

Long-lost Assyrian military camp devastated by 'the angel of the Lord' finally found, scientist claims

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This Assyrian relief shows the camp used by the Assyrians during the siege of Lachish. | Credit: Courtesy of Stephen Compton

Military camps used by the Assyrian king [Sennacherib](#), whose exploits of laying siege to Lachish and Jerusalem are detailed in the Hebrew Bible, have finally been identified, a scholar says.

At the time of the sieges, which both occurred around 701 B.C., the [Assyrians](#) controlled a rapidly growing empire that stretched from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean Sea.

The sieges at Lachish and Jerusalem are mentioned frequently in the Hebrew Bible and supposedly ended at Jerusalem when

"the angel of the Lord went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand in the Assyrian camp" (2 Kings 19:35). But ancient Assyrian inscriptions tell a different story, claiming that Hezekiah, the king of [Judah](#), paid a large amount of tribute to get the Assyrians to leave.

Lachish siege

At the British Museum in London, there is a relief depicting the siege of Lachish, and it shows the Assyrian camp. Stephen Compton, an independent scholar who specializes in Near Eastern Archaeology, compared this relief to photos from the early to mid-20th century which show Lachish. He identified a site north of Lachish with an oval shaped structure with walls that he thinks may have been the Assyrians' camp.

Compton noted that Assyrian camps tended to be oval. The Arabic name of the proposed camp site is "Khirbet al Mudawwara," and during the Middle Ages, the word "Mudawwara" could mean a place where a sultan placed a military camp. This suggests that people who lived at the site in later times knew that the ancient Assyrians had used it as a camp, Compton noted in an article published in the June issue of the journal [Near Eastern Archaeology](#).

Additionally, an archaeological survey conducted in the early 20th century found the remains of pottery shards whose styles date to around the time that Sennacherib laid siege to Lachish, Compton noted. He told Live Science he has sent a copy of his paper to archaeologists who are working at the Lachish site and he hopes that future excavations will shed light on whether the Assyrian camp is located there.

Jerusalem camp

In the case of the Jerusalem camp, Compton used old aerial photographs and 19th-century archaeological excavation records to survey the landscape. He noted that in 1881 to 1882, the Palestine Exploration Fund (PEF) found walls at a site called Jebel el Mudawwara, located north of the Temple Mount. The [Palestine Exploration Fund](#) is a non-profit organization that facilitates research in the region.

The 19th-century archaeologists thought it was a Roman camp, but the excavation records indicate that the camp is oval. "[Roman \[military camps\] were rectangular](#), whereas the photos indicate that this was roughly oval, consistent with an Assyrian camp," Compton wrote. Additionally, the name "Mudawwara" — a name associated with military camps — is used by 19th-century sources to describe the site.

If this is the place where Sennacherib set up camp to lay siege to Jerusalem, it could also be Nob, a site that once held the [Tabernacle](#), a portable sanctuary constructed by Moses, Compton said. The Hebrew Bible claims that the Tabernacle was set up at Nob and that Nob was where Sennacherib halted to attack Jerusalem.

The site's 20th-century history may make it more difficult to conduct new excavations there. In the 1930s, the British built an ammunition storage facility at the site, and it became known as "Ammunition Hill." In 1948, the Jordanian army positioned soldiers on the site and built a series of trenches and fortifications. And in 1967, there was a bloody battle between the Israelis and Jordanian troops that resulted in Israeli troops taking the hill. Today, a museum and memorial site are located there.



Aerial view of Ammunition Hill

Scholars react

Scholars who were not involved with the research had mixed opinions of the findings. Some noted that the idea that the Khirbet al Mudawwara site at Lachish is an Assyrian camp is plausible. "The case of Lachish is the most interesting," [Israel Finkelstein](#), a professor emeritus of archaeology at Tel Aviv University, told Live Science in an email. The "next thing to do is to check the suspected site in the field," Finkelstein said.

[Eckart Frahm](#), a professor of Assyriology at Yale University, said that it's possible that Khirbet al Mudawwara was an Assyrian siege camp.

Others are doubtful, however. [David Ussishkin](#), a professor emeritus of archaeology at Tel Aviv University who has

conducted extensive work at Lachish, told Live Science he thinks the siege camp was to the southwest of Lachish.

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