird in a Cage'*, 119–40; E. A. Knauf, "Sennacherib at the Berezina," 141–49; D. B. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 353.

[65] In his review, G. Rice (review of *The Rescue of Jerusalem: The Alliance Between Hebrews and Africans in 701 BC, JRT* 57, no. 2.5 [2005], 181–92) noted that his book "has the sustaining interest of a mystery novel" (184).

[66] In Aubin's words "this great shift in the perception of black Africa occurred in the early 1880s" (*Rescue of Jerusalem*, 387). Aubin cites the article "Colonialism: II. European Expansion since 1763," *Encyclopaedia Britannica, Macropaedia* (1975), vol. 4, 899. Bellis ("Rescue of Jerusalem") cites the exact same article to support her position without noting Aubin's reliance on it (251).

Kushites, then, coincides almost perfectly with Europe's subjuga-
tion of all of Africa in the century's last two decades."[67] Similarly,
Bellis concludes that after European nations "became colonial
powers, it was no longer comfortable to see Africans as saviors of
the holy city."[68]Aubin further supports his argument by relying on
Ivan Hannaford's historical reconstruction of racism in his mono-
graph, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West,* which states that "that
there was no fundamental historical movement of racial and anti-
Semitic ideas until after 1880."[69] Aubin views this as significant as
he asserts: "Hannaford sees a watershed intensification of Euro-
pean hostility toward the Other at precisely the same time that the
Kushite-rescue theory falls from grace."[70]

However, when Hannaford's work is consulted it is clear that
he is referring chiefly to the rise of anti-Semitism in this time pe-
riod, and not anti-African sentiments at all. In fact, the context of
the Hannaford statement that Aubin quotes makes this clear:

> The suggestion here is that there was no fundamental historical
> movement of racial and anti-Semitic ideas until after 1880, and
> more important, that it is a mistake to see anti-Semitism as …
> an omnipresent historical idea or … as a new form of political
> anti-Semitism, a simple variant on the anti-Jewish antipathies
> of the Middle Ages and a case study in collective psycho-
> pathology.[71]

Furthermore, racist ideas against dark skinned peoples predate this
"watershed" period of 1880–1900. Historians have argued for dif-
ferent origins of race ideas and how they were invented or rein-
vented in different time periods and in different places.[72] Anti-Afri-
can racism was clearly present in America, justifying black slavery.[73]
Ideas of biological race and the inferiority of dark skinned people
developed in different European countries in different varieties and
to varying degrees. For example, in France in the 1780s race ideas
served to explain why slaves in Caribbean plantations were not
"equal" to their French masters—despite the French revolution's

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[67] Aubin, *Rescue of Jerusalem*, 246. Aubin asserts that due to "the grip of
Europe's colonial adventure on the thinking of serious historians"
scholars jumped "readily aboard a popular, narrow-minded bandwagon"
(248).

[68] Bellis, "Rescue of Jerusalem," 251.

[69] I. Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West* (Washington:
Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1996), 316; cited by Aubin, *Rescue of
Jerusalem*, 247.

[70] Aubin, *Rescue of Jerusalem*, 247.

[71] Hannaford, *Race*, 316 (cf. 315–24).

[72] E. Beasley, *The Victorian Reinvention of Race: New Racisms and the
Problem of Grouping in the Human Sciences* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

[73] Ibid., 13–14; Fredrickson, *Racism*, 72.

ideal of equality.[74] In Spain, colour-based racist ideas emerged in response to conflict with the Islamic world and aboriginals/natives in the New World.[75] In 18th century Germany, some writings already characterized "darker, coloured peoples" as "ugly" and "semi-civilized."[76] Beasley has argued that "blackness and powerlessness" were associated in the early 1800s.[77] Some studies have suggested that race was "reinvented" in England in the mid-19thcentury, supported by new scientific and philosophical ideas.[78] In the 1860s, "arrogant behaviour toward black people within England" increased.[79] However, some have argued that British imperialism and doctrines of race were not causally linked at all.[80] In sum, the date of 1880 does not appear to be a watershed for racism in general, (and not for particularly anti-African racism, which already existed well before), though it does mark the publication of some specifically anti-Semitic works in Germany.[81]

