

Article

# A Reading of 2 Kings 18:17–19:9a, 36–37 as a Trauma Narrative

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**Abstract:** The narrative of 2 Kings 18:17–19:9a, 36–37 (“Source B<sub>1</sub>”) recounts pre-exilic religious collective trauma surrounding Sennacherib’s military advance against Judah in 710 BCE and its aftermath. In this narrative, the Rabshakeh uses the keywords “בטח” and “נצל” to assert that Yhwh has turned against Judah. However, his claims were subverted by the withdrawal of the Assyrian army and the later death of Sennacherib, facilitated by the divine intervention of Yhwh following Hezekiah’s supplication. Despite its significance, only a few studies have examined this narrative as that of trauma. Drawing on Jeffrey Alexander’s theory of the social process of cultural or collective trauma, this study argues that the function of this narrative is that of religious trauma narrative. It reconstructs the collective trauma of Sennacherib’s campaign to theologially defend the Davidic kingship and Yhwh and ultimately suggests a revised identity for the Judaeian community to foster solidarity, even under the ongoing influence of Assyria following the military campaign.

**Keywords:** collective memory; trauma narrative; Sennacherib; the Rabshakeh; Hezekiah; identity revision; solidarity

## 1. Introduction

The narrative of 2 Kgs 18:17–19:9a, 36–37 (“Source B<sub>1</sub>”) recounts a traumatic past: Sennacherib’s military campaign against Hezekiah of Jerusalem in 701 BCE.<sup>1</sup> Source B<sub>1</sub> has widely been considered to have originated during the pre-exilic period, sometime after Sennacherib’s military advance against Judah (Dion 1989; Ben-Zvi 1990; Na’aman 2000; Machinist 2000, in particular, pp. 166–67). The narrative includes the advance of the Assyrian army, the Rabshakeh’s speeches, Hezekiah’s response, Isaiah’s prophecy, the withdrawal of the Assyrian army, the preservation of Jerusalem, and the assassination of Sennacherib.

Various scholarly discussions have addressed Source B<sub>1</sub>; however, only a few studies have been focused on its potential as a trauma narrative based on the concepts of collective or cultural memory and trauma. The narrative of 2 Kgs 18:17–19:9a, 36–37 describes the collective traumatic experience of the people of Judah in Sennacherib’s military advance against them. This article analyzes the narrative according to the pattern of the cultural or collective trauma process introduced by Jeffrey Alexander (Alexander 2004, pp. 24–27). Finally, I argue that it is a trauma narrative that defines the nature of the pain and presents a theologially revised identity of Judah for the solidarity of the community that was still under the influence of Assyria even after Sennacherib’s military campaign.

## 2. Methodologies: Collective Memory and Trauma Process Theories

Maurice Halbwachs, a French sociologist, defined collective memory as socially determined and retrieved recollections within the “frameworks used by people living in society” (Halbwachs 1992, p. 43). Later, Jan Assmann developed the concept of the cultural memory by adding a cultural concept to collective memory (Assmann 2006, p. 8). According to him, cultural memory is defined as “a collective concept for all knowledge that directs behavior and experience in the interactive framework of a society and one that obtains through generations in repeated societal practice and initiation” (Assmann 1995, p. 126).

Such collective or cultural memory is deeply related to the concept of sociological collective or cultural trauma. Kai Erikson, an American sociologist, defined individual



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trauma as “a blow to the psyche that breaks through one’s defenses so suddenly and with such brutal force that one cannot react to it effectively” and collective trauma as “a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality” (Erikson 1976, pp. 153–54). Later, Neil Smelser defined cultural trauma as “a memory accepted and publicly given credence by a relevant membership group and evoking an event or situation which is (a) laden with negative affect, (b) represented as indelible, and (c) regarded as threatening a society’s existence or violating one or more of its fundamental cultural presuppositions” which represented its close association with collective memory and identity (Smelser 2004, p. 44; Alexander 2004, p. 1).

Based on the sociological concept of the cultural or collective trauma,<sup>2</sup> Alexander proposed a theoretical process through which cultural trauma is developed to suggest new meaningful and causal relationships among previously unrelated events, structures, perceptions, and actions (Alexander 2004, p. 1). He emphasized the role of the “social process” in such emergence and development of cultural trauma.<sup>3</sup> The process begins with a “claim making”, which is aimed at filling the gap between any event and its social and cultural representation (Alexander 2004, p. 11). In the first stage, an event is formulated as a cultural trauma by members of a social group called the “carrier group” (Alexander 2004, p. 11). The members of the group “project the trauma claim” to a specific public audience in a specific historical, cultural, and institutional context (Alexander 2004, pp. 11–12).

