THE ASSYRIAN MILITARY MACHINE

The Assyrians achieved a reputation for possessing a mighty military machine. They were able to use a variety of military tactics and were successful whether they were fighting guerrilla warfare and set battles or laying siege to cities. These three selections contain accounts by Assyrian Kings of their military conquests.

King Sennacherib Describes a Battle with the Elamites in 691 BC

At the command of the god Ashur, the great lord, I rushed upon the enemy like the approach of a hurricane . . . I put them to rout and turned them back. I transfixed the troops of the enemy with javelins and arrows . . . I cut their throats like sheep . . . My prancing steeds, trained to harness, plunged into their welling blood as into a river; the wheels of my battle chariot were bespattered with blood and filth. I filled the plain with the corpses of their warriors like herbage . . . As to the sheikhs of the Chaldeans, panic from my onslaught overwhelmed them like a demon. They abandoned their tents and fled for their lives, crushing the corpses of their troops as they went . . . In their terror they passed scalding urine and voided their excrement into their chariots.

King Sennacherib Describes his Siege of Jerusalem 701 BC

As to Hezekiah, the Jew, he did not submit to my yoke, I laid siege to 46 of his strong cities, walled forts and to the countless small villages in their vicinity, and conquered them by means of well-stamped earth-ramps, battering-rams brought thus near to the walls combined with the attack by foot soldiers, using mines, breeches as well as sapper work. I drove out of them 200,150 people, young and old, male and female, horses, mules, donkeys, camels, big and small cattle beyond counting, and considered them booty. Himself I made a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage. I surrounded him with earthwork in order to molest those who were leaving his city's gate.

King Ashurbanipal Describes his Treatment of Conquered Babylon

I tore out the tongues of those whose slanderous mouths uttered blasphemies against my god Ashur and had plotted against me, his god-fearing prince; I defeated them completely. The others, I smashed alive with the very same statues of protective deities with which they had smashed my own grandfather Sennacherib—now finally as a belated burial sacrifice for his soul, I fed their corpses, cut into small pieces, to dogs, pigs, . . . vultures, the birds of the sky,
and also to the fish of the ocean. After I had performed this and thus made quiet again the hearts of the great gods, my lords, I removed the corpses of those whom the pestilence had felled, whose leftovers after the dogs and pigs had fed on them were obstructing the streets, filling the places of Babylon, and of those who had lost their lives through the terrible famine.

I fixed up a pile of corpses in front of the city's gate. I flayed the nobles, as many had rebelled, and spread their skins out on the piles . . . I flayed many within my land and spread their skins out on the walls.