5. WHY MODERN SCHOLARS DO NOT ACCEPT THE CUSHITE-RESCUE THEORY

In explaining why modern reconstructions have not embraced the Cushite-rescue theory, neither Aubin nor Bellis deal with historical method or the interpretation of sources (cf. the questions stated at the beginning of this essay), but instead assert that modern scholars have missed the truth due to racism and their unquestioned reliance on 19th century colonial scholarship.[82] Bellis explicitly claims that "racism" has "closed our eyes to the best explanation" for Jerusalem's deliverance in 701.[83] However, Aubin does not accuse modern scholars of racism *per se*, but asserts that modern scholarship has adopted this view of Cushite incompetence from their "colonial-era" predecessors.[84] Aubin queries:

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[74] Beasley, *Victorian Reinvention*, 12.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Fredrickson, *Racism*, 59.

[77] Beasley, *Victorian Reinvention*, 16–17.

[78] Ibid.

[79] M. P. Banton, *The Idea of Race* (London: Tavistock, 1977), 59–60.

[80] G. Watson, *The English Ideology: Studies in the Language of Victorian Politics* (London: A. Lane, 1973), 213, 215.

[81] E.g., W. Marr, *Der Sieg des Judenthums über das Germanenthum* (Bern: Rudolph Costenoble, 1879); K. E. Dühring, *Die Judenfrage als Rassen-, Siten-und Kulturfrage* (Karlsruhe-Leipzig) 1880.

[82] *Rescue of Jerusalem*, 249. Aubin suggests that scholars could again discover the truth but that "The trick is this … to be free of preconceptions that the Kushites were incapable" (83).

[83] Bellis, "Rescue of Jerusalem," 257.

[84] According to Aubin (*Rescue of Jerusalem*, 249) modern scholars "derive their view of Kush's insignificance in 701 BC from their late 19th- and early 20th-century predecessors … they seem to accept their assumption

> Why are today's Egyptologists, biblical historians, biblical commentators and Assyriologists so blind to Kush's vital participation in saving Judah? … why can't they perceive an historic role that many of their counterparts in pre-colonial times discerned simply by reading two elementary research tools, the Bible and Herodotus?[85]

However, his own question answers his query. He asks why precolonial scholarship determined that Cush rescued Jerusalem using only the Bible and Herodotus. That is *because they only had the Bible and Herodotus*! Neither Aubin nor Bellis seem to appreciate that the archaeological and epigraphic evidence available today is far greater than that available in the mid-19th century.

In fact, most of the evidence Aubin and Bellis produce to establish a "Cushite-rescue theory" consensus dates to before the decipherment and publication of Sennacherib's annals. Clearly Calvin (1509–1564), Radak (1160–1235), Lowth (1730), and *Mant's Bible* (1817) all date before the discovery of Sennacherib's annals, as the Taylor Prism was only discovered in 1830.[86] The cuneiform text of the prism was only published in 1861,[87] which means that Heeren's work (1832) pre-dates its availability, and Ewald's work, though the English translation dates to 1878, is actually a translation from the German original which dates to 1852—also before the Prism's text was published.[88] *The Imperial Bible Dictionary* (1867) dates to just after the first publication of the annals, but before an English translation was available (in 1878). Aubin and Bellis cite the 1878 edition of Wilkinson's *Manners and Customs,* but the work essentially dates to 1837 (it was reissued several times in 1841, 1847, and then again in 1878), making it effectively pre-date the publication and decipherment of Sennacherib's annals.[89] Interestingly, Aubin notes that Sennacherib's annals were "first translated into English in 1878."[90] Since Aubin detected a change in scholars' opinions in the 1880s, one would think he would have perceived a causal connection between the coinciding of the availability of Sen-

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that Kush—and ancient sub-Saharan Africa as a whole—is irrelevant for serious history."

[85] Ibid.

[86] L. L. Honor, *Sennacherib's Invasion of Palestine: A Critical Source Study* (New York: Columbia, 1926), 26.

[87] Ibid.