According to Alexander, the “creation” or formulation of a cultural trauma requires identifications or explications of four subjects: the nature of the pain, the nature of the victim, the relationship of the trauma victim with the wider audience, and the attribution of responsibility (Alexander 2004, pp. 12–15). Along with these four subjects, Alexander suggested that the mediation of the newly formulated cultural trauma happens only in a specific social or cultural context such as religious, aesthetic, legal, scientific, mass media, state bureaucracy, and stratificational hierarchies (Alexander 2004, pp. 15–22).

Finally, Alexander argued that “the contemporary sense of the self” is constructed or revised by the reconstruction of “the collectivity’s earlier life”, which can also be described as “a searching re-remembering of the collective past” (Alexander 2004, p. 22). The collective identity of the society is constructed not only by the contexts of the present and future but also by the reconstruction of the past (Ibid.). Such an identity revision of the collectivity also leads to the extension of solidarity among the members of the society who share the revised identity (Alexander 2016). He added that “collective traumas have no geographical or cultural limitations” (Alexander 2004, p. 27).

The social process of collective or cultural trauma is deeply related to the nature of the trauma literature or narrative. Kalí Tal suggested that trauma literature can be defined as the writings of trauma survivors (Tal 1996, p. 17). Within itself the trauma literature contains the traumatic past or the memory associated with it. Christopher Frechette and Elizabeth Boase further suggested that the construction of trauma literature is an act of meaning-making in which the literature breaks a previously established identity and its well-being (Frechette and Boase 2016, vol. 86, p. 6). The literature recounts and interprets a traumatic past to replace the old identity and beliefs with new ones (Frechette and Boase 2016, p. 6).

### 3. Cultural Trauma Process in the Narrative of Source B<sub>1</sub>

#### 3.1. Identifications of the Pain and the Perpetrator(s) (2 Kgs 18:17–18)

Considering the cultural trauma process and the formation of trauma literature as described in the previous section, the narrative of source B<sub>1</sub> exhibits comparable features to trauma literature. First, the narrative identifies the traumatic pain and its perpetrator(s), describing the arrival of the Assyrian officials at Jerusalem. Sennacherib sent the Tartan, the Rabsaris, and the Rabshakeh with a heavy force (בחייל כבד) from Lachish to Hezekiah in Jerusalem (2 Kgs 18:17a). The Assyrian officials came and stood by the conduit of the upper

pool (2 Kgs 18:17b). When they called for Hezekiah, Eliakim son of Hilkiah, Shebna the secretary, and Joah son of Asaph, the recorder came out before them (2 Kgs 18:18).

The presence of the Assyrian officials represents a looming crisis caused by Sennacherib's advance against Judah. Judah found itself in a desolate situation, as the fortified cities had been devastated by the Assyrian army (2 Kgs 18:13) (See also [Grayson and Novotny 2012](#), vol. 1, p. 65 (No. 4, lines 49–51)). Consequently, the visit from the Assyrian officials signified an impending threat that instilled fear among the people of Jerusalem.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the presence of the heavy force accompanying the officials intensified this threat and fear, making the subsequent speeches of the Rabshakeh even more impactful ([Hobbs 1985](#), p. 256; [Gonçalves 1986](#), p. 395). Thus, it is clear that the narrative begins with the identification of the traumatic pain and its perpetrator(s).

### 3.2. Traumatic Memory About Unequal Power Relations in the Royal Titles (2 Kgs 18:19–33)

With the appearance of the Assyrian officials in an image of numbing shock and horror, the Rabshakeh delivered speeches that emphasized his role as a perpetrator of the traumatic event and represented “the nature of the pain” ([Alexander 2004](#), p. 13) among the people of Judah (2 Kgs 18:19–25, 28–35).<sup>5</sup> Before examining his speeches separately, it is notable that the Assyrian official consistently made discriminating contrasts between Hezekiah and Sennacherib regarding their titles throughout the speeches. He first addressed Hezekiah (חזקיהו), the recipient of the message, without any royal title, while referring to Sennacherib, the sender of the message, as “the great king, the king of Assyria (כה אמר המלך הגדול מלך אשור)”<sup>6</sup> in a messenger formula (2 Kgs 18:19a) ([Gonçalves 1986](#), pp. 404–6; [Ben-Zvi 1990](#), p. 82). Subsequently, the Assyrian official referred to Hezekiah by his personal name (2 Kgs 18:19a, 29a, 31a, 32b), while using various royal titles for Sennacherib (2 Kgs 18:19b, 23a, 28b, 29a, 30b, 31b, 33b) throughout the speeches.

