

PRESS RELEASE

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New study backs theory that Africans were instrumental in rescue of Jerusalem in antiquity

- **The Bible says an angel slew an Assyrian army at the gates of Jerusalem in 701 BCE; the real cause of Jerusalem's survival has been one of history's great puzzles**
- **Now, a panel of scholars suggests Kushites from present-day Sudan may have repelled the Assyrians**
- **Jerusalem's surprise survival facilitated the city's reputation as divinely blessed**
- **The preservation of Hebrew culture allowed monotheism to develop fully**
Had Jerusalem been destroyed, the later emergence of Judaism would have been impossible and, without Judaism, Christianity becomes inconceivable

As the world seeks a way forward in the Middle East, a groundbreaking study casts new light on an early event that contributed to Jerusalem's status as a holy city, a source of chronic tensions in the region today. The event is Jerusalem's escape in 701 BCE from conquest and destruction by the seemingly invincible Assyrian army — the only superpower of the day.

The Bible presents the event as a miracle in which an angel is sent to overcome the Assyrians, thereby demonstrating that the city is protected by the Deity. In the new study, eight leading academics weigh in on the long-debated question of what saved Jerusalem. The consensus view: An expeditionary army of Kushites (Nubians) and Egyptians may have had a key role in causing the retreat of the Assyrians under King Sennacherib. The Kushites, who were from present-day Sudan, at that time formed Egypt's 25th Dynasty, and their army would have been commanded by a young Kushite named Taharqo.

It is believed that without the Assyrian setback, Hebrew society could have been permanently extinguished, directly impacting the later developments of Judaism and its two kindred monotheisms, Christianity and Islam.

The scholars' views are presented in a book, *Jerusalem's Survival, Sennacherib's Departure, and the Kushite Role in 701 BCE: An Examination of Henry Aubin's Rescue of Jerusalem (Journal of Hebrew Scriptures)*, published by Gorgias Press later this month.

The volume's editor, Alice Ogden Bellis, Professor of Hebrew Bible at Howard University's School of Divinity, selected the evaluators. She said: "The question of the rescue of Jerusalem has been controversial in the last 150 years. It was important to have an impartial or even skeptical group of specialists evaluate Canadian journalist Henry Aubin's thesis that the intervention of the Kushites was key to Jerusalem's survival. Achieving a consensus on Africa's role lays the groundwork for a new understanding of the development of the city at the heart of the three Abrahamic faiths."

Notes to Editors

Contact Information:

Gorgias Press invites interviews related to the new book for online, print, radio, and television coverage. Upon request, news outlets are welcome to interview Bellis, Aubin, or any of its contributors. Gorgias Press will also issue review copies to journalists with a confirmed interest in covering the book. Requests should be sent to:

Dr Gemma Tully,
gemma@gorgiaspress.com

Link to the book: <https://www.gorgiaspress.com/jeruselems-survival-sennacheribs-departure-and-the-kushite-role-in-701-bce>

Background:

Jerusalem's enduring aura as a "Holy City" — which contributes to today's geopolitical strains over its future — received an early impetus from a crisis in 701 BCE.

In that year, the seemingly invincible army of Assyria was about to destroy Jerusalem when, suddenly, the army departed. The Bible ascribes the city's astonishing deliverance to the "angel of the Lord," who killed 185,000 troops as they slept, forcing the survivors to retreat to their homeland, present-day Iraq. The proclaimed miracle contributed to the Bible's presentation of Jerusalem as divinely blessed.

Historians have proposed more down-to-earth explanations for Assyria's failure. These include (1) an epidemic that caused Assyria's King Sennacherib to retreat, (2) a crisis elsewhere in the empire with which Sennacherib had to deal, and (3) a simple surrender by Jerusalem's King Hezekiah.

Now, a new scholarly book, *Jerusalem's Survival, Sennacherib's Departure, and the Kushite Role in 701 BCE*, published by Gorgias Press, supports a theory that could rewrite a crucial part of Jerusalem's history. The book's contributors suggest that an army of Kushites — Africans from present-day Sudan who are also known as Nubians —, led by the Kushite commander Taharqo, was influential in the Assyrian retreat. The Bible in fact briefly mentions the army of Taharqo (also known as Tirhakah) as preparing to confront Sennacherib before the text goes on to attribute the city's survival to the angel.