[88] H. Ewald, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel* (Göttingen: Dieterichs Buchhandlung, 1852).

[89] However, Aubin's citation of the 1878 edition works in his favour in setting out a hard date of 1880 for the change in scholarly opinion. It appears Bellis cites this edition simply because she draws on Aubin's research.

[90] Aubin, *Rescue of Jerusalem*, 83.

nacherib's annals in translation and the supposed "change" in scholarly opinion that he perceived.[91] That Aubin and Bellis failed to note the relevance of the knowledge of the Assyrian annals for the supposed differences of opinion between pre-1880 scholarship and post-1880s scholarship is both surprising and unfortunate.

Although Bellis maintains, "the evidence suggests that Tirhakah's forces were behind Sennacherib's hasty retreat,"[92] most historians have not agreed with her appraisal of the evidence. It seems clear that a Cushite contribution has not been viewed as determinative to Sennacherib's withdrawal due to the assessment of several important pieces of evidence: 1) The Assyrian annals; 2) Herodotus, *Histories*, 2.141; and 3) Egyptian chronology.

5.1 THE ASSYRIAN ANNALS

Aubin claims that historians "offer no hard evidence on which to base their judgments" regarding Tirhakah's defeat by Sennacherib.[93] However, as is well known, Sennacherib's annals explicitly describe their victory over Egyptian forces and Cushite cavalry, as the following excerpt demonstrates:

> The kings of Egypt, (and) the bowmen, chariot corps and cavalry of the kings of Ethiopia assembled a countless force and came to their (i.e. the Ekronites') aid. In the plain of Eltekeh, they drew up their ranks against me … Trusting in the god Ashur, my lord, I fought with them and inflicted a defeat upon them. The Egyptian charioteers and princes, together with the charioteers of the Ethiopians, I personally took alive in the midst of the battle. I besieged and conquered Eltekeh and Timnah and carried off their spoil.[94]

This is the most unambiguous evidence available on which to base the supposition of a Cushite defeat. What is more, Assyrian annals have proven themselves quite trustworthy. Early after their discovery it was thought that Sennacherib's annals were inaccurate when they contradicted the biblical accounts since Assyrians never admit

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[91] This is even more curious since Aubin assumes that scholars rely on others' translation of ancient texts. He writes, "many scholarly works rely primarily on a single translation of the Bible" but boasts that "this book [Aubin's book] will use many different biblical translations" (*Rescue of Jerusalem*, xii). Aubin's criteria for choosing one translation over another is not accuracy but "clarity of expression" (*Rescue of Jerusalem*, xii). Of course the question of how one can judge the clarity of a translation when one does not know Hebrew is not entertained in his volume.

[92] Bellis, "Rescue of Jerusalem," 256.

[93] Aubin, *Rescue of Jerusalem*, 13.

[94] "Sennacherib's Siege of Jerusalem," translated by Mordechai Cogan (*COS* 2.119B:303).

defeat.[95] However, this opinion changed over time. Today scholars generally believe that "Assyrian royal inscriptions (nearly) never lie, at least in so many words."[96] While they do not lie, it is well known that they do exaggerate and put "extreme spin on real events."[97] Nevertheless, the consensus is that Eltekeh was not an Assyrian defeat.

Some think that Sennacherib has exaggerated the extent of his victory over Egypt/Cush at Eltekeh, but most do not think his account is a complete fabrication.[98] For example, Knauf suggests that Eltekeh was not a resounding victory for Assyria, but neither was it one for Egypt.[99] Luckenbill suggests that the silence of the Babylonian Chronicle ("which was not slow to record Assyrian reverses") regarding an Assyrian defeat by Cushites in 701 BCE supports the veracity of Sennacherib's claims to victory at Eltekeh.[100]

Another significant piece of information drawn from Sennacherib's annals is the note that the Egyptians/Cushites came out to rescue Ekron—not Jerusalem. The relevant section reads:

> The people of Ekron … became afraid. The kings of Egypt, troops, archers, chariots and the cavalry of the king of Nubia, an army beyond counting, they [the people of Ekron] had called, and they (actually) came to their assistance.[101]

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[95] E.g., Rawlinson (*Five Great Monarchies*, 2.155–70) was one of the first to write on the subject after the decipherment of the Assyrian inscriptions. When G. Rawlinson questioned his brother Henry regarding Assyrian disagreements with the biblical accounts, Henry explained that the Assyrian annals were distorted because they never admit to defeat. As Mayer ("Sennacherib's Campaign," 169) has observed, "This cut-and-dry explanation became the guiding force for all subsequent interpretation of Neo-Assyrian historical writings."