Such discrimination in the Rabshakeh's speeches reveals the collective memory of the Judaeans regarding their painful recognition of the unequal relationship between Assyria and Judah. Peter Dubovský suggested that this was one of the aims of the psychological warfare ([Dubovský 2006](#), p. 13). On the surface, the victim of the official's insulting remark was the Judean king; however, on a deeper level, it was the people of Jerusalem who were listening to the speeches. From the perspective of collective trauma, such humiliation can be understood as part of the traumatic memory of the warfare. The scribe(s) (re-)constructed such memory as the “carrier group” to create a collective trauma about the fragile status of the Judaeans kingship before the Assyrian king. Such a painful past about the humiliated kingship represents the powerlessness of Judah under Assyria in a time of trouble.

### 3.3. Traumatic Memory About Undermined Trust (בטח) (2 Kgs 18:19–25)

The collective memory about the Rabshakeh's first speech focused on a specific keyword: “trust/reliance (בטח)”. After calling Hezekiah, the Assyrian official delivered the message of Sennacherib with an overarching question about trust (בטח), which was repeated six times in total in his first speech (2 Kgs 18:19b, 20b, 21a, 21b, 22a, 24b).<sup>7</sup> In his speech, the official criticized Hezekiah's alleged trust in himself, Egypt, and Yhwh.<sup>8</sup> His argument was clear: Judah and Egypt were weak, and Yhwh was with Assyria. According to the Rabshakeh, the Judaeans king abandoned the trusted relationship with Assyria (*Ibid.*, pp. 409–10). He began criticizing Hezekiah with a question as to whom or what the king relied on or trusted (בטח) in his rebellion against Assyria (מה הבטחון הזה אשר בטחת) (2 Kgs 18:19b). He then criticized that “a word of lips (דבר שפתים)”<sup>9</sup> was the Judaeans king's “counsel and power (עצה וגבורה)”<sup>10</sup> for war (2 Kgs 18:20a).<sup>11</sup> With this critique, he asked if the king had anyone to rely on (בטח) in his rebellion against Sennacherib (עתה על מי בטחת כי) (2 Kgs 18:20b).

The Rabshakeh continued to rebuke Hezekiah for his reliance (בטח) upon Egypt (2 Kgs 18:21). The Assyrian official strongly disapproved of the alliance between Judah and Egypt,

humiliating the latter with a derogatory expression, “a staff of that broken reed” (עֵתָה הִנֵּה) (2 Kgs 18:21a).<sup>12</sup> He argued that Hezekiah’s reliance upon Egypt was a diplomatic mistake that would cause a disaster to befall Judah without any benefit from its alliance (כִּן פִּרְעָה מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם לְכָל הַבְּטָחִים) (עליו) (2 Kgs 18:21b).<sup>13</sup>

The Rabshakeh finally criticized Hezekiah’s alleged reliance (בטח) upon Yhwh (אלהינו) (בטחנו) in the king’s rebellion against Sennacherib (2 Kgs 18:22):

וכי תאמרון אלי אל יהוה אלהינו בטחנו הלוא הוא אשר הסיר חזקיהו את במתיו ואת מזבחתיו ויאמר ליהודה ולירושלם לפני המזבח הזה תשתחוו בירושלם

In expressing his strong doubt about any trust-based relationship between Yhwh and Hezekiah, the Assyrian official claimed that the Judaeen king had demolished the so-called “high-places” (במות), causing Yhwh to stand against him.<sup>14</sup> While the preceding narrative (2 Kgs 18:3–7) considered the cultic centralization through the breaking of the local shrines, including the high places, as a positive aspect of the Judaeen king (Cogan and Tadmor 1988, p. 220), the Rabshakeh criticized it as one of the poignant matters regarding the fate of the people of Jerusalem and that of the king.

