

Hezekiah's Display: Another Parallel

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In a recent BN article, I called attention to a Tell Amarna letter containing a parallel to Hezekiah's display of the royal treasure house to the Babylonian envoys recorded in 2 Kgs 20,12-19 (// Isa 39,1-8)¹. Here, I wish to note another such extra-Biblical parallel. The relevant passage stands within a collection of admonitions known as the "Counsels of Wisdom"². The collection is generally dated to the second half of the second millennium B.C.³; in any case, it antedates the reign of Ashurbanipal whose library contained several copies of the work. Lines 81-94 of the "Counsels" constitute a warning, directed to the favorite royal official (the "vizier": LAMBERT), against misappropriating his master's property. In this context the following reference is made to that official's unique privilege vis-à-vis the king's treasure house:

My son, if it be the wish of the prince that you
are his,
If you attach his closely guarded seal to your
person
Open his treasure house, enter within (*pi-ti-ma
ni-šir-ta-šú e-ru-ub ana lib-bi*)
For apart from you there is no else (who may do this)
Unlimited wealth you find inside⁴

The above passage, I suggest, helps clarify what is at stake in the 2 Kgs 20,12-19 incident, and why what might appear as a harmless act of courtesy and/or vanity by Hezekiah should evoke so severe and sweeping a response from

1 Hezekiah's Display (2 Kgs 20,12-19), BN 38/39 (1987) 14-17.

2 For the text see W.G. LAMBERT, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, Oxford, 1960, 99-107.

3 Thus e.g.: LAMBERT, *Wisdom*, 97; J.M. THOMPSON, *The Form and Function of Proverbs in Ancient Israel*, The Hague, 1974, 42; R.E. MURPHY, *Wisdom Literature*, Grand Rapids, 1981, 10; O. PLÖGER, *Sprüche Salomos (Proverbia)*, Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1984, XXVIII.

4 LAMBERT, *Wisdom*, 103.

the side of Isaiah. In light of the former text, Hezekiah's showing the envoys of Merodachbaladan his treasure house would indicate that for him the Babylonian king has the status of the trusted favorite who is accorded a privilege granted no one else. As such, Hezekiah's deed represents an especially egregious transgression against Isaiah's warnings about foreign entanglements (see e.g., Isaiah 7; 18; 20; 30,1-5; 31,1-3)⁵. Accordingly, it is not surprising to find the prophet reacting with such vehemence to the king's admission of the act.

5 In my 2 Kings 20:12-19 as an Element of the Deuteronomistic History, CBQ 48 (1986) 27-38, pp. 28-31, I argue that an authentic Isaian word may well stand behind the announcement ascribed to the prophet in 2 Kgs 20,16-18 (// Isa 39,5-7), just as 2 Kgs 20,12-19 (// Isa 39,1-7) as a whole is essentially pre-Deuteronomistic in its formulation. A similar view is now advocated by J.H. HAYES - S.A. IRVINE, *Isaiah the Eighth-century Prophet. His Times and His Preaching*, Nashville, 1987, 385-386.