[96] Knauf, "Sennacherib at the Berezina," 141.

[97] Halpern has called this the "Tiglathpileser principle," which he defines as a technique of "putting extreme spin on real events" (B. Halpern, *David's Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001], 126).

[98] For example, D. D. Luckenbill (*The Annals of Sennacherib* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1924]) argues that Sennacherib's campaign "was not a brilliant success … [but] Sennacherib had not met with outright defeat" (13). Others who do not see Eltekeh as an all-out victory for Assyria include Schrader (*Cuneiform Inscriptions*, 299–301), B. S. Childs (*Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis* [SBT 2/3; London: SCM, 1967], 15); and Knauf ("Sennacherib at the Berezina," 147–49).

[99] Knauf, "Sennacherib at the Berezina," 147–49.

[100] Luckenbill, *Annals of Sennacherib*, 13.

[101] Mayer's translation ("Sennacherib's Campaign," 189).

As noted above, Mayer has suggested that Ekron's appeal to Egypt was for aid against Judah and *not* against Assyria.[102] While Mayer's thesis has not achieved wide support, it is clear that Aubin's thesis of a trusted alliance between Jerusalem and Cushite Egypt where the latter bravely march in to rescue the former ignores Sennacherib's annals at this point.

Aubin is aware of Sennacherib's claims to have won the battle of Eltekeh and tries to work around them by positing a subsequent battle (one that is not recorded in any text) wherein the Cushites were victorious over Sennacherib's forces. Of course, he is not the first to suggest there was a second Egyptian force that fought Sennacherib in 701 BCE. As we have seen, Wellhausen posited a second battle such as this, as have others.[103] However, we do not have any text that refers to a second battle so the theory is extremely speculative.[104] This has led most to reject the likelihood of a second battle since it would mean either 1) the Egyptians committed their forces piecemeal against the Assyrians (a foolish stratagem),[105] or 2) the Pharaoh would have needed to have had a second army ready to march so soon after Eltekeh's defeat *and* have been willing to lead this army into Palestine "after an initial defeat, and at a time when, as his intelligence services must have informed him, the rebellion he had come to support had already collapsed [since Hezekiah capitulated]."[106] As it is, Sennacherib's annals are the only texts that refer to a battle between the Cushites and the Assyrians at all, and they claim the former was defeated soundly. Clearly it is Aubin who lacks evidence for his assertion, not the scholars he criticizes. Aware of the problem of lack of evidence, Aubin suggests there *was* Egyptian evidence but it has been destroyed.[107] While of course "anything is possible," such arguments

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[102] Ibid., 177.

[103] E.g., Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, 485; H. H. Rowley, "Hezekiah's Reform and Rebellion," idem (ed.) *Men of God: Studies in Old Testament History and Prophecy* (London: T. Nelson, 1963), 98–132.

[104] The two-campaign hypothesis posits a second battle between Sennacherib and Egyptian/Cushite forces, but this second battle is thought to have occurred in a second Assyrian campaign altogether. See discussion of two-campaign theories below.

[105] Aubin (*Rescue of Jerusalem*, 191) explicitly suggests that this was the case: He thinks they first sent "a small advance force … [to] slow down the Assyrian advance" then the Pharaoh's would send "a much larger second force composed of every soldier and militiaman they can find in Lower Egypt, Upper Egypt and Kush and its environs."

[106] J. Bright, *A History of Israel* (3d ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), 304.