After the critique of Hezekiah’s religious reform, the Rabshakeh concluded his first speech with his assertion about Assyrian military power and the divine authorization of the Assyrian army’s attack against Judah (2 Kgs 18:23–25). He claimed that Assyria had a dominating military power over Judah and Egypt (2 Kgs 18:23–24). He also asserted that Yhwh authorized Sennacherib’s attack against Judah for destruction (2 Kgs 18:25). Yhwh told the Assyrian king to go up against the land of Judah to destroy it (יהוה אמר אלי עלה על) (הארץ הזאת והשחיתה) (2 Kgs 18:25b). The divine being stood with Assyria to destroy Judah because of Hezekiah’s religious reform (Gevaryahu 1964, p. 97; Childs 1967, pp. 84–85; Cogan and Tadmor 1988, p. 232).

In terms of the collective trauma process theory, the Rabshakeh’s speech is a traumatic memory about a lack of “בטח” among the people of Judah in the midst of Sennacherib’s military campaign. As a part of trauma narrative formed by a carrier group, the speech repeatedly employs “בטח” in relation to the Judaeen kingship (Hezekiah), the ally (Egypt), and even their divine being (Yhwh). Such recurring usage of “בטח” in the speech indicates the possibility that the scribe(s) as a carrier group identified the lack of “בטח” with a pain caused by Sennacherib in his military campaign against Judah. In other words, the Assyrian official’s speech externalized and verbalized the pain that the people of Judah faced in the Assyrian threat.

#### 3.4. The Identification of the Victim(s) and the Intensification of the Pain (2 Kgs 18:26–27)

The Judaeen officials interrupted the Rabshakeh with a request which identified who the “victim” (Alexander 2004, pp. 13–14) was in the traumatic memory of the Assyrian military campaign against Judah (2 Kgs 18:26–27). The Judaeen representatives including Eliakim son of Hilkiyah, Shebna, and Joah asked the Assyrian official not to speak in the language of Judah (יהודית) but in the Aramaic language (ארמית) to prevent the people on the wall who could hear him from understanding (2 Kgs 18:26). As described earlier, the Assyrian official claimed that the main addressee of his speech was Hezekiah (ויאמר אלהם) (רב שקה אמרו נא אל חזקיהו) (2 Kgs 18:19).<sup>15</sup> However, based upon the request, it becomes clear that the Rabshakeh’s speech was aimed at the demoralization of the people of Jerusalem and Hezekiah (Gonçalves 1986, pp. 399–400; Berges 1998, p. 295). Since he spoke in the language of Judah, the victim of the traumatic experience was not only Hezekiah but also the people of Jerusalem. Hence, this psychological outcome was one of the Rabshakeh’s intentions in his speech (Yadin 1963, vol. 2, p. 320; Machinist 2000, p. 159; Dubovský 2006, pp. 15–19).

The Judaeen officials’ request and the Assyrian official’s denial intensified the collective pain about the powerlessness of Judah amid the Assyrian military campaign. The Assyrian official said that Sennacherib had sent him to speak words of warning to Hezekiah, the Judaeen officials, and the people on the wall of Jerusalem (ויאמר אליהם רב שקה העל אדניך)



(2 Kgs 18:27a) (ואליך שלחני אדני לדבר את הדברים האלה הלא על האנשים הישבים על החמה) He even intimidated the Judaeans with the image of eating their own dung and drinking their own urine (2 Kgs 18:27b).<sup>16</sup> Even though the speech was damaging and threatening to the people of Jerusalem, the latter did not have anything to repudiate the Assyrian official's argument (Berges 1998, p. 295). Hence, the memory about the Judaeans' request and its denial intensified the traumatic pain of being powerless in front of Assyria.

### 3.5. Traumatic Memory About Undermined Hope for Rescue (נצל) (2 Kgs 18:28–35)

After rejecting the Judaeans' request to speak in Aramaic, the Rabshakeh's second speech begins with another identification of the victims of the traumatic event. The Assyrian official stood and spoke loudly to the people through the opening address in the language of Judah (יהודית), urging them to listen to the words of the Assyrian king (שמעו) (דבר המלך הגדול מלך אשור) (2 Kgs 18:28). As in the previous speech, the people of Judah and Hezekiah were identified once again as the victims of the traumatic pain caused by the Assyrian official's speech.