This new academic book includes essays by eight recognized specialists in this historical period. They were commissioned by an academic journal, the *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*, to evaluate an earlier publication that had put forward the Kushite role in saving Jerusalem but which received little attention upon its publication in 2002. The original publication, *The Rescue of Jerusalem: The Alliance between Hebrews and Africans in 701 BC*, was written by Henry Aubin, a Montreal journalist. Six of the eight evaluators in the new volume tilt in favor of the Kushite-rescue theory giving cause for a dramatic re-thinking of one of the most significant events in world history.

The evaluators, who specialize in the fields of Egyptology, Assyriology, Nubiology, and Biblical Studies, are:

- **Professor Aidan Dodson**, University of Bristol
- **Professor Emeritus Lester L. Grabbe**, The University of Hull
- **Professor Christopher B. Hays**, Fuller Theological Seminary
- **Professor Marta Høyland Lavik**, Stellenbosch University
- **Professor Alan B. Lloyd, Retired**, Swansea University
- **Professor Song-Mi Suzie Park**, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary
- **Professor Jeremy Pope**, The College of William and Mary
- **Professor K. Lawson Younger, Jr.**, Trinity International University

The Importance of the Book

The creation of this panel of judges — a rare step in academia — testifies to the significance of Jerusalem’s deliverance on world history. Jerusalem was the only Hebrew city that the Assyrians had not already destroyed, and today’s scholarly consensus is that its capture — followed by the exile of survivors — would have meant the extinction of Hebrew culture, preventing the emergence of Judaism several centuries later. The late William McNeill, a world historian at the University of Chicago and author of the National Book Award-winning *The Rise of the West*, commented on Jerusalem’s survival in *MTQ: The Quarterly Journal of Military History* in 1998: “Without Judaism, both Christianity and Islam become inconceivable. And without these faiths, the world as we know it becomes profoundly, utterly different.” Of Assyria’s abortive conquest of the Hebrew capital, he says “Surely, there is no greater might-have-been in world history.”

As if to underscore the event’s importance to Hebrew society, the Bible tells the story of Jerusalem’s deliverance three times — in the books of Second Kings, Isaiah and Second Chronicles. The Old Testament/Tanakh/Hebrew Bible presents no other story so often.

The Kushites' involvement in the Mediterranean world began in the 720s BCE when they took over Egypt, whose religion they shared, and established Egypt’s 25th Dynasty. The aim, Aubin writes, was to combine their army with that of the Egyptians and thus better protect Egypt and their own kingdom of Kush from Assyrian invasion. When in 701 BCE Sennacherib invaded the Levant and appeared ready to attack Egypt, the Kushite Pharaoh sent forces to the Hebrew kingdom of Judah, his ally, in a preemptive strike.

“The 2002 book was originally ignored,” Aubin recalls. “The theory was seen as far-fetched. The conventional wisdom has been that ancient Africans, geographically isolated, were non-players in the great currents of Western history, and I lacked the academic credentials to be taken seriously.” The retired investigative reporter and columnist at the Montreal Gazette has a B.A. from Harvard in English but no graduate degrees. He based his case on the incomplete biblical and Assyrian accounts of the invasion as well as on archaeology.

One of the evaluators, Jeremy Pope, an Egyptologist at the College of William and Mary, and author of a book on Taharqo’s subsequent rule as Pharaoh, comments, “In 2002, when Aubin drew attention to an unexplored cause behind one of the most significant events in world history, it was rational to

approach his claim with skepticism. Yet newer research published during the past 18 years has distinguished Aubin's thesis as the most defensible explanation."

In a peer-reviewed essay included in the new book, Aubin argues that the 25th Dynasty's army was probably the strongest in Egypt's history up to that point. Unlike the more famous Egyptian forces of Rameses the Great and the Pharaohs of earlier centuries, this army utilized cavalry, iron weaponry, and upgraded three-horse war chariots.

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