[107] To explain the lack of evidence Aubin (*Rescue of Jerusalem*) suggests either the Assyrians who later conquered Egypt destroyed the Egyptian chronicles that recorded Tirhakah's victory over Sennacherib, or the 26th

from silence will convince few and undermine his credibility as he castigates historians for *their* lack of evidence.[108]

5.2. HERODOTUS, HISTORIES, 2.141

As is well known, this story refers to a miraculous defeat of Sennacherib's forces whilst in conflict with the Egyptians near Pelusium.[109] Interestingly, both the biblical account and this Herodotus text record a mysterious/miraculous ending to Sennacherib's campaign: in Herodotus an onslaught of field mice rendered the weapons of the Assyrian army useless; in the biblical account the "angel of the Lord" attacks the Assyrian camp.[110] Some scholars have viewed this as the Egyptian parallel to the biblical story.[111] Since mice are often seen as a symbol of plague, and the angel of the Lord explicitly denotes plague elsewhere (cf. 2 Sam 24; 1 Chr 21), most who appeal to Herodotus view the disaster that militated Sennacherib's withdrawal as an outbreak of plague in the Assyrian camp. Others have viewed it as a memory of the defeat of the Assyrian army under Sennacherib's son, Esarhaddon.[112] Still others have suggested that it relies on the biblical account.[113] In other

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dynasty destroyed the records due to their hatred of the previous (Cushite) dynasty. He writes, "In other words, most of whatever remaining evidence in Egypt the Assyrians might have missed in the seventh century BC, the 26th Dynasty might well have finished off in the sixth" (146).

[108] In further support of the Aubin-Bellis hypothesis, they claim that Cushite Egypt "enjoyed commercial and political success in Judah and its surrounding areas, influence that is consistent with Egypt's having come out of the conflict in a strong position" (Bellis, "Rescue of Jerusalem," 255; drawing on Aubin, *Rescue of Jerusalem,* 148–63). However, this is not the consensus viewpoint. For example, Knauf ("Sennacherib at the Berezina") contradicts this suggestion, (though he holds that a Cushite force contributed to the end of hostilities in 701) asserting that it could not have been "a resounding Egyptian victory" due to "the status of Southern Syria between Assyria and Egypt during the following 20 years: stalemate, or a cold truce in a frozen war" (147). So Rawlinson, *Five Great Monarchies*, 2.169–70; and Schrader, *Cuneiform Inscriptions*, 301.

[109] See Herodotus, *Hist.* 2.141.

[110] The mice are said to devour the bowstrings and shield handles of the Assyrian soldiers.

[111] J. A. Montgomery and H.S. Gehman, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Kings* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1951), 497–98; J. Gray, *1 & 2 Kings* (2d, fully rev. ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 694.

[112] J. Boardman (ed.), *The Cambridge Ancient History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 74, 85; M. Cogan and H. Tadmor, *II Kings* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1988), 250–51.

[113] A. Rofé, "Israelite Belief in Angels in the Pre-exilic Period as Evidenced by Biblical Traditions" (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University, 1969), 217.

words, those who have not viewed Herodotus as relevant have had some good reasons to disregard it. More recently, Grabbe has argued for the independence of Herodotus from the biblical account and that it preserves an Egyptian version of the Assyrian invasion of 701 BCE which was frustrated by an "unusual" happening.[114] However, even if it represents an historical memory of Sennacherib's defeat in 701 BCE it must be noted that the Cushites are *not* mentioned in Herodotus 2.141, and the event does not occur in Palestine. Furthermore, the victory is not presented as an Egyptian victory due to military prowess, but is rather due to a strange occurrence (i.e., miracle). In other words, the text does *not* provide clear evidence of a Cushite victory over Sennacherib.

5.3. EGYPTIAN CHRONOLOGY

As early as Rawlinson (1871), there was an awareness of the problematic nature of the reference to Tirhakah as "King of Cush" in 2 Kgs 19:9.[115] Egyptian records clearly show that Tirhakah did not become king until 690 BCE—over a decade after Sennacherib's invasion. According to some studies, Tirhakah would only have been a child in 701 BCE, making it impossible that he would have led an army at this time.[116] Scholars concluded that either the biblical text was incorrect, or the texts that mention Tirhakah actually refer to an incident later than 701 BCE. Therefore, some scholars posited a second Assyrian campaign under Sennacherib which occurred after Tirhakah's ascension and is reflected in the biblical text but is not mentioned in the Assyrian annals.[117] However, recent

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[114] Grabbe, "Mice and Dead Men," 119–40. Cf. the positions of Redford (*Egypt, Canaan, and Israel*, 353) and Evans (*Invasion of Sennacherib*, 184).