The collective trauma in the Rabshakeh's second speech is rooted in the word "save (נצל)", which was mentioned nine times in the speech (2 Kgs 18:29, 30b (2), 32, 33a (2), 34b, 35a, 35b). According to the narrative, the Assyrian official highlighted the deceptiveness and the inability of Hezekiah to save the people from Sennacherib and the absence of Yhwh to save them in favor of the Assyrian king.<sup>17</sup> He first asserted the deceptiveness and inability of the Judaeans' king regarding his promise to save (נצל) his people from the hand of the Assyrian king (כי לא יוכל להציל אתכם מידו) (2 Kgs 18:29). He continued to tell the people on the wall not to trust Hezekiah's words that Yhwh would surely deliver (נצל) them and that Jerusalem would not be given into the hand of Sennacherib's hands (2 Kgs 18:30):

ואל יבטח אתכם הזקיקה אל יהוה לאמר הצל יצילנו יהוה ולא תנתן את העיר הזאת ביד מלך אשור

In the following part of the speech, the Assyrian official delivered a message from Sennacherib, urging the people of Judah to surrender (2 Kgs 18:31b–32). The Assyrian king offered peace, promising that they would live as they had before until he took them to a land resembling the land of Judah (2 Kgs 18:31b–32a). It is notable that the new land is described as "a land of olive oil and honey" (ארץ זית יצהר ודבש) (2 Kgs 18:32a), reflecting Deuteronomistic language (cf. Deut 8:8) (Ben-Zvi 1990, p. 88; Hom 2012, p. 169; Kahn 2020, p. 87). Such a Deuteronomistic expression gives the impression that Sennacherib sought to replace Yhwh by offering the people a "Promised Land" through exile (Kahn 2020, p. 87).

Sennacherib's attempt to replace Yhwh is further supported by his claim regarding the absence of the divine in the deliverance of the people of Judah (2 Kgs 18:33–35). The Assyrian king questioned whether any of the gods of the nations had ever delivered their land from his hand, listing Hamath, Arpad, Sepharvaim, Hena, Ivva, and Samaria (2 Kgs 18:33–34). He then compared the gods of those lands to Yhwh to deny Yhwh's role in the deliverance of Jerusalem (2 Kgs 18:35):

מי בכל אלהי הארצות אשר הצילו את ארצם מידי כי יציל יהוה את ירושלם מידי

According to Sennacherib's logic, the people of Judah needed to surrender to the Assyrian king for their own deliverance.

After indicating a traumatic pain related to the word "בטח" in the Rabshakeh's first speech, the scribe(s) of the narrative identified another collective trauma associated with "נצל" in the Assyrian official's second speech. While his first speech focused on trust in relation to Hezekiah, Egypt, and Yhwh, his second speech emphasized deliverance concerning Hezekiah, and primarily, Yhwh. As described earlier, Sennacherib had captured all the fortified cities of Judah (2 Kgs 18:13), and later sent the Rabshakeh and other Assyrian officials to Jerusalem with a military convoy (2 Kgs 18:17). In such an overwhelming and desperate situation, the community of Judah was vulnerable to threats and doubtful about any faith or hope in divine salvation. Therefore, it is likely that another traumatic

pain of the people of Judah was reflected in the word “נצל” throughout the narrative of 2 Kgs 18:28–35.

### 3.6. *The Silence After the Rabshakeh’s Speeches (2 Kgs 18:36)*

The Rabshakeh’s traumatic speech was followed by a silence without any response from the people of Jerusalem. It is described that they remained silent and did not answer a word to him because Hezekiah commanded them to do so (2 Kgs 18:36):

החרישו העם ולא ענו אתו דבר כי מצות המלך היא לאמר לא תענהו

Since the Assyrian official persisted in threatening Jerusalem to surrender without compromise in the language of Judah, it would not have been beneficial for Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem to continue arguing against Assyria any further (Hobbs 1985, p. 260).

Concerning the subject “העם”, however, Cogan and Tadmor suggested that it appears to be an incorrect gloss (Cf. Isa. 36:21) (Cogan and Tadmor 1988, p. 233). According to them, the king’s order for the people to remain silent is unlikely, based upon the Judaeans’ request to the Rabshakeh in 2 Kgs 18:26–27. Their request indicates that it was not expected for the Rabshakeh to address the people of Jerusalem in his speeches. Consequently, it seems more persuading that the Judaeans’ king’s command was directed at his officials who were facing the Rabshakeh.