[115] Rawlinson, *Five Great Monarchies*, 2.167.

[116] W. F. Albright, "New Light from Egypt on the Chronology and the History of Israel and Judah," *BASOR* 130 (1953), 8–11; M. F. L. Macadam, *The Temples of Kawa* (London: Griffith Institute, Ashmolean Museum, 1949).

[117] Rawlinson (*Five Great Monarchies*, 2.165) was the first to suggest that Sennacherib led multiple campaigns into the Levant, based partly on the recognition of Tirhakah's ascension date militating against his presence in a 701 BCE campaign. Thus the biblical text must refer to a different campaign. In order to explain the reference to Tirhakah, in 1904 Alfred Jeremias (*Das Alte Testament im Lichte des alten Orients; Handbuch zur biblisch-orientalischen Altertumskunde* [Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1904], 529–30) suggested that the biblical story actually refers to a different invasion by Sennacherib that took place after the Cushite took the throne (i.e., after 690 BCE). So likewise R. P. Dougherty, "Sennacherib and the Walled Cities of Judah," *JBL* 49 (1930), 160–71; Albright, "New Light from Egypt," 8–11; Bright, *History*, 267–69, 282–87; and C. van Leeuwen, "Sanchérib devant Jérusalem," *OTS* 14 (1965), 245–72. More recently, the theory was defended by

scholarship has largely rejected this view.[118] Most scholars have held that the mention of Tirhakah is anachronistic, leading many scholars to reject any "Cushite Rescue-theory." Volkmar Fritz's statement is representative:

> The mention of Tirhakah in v. 9a is an anachronism, since the pharaoh of this name … reigned only from 690 …. Any interpretation that Sennacherib left Judah for fear of an Egyptian assault under Tirhakah is therefore ruled out on historical grounds.[119]

Other studies have concluded that Tirhakah would have been old enough to lead the army that fought the Assyrians at Eltekeh in 701 BCE.[120] However, all admit that the title of "King" is anachronistic, as Tirhakah did not ascend the throne until 690 BCE. Even if Tirhakah would have been of age to participate in the battle of Eltekeh, whether he did or not is still debated, with many asserting he is only mentioned in the biblical account due to his later reputation as the great Egyptian king who resisted Assyria.[121]

W. 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 [1999], 36; and idem, "Hezekiah, Sennacherib and Tirhakah: A Brief Rejoinder," 45 [2000], 37–38).

[118] However, most have argued against the thesis: see S. H. Horn, "Did Sennacherib Campaign Once or Twice Against Hezekiah?" *AUSS* 4 (1966), 1–28; F. J. Yurco, "Sennacherib's Third Campaign and the Coregency of Shabaka and Shebitku," *Serapis* 6 (1980), 221–40; idem, "The Shabaka-Shebitku Coregency and the Supposed Second Campaign of Sennacherib Against Judah: A Critical Assessment," *JBL* 110 (1991), 35–45; R. D. Bates, "Assyria and Rebellion in the Annals of Sennacherib: An Analysis of Sennacherib's Treatment of Hezekiah," *Near East Archaeological Society Bulletin* 44 (1999), 39–61; idem, "Could Taharqa Have Been Called to the Battle of Eltekeh? A Response to William H. Shea," *Near East Archaeological Society Bulletin* 46 (2001), 43–46; M. Cogan, "Sennacherib's Siege of Jerusalem: Once or Twice?" *BAR* 27 (2001), 40; C. Hardmeier, *Prophetie im Streit vor dem Untergang Judas: Erzählkom- munikative Studien zur Entstehungssituation der Jesaja- und Jeremiaerzählungen in II Reg 18–20 und Jer 37–40* (BZAW 187; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990), 164; Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel*, 354 n. 165; E. Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften* (AfOB 26; Horn: Selbstverlag des Instituts für Orientalistik der Universität Wein, Druck F. Berger & Söhne, 1997), 10; and Evans, *Invasion of Sennacherib*.