If Hezekiah had ordered the Judaeans’ officials to remain silent as Cogan and Tadmor suggested, it would require some conjecture to determine the response of the people of Jerusalem. Since the Rabshakeh spoke not only to the Judaeans’ officials but also to the people of Jerusalem in the language of Judah (2 Kgs 18:26–27), the people of Jerusalem would have been affected by his threatening speeches. Regardless of this possibility, their response is not recorded in the narrative.<sup>18</sup> In his work on war trauma and its symptoms, Nigel Hunt proposed that “a fundamental rift or breakdown of psychological functioning (memory, behavior, emotion)” can occur as a result of life-threatening experiences such as war (Hunt 2010, p. 7). He suggested that responses to traumatic experiences include intrusive recollections, avoidance and emotional numbing, and hyperarousal (Hunt 2010, p. 7). Similarly, Erikson argued that a traumatic situation can be so overwhelming that a victim may struggle to explain his or her feelings in such a context (Erikson 1976, pp. 142–43). Therefore, it is possible that the people of Jerusalem experienced overwhelming trauma, which led them to fall into a state of numbing silence even without Hezekiah’s command.

### 3.7. *Subversion of the Speeches and the Revision of Yhwh’s Identity (2 Kgs 18:37–19:9a, 36–37)*

The following narrative of 2 Kgs 18:37–19:9a, 36–37 shifts focus from the Rabshakeh to the interaction between Hezekiah and Yhwh. After the silence as a response to the Assyrian official’s speeches, the Judaeans’ officials and Hezekiah revealed their desperate feelings by tearing their garments (Sweeney 2007, p. 416) and consulting with Isaiah for a divine response. The Judaeans’ officials came to Hezekiah with their garments torn and reported the words of the Assyrian official to the king (2 Kgs 18:37). Hezekiah also tore his garments, covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of Yhwh (2 Kgs 19:1). Then, he sent Eliakim, Shebna, and the senior priests (זקני הכהנים) to Isaiah (2 Kgs 19:2) for a divine response to the Rabshakeh’s speeches. In his message to Isaiah (2 Kgs 19:3–5), the king hoped that Yhwh heard the words of the Rabshakeh (אולי ישמע יהוה אלהיך את כל דברי) (2 Kgs 19:4a). Saying that Sennacherib and the Rabshakeh mocked the living God (לחרף אלהים חי),<sup>19</sup> he asked the divine being to rebuke their words (והוכיח בדבריהם) (2 Kgs 19:4b). He concluded with a request to the prophet to pray for “the remnant that was left (הנמצאה)” (2 Kgs 19:4b).

Upon the king’s request, Isaiah delivered the words of Yhwh, saying that they should not be afraid of the words with which the servants of the king of Assyria reviled (גדף) the divine being (2 Kgs 19:6). Yhwh would put a spirit in Sennacherib so that he would hear a rumor and return to his land (2 Kgs 19:7a). Furthermore, Yhwh would cause him to fall by the sword in his land (2 Kgs 19:7b).

The following narrative succinctly describes how the desperate situation of Judah changed drastically and the words of Yhwh were fulfilled. When the Rabshakeh returned, he found the king of Assyria fighting against Libnah (2 Kgs 19:8a). When Sennacherib heard about King Tirhakah of Ethiopia that the latter had set out to fight against the Assyrian king (2 Kgs 19:9a), he left and returned to reside at Nineveh (2 Kgs 19:36). As he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch, his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer killed him with the sword, and another son, Esar-haddon, succeeded him (2 Kgs 19:37).<sup>20</sup>

The fulfillment of Yhwh's promise represents the subversion of the Rabshakeh's arguments and the revised identity of Yhwh as "a universal protector of Judah".<sup>21</sup> According to Liwak, the narrative reconstructed Sennacherib's military campaign with a theological focus on the relationship between Judah and the divine being (Liwak 1986). The military campaign was a confrontation between Assyria, represented by the Rabshakeh, and the kingdom of Judah, represented by Yhwh.<sup>22</sup> The Assyrian official denied Yhwh's salvation and demanded that Hezekiah surrender to Assyria. However, Yhwh protected Jerusalem from Assyria, which contrasted the divine being from other lifeless or false gods who were unwilling or unable to save their cities.<sup>23</sup> The divine being was not only in control of Israel but also of Assyria as a universal divine being. Furthermore, this narrative relates Isaiah's prophecy about Yhwh's judgment of Sennacherib to his much later (and unrelated) death, which can be understood as a feature of the collective trauma narrative as described in the previous section (Alexander 2004, p. 1).