[119] Fritz, *1 & 2 Kings*, 373.

[120] Kitchen, *Third Intermediate Period*, 225–31.

[121] P.-E. Dion, "Sennacherib's Expedition to Palestine," *EgT* 20 (1989), 5–25; L. L. Grabbe, "Introduction," L. L. Grabbe (ed.), *'Like a Bird in a Cage'*, 2–43.

In sum, the anachronistic nature of the Tirhakah reference, combined with the evidence of Sennacherib's annals (which claim to have defeated the Egyptian-Ethiopian armies), has served as compelling evidence for most that the Cushites did not rescue Jerusalem in 701 BCE. Clearly Aubin's claims that historians who reject the Cushite-rescue theory "offer no hard evidence on which to base their judgments" is grossly inaccurate.[122]

5.4. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

As this paper has shown, the evidence simply does not support the Aubin-Bellis hypothesis. Furthermore, the fact that most scholars have not viewed the Cushites as responsible for rescuing Jerusalem cannot be explained by *ad hominen* arguments that claim scholars have been racist in their neglect. The historical reconstruction of Sennacherib's invasion will not be solved by realizing the racial bias of 19th century scholars and their continuing effect on today's scholars (racist or not).

In the conclusion to her article, Bellis suggests that the Aubin-Bellis hypothesis is confirmation of the influence of social location on interpretation.[123] She credits Aubin for doing "an important service" in bringing out the racial bias of scholarship which has blinded the guild to the Cushite role in Jerusalem's deliverance.[124] Bellis notes that Aubin's social location was modified when he (a white male) adopted a black son, who was the impetus for his research into the Cushite role in the events of 701 BCE.[125] That is, Bellis implies that Aubin's altered social location allowed him a better perspective from which to evaluate the historical events of 701 BCE. Bellis is a scholar whose stated research interests include "African presence in and influence on the Hebrew Bible."[126] As she notes, most "white scholars who have done serious research on matters relating to African contributions to biblical religion and history have … had their social locations modified"; presumably we are to understand that her social location (like Aubin's) has been modified and has affected her interpretation of the events of 701 BCE.[127] Bellis' point is well-taken, though in an ironic way: clearly

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[122] Aubin, *Rescue of Jerusalem*, 13. Elsewhere he says "without evidence, many modern experts ascribe military failure to the Kushites" (233).

[123] Bellis, "Rescue of Jerusalem," 256. G. Rice (review of *The Rescue of Jerusalem: The Alliance Between Hebrews and Africans in 701 BC*, *JRT* 57, no. 2.5 [2005],181–92) similarly concludes his review of Aubin's book seeing it as confirming that social location affects interpretation (192).

[124] Ibid., 256–57.

[125] Aubin, *Rescue of Jerusalem*, xv. Bellis, "Rescue of Jerusalem," 256.

[126] As noted on her faculty webpage. Cf. http://husd.dst01.com/-index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=107&Itemid=214.

[127] Bellis, "Rescue of Jerusalem," 256.

social location can affect interpretation. However, in pointing to the racist and colonial social locations of scholars, Aubin and Bellis have failed to realize the impact of their own social locations on their research.

Postmodern approaches like postcolonial criticism and cultural studies may have much to offer in creative interaction with historical critical approaches, and Aubin's and Bellis' concern with the analysis of the reader (19th century scholars) as being just as important as the analysis of ancient texts is the hallmark of such an approach. However, a truly postmodern approach eschews definitive answers or definitive reconstructions of history.[128] Yet, Aubin states that his thesis is "unshakable" and "the obvious solution."[129] Bellis states that other interpretations are "demonstrably false."[130] In fact, their work evinces an ignorance regarding the basic mode of a postmodern approach—*suspicion*—especially "critical self-suspicion."[131] Any study that accents the effect of social location on interpretation must embrace critical analysis of itself and its own social location(s). Aubin and Bellis have shown themselves very interested in the social location of historians and biblical scholars, but have overlooked the significance of their own social locations which have clearly (mis-) guided their research.[132]