#### 4. Conclusions

To sum up, the B<sub>1</sub> narrative exhibits features of a trauma narrative. The trauma memory of Sennacherib's military campaign against Judah unfolds within a religious context or the "religious arena" (Alexander 2004, p. 20). The scribe(s) of the narrative, acting as a "carrier group", elaborately reconstructed collective traumatic memory about Sennacherib's military campaign against Judah through the speeches of the Rabshakeh. The Assyrian official represented Assyria, the "perpetrator", which caused the trauma to Judah. He tried to undermine any hope for "trust/reliance (בטח)" and "save (נצל)" related to Hezekiah, Egypt, and Yhwh. Finally, these traumatic arguments were subverted and dissolved with the divine intervention of Yhwh in the narrative.

As a pre-exilic trauma narrative, the B<sub>1</sub> narrative was formed by the "carrier group" under the influence of Assyria, in which the community of Judah experienced the devastating impact of the Assyrian campaign, leading to a lack of trust in Yhwh and the kingship of Judah. Cogan and Tadmor proposed the possibility that Judah became doubtful about Hezekiah and his policies when Assyria was still influential even after Sennacherib (Cogan and Tadmor 1988, pp. 272–73). In his study on 2 Kgs 18:26–35, Machinist also suggested that there were Judaeans who criticized Judaeans theology regarding Hezekiah's religious reforms during Sennacherib's invasion (Machinist 2000, p. 163). In response to these challenges, the author(s) of the narrative externalized the inner Judaeans critique through the mouth of the Rabshakeh. Such externalization finally led the critical points against Hezekiah into dissolution while functioning as a polemic against the internal critics of Judaeans theology (Ibid., p. 164). Based on the relationship between collective trauma and identity revision, it is possible to extend Machinist's argument in that the narrative as a trauma narrative aimed not at a specific inner-Judaeans critique group but at the whole Judaeans community after Sennacherib's military advance in 701 BCE. As a theological and apologetic response to social confusion and crisis, the scribe(s) constructed a trauma narrative aimed at defending the Davidic kingship and Yhwh, ultimately fostering a revision of Judah's social identity to promote solidarity under the influence of Assyria. The B<sub>1</sub> narrative revised the identity of Yhwh as "a universal protector of Judah", thereby suggesting a revised social identity for the postwar Judaeans community as "the people under the protection of universal Yhwh".

Reading Source B1 as a trauma narrative shifts the focus to the unacknowledged yet persistent social and psychological scars within the pre-exilic community of Judah in mod-

ern biblical scholarship. The Assyrian military campaign damaged not only the territories but also the social fabric and the individual psyches of the community. A trauma perspective offers insight into the invisible yet enduring damage caused by the campaign, even after Judah's survival. Therefore, future research on Source B<sub>1</sub> and other related resources in terms of collective trauma and identity is essential for understanding the postwar community of Judah.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The narrative of 2 Kgs 18:17–19:9a, 36–37 as one whole narrative (the so-called “source B<sub>1</sub>”) is based upon the source division suggested by B. Stade and later revised by Brevard Childs. See (Stade 1886, in particular, pp. 172–83; Childs 1967, pp. 73–103). There has been scholarly discussion about source(s) and tradition(s) behind the passage of 2 Kgs 18:13–19:37/Isa 36–37 since B. Stade. It would be beyond the focus of this paper to discuss all the details of the discussion. Instead, it focuses on the integrity of 2 Kgs. 18:17–19a, 36–37 as an independent whole narrative and its possible features of a trauma narrative. For a brief summary of the past research, see (Evans 2009, pp. 1–15; Kahn 2020, pp. 23–67).
- <sup>2</sup> Alexander employed “collective trauma” and “cultural trauma” interchangeably throughout his article to introduce his theory of cultural trauma. (Alexander 2004).
- <sup>3</sup> (Alexander 2004, p. 10). He argued, “For traumas to emerge at the level of the collectivity, social crises must become cultural crises”.
- <sup>4</sup> Alexander (2004, p. 15) suggests that a trauma narrative tends to establish the identity of the perpetrator for the “attribution of responsibility”.
- <sup>5</sup> The Rabshakeh’s speech can be considered as two rounds of speech with a transitional response from the Judaeans and the conventional messenger formula for each round. Machinist points out that those two speeches are interrelated to form a whole argument for the surrender of Judah to Sennacherib. See (Gonçalves 1986, pp. 394–408; Ben-Zvi 1990, pp. 82–91; Machinist 2000, p. 155).
- <sup>6</sup> המלך הגדול מלך אשור, which is one of Sennacherib’s royal titles, occurs twice in the Rabshakeh’s speeches (2 Kgs 18:19, 28).
- <sup>7</sup> מוֹצֵט occurs seven times in total in the Rabshakeh’s speeches (2 Kgs 18: 19b, 20b, 21ab (2), 22a, 24b, 30a).
- <sup>8</sup> Regarding the Rabshakeh’s first speech, Gonçalves (1986, p. 398) suggests that it consists of three-part parallel symmetry (ABC A’B’C’). In the literary structure, the A part describes Hezekiah’s weakness (2 Kgs 18:20a, 23–24a), the B part describes Hezekiah’s trust in Egypt (2 Kgs 18:21, 24b), and the C part describes trust in Yhwh (2 Kgs 18:22, 25) in his rebellion against Assyria.
- <sup>9</sup> Cf. Esarhaddon’s letter to the Babylonians, ABL 403 דבר שפתיים. See (Oppenheim 1977, p. 170).
- <sup>10</sup> Cf. Prov. 14:23 דבר שפתיים and Prov. 8:14, Job 12:13 גבורה and עצה. See (Cogan and Tadmor 1988, p. 231; Ben-Zvi 1990, p. 83).
- <sup>11</sup> Jerem Walsh (2011, p. 273) suggested that this remark possibly refers to a verbal agreement between Hezekiah and Egypt for military support.
- <sup>12</sup> Chaim Cohen (1979, pp. 41–43) suggests that this expression reflects Neo-Assyrian annalistic style.
- <sup>13</sup> Ironically, the Rabshakeh’s rebuke of Hezekiah regarding the alliance between Judah and Egypt reflects the author or the redactor’s negative understanding of the Judaeans king. Even though Isaiah’s opposition to Hezekiah’s alliance with Egypt was not clearly described in 2 Kgs 18–19, the reliance upon Egypt was considered futile in other biblical texts (Hos 12:2; 2 Kgs 17:4; Isa 30:1–5; 31:1, 3; Jer 37:6–8; Ezek 29:6–7). Hezekiah’s choice to rely upon Egypt was related to his rebellion against Assyria, which finally led to Sennacherib’s military campaign against Judah. (Ben-Zvi 1990, p. 84).
- <sup>14</sup> Scholarly discussions about בְּמוֹת have included but are not limited to its semantic features, relationship to the composition of the books of Kings, and historical reconstruction of the religious reform of Hezekiah. Those discussions are beyond the scope of this article. For more details, see (Haran 1978; Whitney 1979; Barrick 1996; Fried 2002; Finkelstein and Silberman 2006; Edelman 2008; Hardy and Thomas 2012).
- <sup>15</sup> Walsh pointed out that the addressee of the speech was switched back and forth between the envoy of Judah (2 Kgs 18:19aββ, 22a, 22b) and Hezekiah (2 Kgs 18:19bβ, 20a, 20b, 21a, 21b, 23a, 23b, 24). For more detail, see (Walsh 2011, pp. 268–72).



- <sup>16</sup> Dubovský (2006, pp. 16–17) suggested that this image was intended to evoke the memories of other sieges that the Israelites had previously experienced as a part of psychological war tactics. (Cf. 2 Kgs 6–7).
- <sup>17</sup> Cf. The word “trust” (אָמַן) is written only once in the Rabshakeh’s second speech (2 Kgs 19:30).
- <sup>18</sup> David Janzen argued that individual traumas tend to be implicit or even suppressed in the Hebrew Bible. (Janzen 2019).
- <sup>19</sup> Cf. 1 Sam 17:26b, 36b. (Gonçalves 1986, pp. 422–23).
- <sup>20</sup> (Sweeney 2007, p. 419). Sennacherib was assassinated in 681 B.C.E., but the narrative of Source B<sub>1</sub> relates his assignation to the fulfillment of the divine judgment on him regarding his military campaign against Judah.
- <sup>21</sup> Cf. (Hayes 1963, pp. 419–26). John Hayes argued that Isaiah used the pre-Davidic or non-Israelite traditions concerning the invulnerability of Jerusalem in the narrative about Assyria. His argument is important in that it implies the identity revision of Yhwh after the withdrawal of Sennacherib from Jerusalem.
- <sup>22</sup> (Beuken 2010, pp. 358–410). Regarding the narrative of Isa 36–37, Beuken posited a theme question, “Wem gebührt die Herrschaft über Zion?”
- <sup>23</sup> Michael Press argued that the passage of 2 Kgs 18:34 with 2 Kgs 17 is superficial bluster as part of Deuteronomistic ridicule of false gods and divine statutes. (Press 2015, pp. 220–21).

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