In the end, I would suggest that the present study functions as a critique of approaches that accent too heavily the importance of social location on interpretation. Influence of social location on

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[128] As F. F. Segovia ("The Significance of Social Location in Reading John's Story," *Int* 49 [1995], 370–78) explains, in such an approach "the concern is no longer with the final and definitive recreation of meaning or reconstruction of history" instead such an approach is "less 'climactic,' since it calls for critical analysis and engagement in a spirit of critical dialogue" (376).

[129] Aubin writes, "I believe my thesis—that Kushite Egypt turned back Sennacherib—is unshakable" (*Rescue of Jerusalem,* 188). Elsewhere he calls it the "obvious solution" (264).

[130] In particular, ideas that the Egyptians fomented rebellion in Judah or that Hebrews had a negative view of Cushites (Bellis, "Rescue of Jerusalem," 251).

[131] G. Aichele, et al., "An Elephant in the Room: Historical-Critical and Postmodern Interpretations of the Bible," *JBL* 128 (2009), 383–404.

[132] Even a responsible historical-critical approach should be aware of the theoretical nature of historical research. As E. A. Knauf ("From History to Interpretation," D. Edelman (ed.), *Fabric of History: Text, Artifact and Israel's Past* [JSOTSup, 127; Sheffield, England: JSOT, 1991], 26–64) states: "The acknowledgment that facts are theoretical constructs would highly facilitate the discussion between conflicting theories and partially unburden scholars from ignoring their opponents—or from charging them with stupidity, the deficit of knowing enough facts, or illwill [or one would add, "racism"], the refusal to acknowledge facts for what they are" (30).

historians is only one aspect of explaining reconstructions of history. Clearly the evidences available to historians (epigraphic, archaeological and literary) serve as controls in guiding modern historical reconstructions and set limits to our understandings of what happened in 701 BCE. While postmodern critiques may be important conversation partners moving forward, such keen interest in the social location of historians without the balance of corresponding interest in the available evidences for reconstructing history results in scholarship that fails to be critical in either the modern or postmodern sense of the word.[133]

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[133] The quality of Bellis' work in this article ("Rescue of Jerusalem ") is diminished by the number of errors that are readily apparent. For example, she twice misspells Edersheim as Edelsheim (250). She inaccurately states that in 2 Chr 32 after Sennacherib sends his army and high officials to Jerusalem "the Rabshakeh delivered a long speech to two of Hezekiah's officials" (247). However, the Rabshakeh's speech is actually addressed to *three*—not two—of Hezekiah's officials and *only* in 2 Kgs 18 and Isa 36. In Chronicles neither the Rabshakeh nor any high officials are even mentioned. Instead Sennacherib's "servants" go to threaten Jerusalem (2 Chr 32:9). Also, the Assyrian army is not said to approach Jerusalem at any time in the narrative of 2 Chr 32. After summarizing the source critical delineations of Stade (A, B[1], B[2]) and noting that account A is very close to Sennacherib's annal ("the two versions are close enough," 253), she later asserts that the main problem in historical reconstruction is "the differences between biblical account A and Sennacherib's annals" (256). These errors betray a lack of thoroughness that is disappointing to say the least. However, her use of Byron's poem "The Destruction of Sennacherib" borders on the unintelligible. Bellis begins her article (247) referring to Byron's poem and laments that it is not widely well known today, asserting that this is the case because of the cover-up of the Cushite-rescue of Jerusalem. She concludes her article by suggesting that "if racism had not closed our eyes to the best explanation of the clues we do have [the Cushite-rescue theory] then perhaps every child in school would still be memorizing Byron's poem" (257). However, Byron's poem clearly attributes the Assyrian defeat to the "angel of death" and a plague (with no mention of Cushites)! Why any recognition of a Cushite role in the defeat of Sennacherib would make Byron's poem more likely to be known today is baffling.