The Numbers of the Israelite Army in the Time of Joahaz: Is II Reg 13,7 Derived from an Archival Source?*

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It has been generally assumed that the numbers of the Israelite army in II Reg 13,7 are based on a certain archival source that the Deuteronomist employed for his composition. Scholars, supposing that these numbers are credible, have compared them with the numbers of Ahab’s army recorded in Shalmaneser III’s inscription. However, such a comparison is invalid because the numbers of Ahab’s army was probably exaggerated. The numbers in II Reg 13,7 are quite low, when compared with other numbers of the Israelite army in the Deuteronomistic History, where the context stresses the peak of Israel’s power. The Deuteronomistic History likewise increases the numbers of enemy armies in order to accentuate their power. These observations indicate that the Deuteronomist intentionally created small numbers in II Reg 13,7 compared to the size of the Israelite army in other parts of the Deuteronomistic History, in order to create the prominent contrast between the lowest ebb and the peak of Israel. II Reg 13,7 is not derived from any archival sources, but reflects the Deuteronomist’s intention to demonstrate the lowest point in the History by manipulating the numbers.

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According to the Deuteronomistic History, Israel was greatly oppressed by Hazael of Aram-Damascus and Ben-Hadad his son, during the reign of Joahaz son of Jehu. This was the lowest point in the history of the Kingdom (II Reg 13,3). By way of illustration, II Reg 13,7 records the numbers of the Israelite army of that time, as 50 horsemen, 1, 10 chariots and 10,000 foot soldiers.

The concrete numbers in the verse have led scholars to infer that these numbers are based on a certain source. Jepsen suggested that this verse originally followed v. 22 because of the conjunction ky at the beginning of the sentence. According to another view, this verse is an amplification of v. 3. If so, v. 22 may have originally followed v. 7. The Lucianic recension puts v. 23

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after v. 7. These approaches presuppose that v. 7 is derived from a certain archival source which was available to the author of the Book of Kings, and thus that the numbers of the army are reliable. Yet one must question whether v. 7 provides historically reliable numbers regarding the Israelite military at that time.

The most comparable source related to the Israelite army described in II Reg 13,7 can be found in the Kurkh Monolith of Shalmaneser III (RIMA 3, A.0.102.1, Col. ii, 91-92). The text records Shalmaneser’s encounter with the Syrian allied forces at Qarqar, North Syria in 853 BCE. Ahab of Israel was one of the three biggest allies and his military force included: “2,000 chariots and 10,000 troops”. These numbers are not reliable as once thought. In his recent study of the numbers of army in the battle of Qarqar, De Odorico suggested, for the following five reasons, that the quantities of this text were deliberately exaggerated. Firstly, the numbers of the Syrian army are excessive (nearly 75,500 soldiers). Secondly, information on exact numbers of the enemy would have been difficult for the Assyrians to acquire. Thirdly, the Assyrian tendency to increase the numbers of the enemy forces is well recognised. Fourthly, the numbers of each group in the inscription vary widely. Finally, the round numbers are frequently employed. Consequently, De Odorico presumed that the Assyrian scribe intentionally increased the numbers of some contingents, particularly those of the first three, which would include the army of Israel, in order to multiply the total numbers of the enemy forces. Since the numbers in this text are less credible, as he also showed in his study, we should not take the numbers at face value. Likewise, because the emendations of numbers in the original text, as some have suggested, is a speculative enterprise, we will not use them here for our argument.

The Tel Dan Inscription (II. 6-7) also refers to the chariots and horsemen of the Israelite and Judaean armies. In this text, the author claimed that he slew “thou[sands of cha]riots and thousands of horsemen”- One should bear in mind that these numbers are probably exaggerated to aggrandise the victory of the author over the enemies. It indicates that the use of “thousands of chariots” and horsemen simply means “many” for the author and his intended readers.

The number of 10,000 foot soldiers recorded in II Reg 13,7 is not low compared to that of Ahab in the Kurkh Monolith. Cogan and Tadmor, comparing the two texts, suggest emending ‘šrt “ten” to ‘lpym “two thousands”. Another possibility suggested in their commentary is that “‘ten thousand’ sets in contrast the depleted chariot and cavalry forces and the relatively larger infantry”. However, since the numbers of Ahab’s army in the Kurkh Monolith are not
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firmly established, we should compare the data with other numbers of Israelite armies mentioned in the Bible, especially in the Deuteronomistic History.\(^\text{11}\)

The Deuteronomistic History scarcely refers to the numbers of Israelite army, especially with the terminology in II Reg 13,7. The numbers of the Israelite foot soldiers (\textit{rgly}) appear only in Jud 20,2,17; I Sam 15,4.\(^\text{12}\) Jud 20,2,17 gives the number 400,000 and I Sam 15,4 200,000, excluding those from Judah. The numbers are apparently high, considering that the assumed sedentary population of Palestine was under 150,000 until the end of the second millennium BCE.\(^\text{13}\) Mention of the numbers of the Israelite horsemen (\textit{prśym}) and chariots (\textit{rkb}) is found in I Reg 5,6; 10,26. They state that Solomon had 12,000 horsemen and 1,400 chariots, which are too high in number to be real.\(^\text{14}\)

Comparing these numbers, the numbers of army in II Reg 13,7 are indeed small: horsemen 50 : 12,000; chariots 10 : 14,000; foot soldiers 10,000 : 200,000 ~ 400,000.

Interesting enough, the Deuteronomistic History refers more to the numbers of the enemy armies by employing the same terminology as in II Reg 13,7 (I Sam 13:5; II Sam 8:4; 10:6; 10:18; I Reg 20,19). Among these references, I Sam 13,5 and II Sam 8,4 are of significance for comparison, for they enumerate the three military categories as in the verse in question. I Sam 13,5 mentions the numbers of the Philistine army as follows: 30,000 chariots, 6,000 horsemen, and people (\textit{m}) “as the sand which is on the seashore in multitude”. These numbers are obviously inflated, if not fictional, stressing the overwhelming power of the Philistines who gathered to fight the Israelites. II Sam 8,4 lists the numbers of the army that David captured from Hadadezer, king of Zobah, as 1,700 horsemen, 20,000 foot soldiers, and horses for 100 chariots.\(^\text{15}\)

The passage emphasises David’s deeds, and the numbers must thus be downplayed, even if they should reflect a historical event. In these two cases, the author evidently exaggerates the numbers of the enemy troops in order to accentuate their power in the stories. This is the same literary technique as employed in the Tel Dan Inscription as well as in other ancient Near Eastern texts.

The above observations may indicate that the numbers in II Reg 13,7 were not derived from a source, but rather represent an interpolation that the author invented by intentionally recording small numbers compared to the size of the Israelite army in other parts of the Deuteronomistic History when the Israelite Kingdom was at its peak. The author of the Deuteronomistic History deliberately invented the improbably high numbers for the time of prosperity, whereas he produced the low numbers for the lowest point in the history of Israel, in order
to demonstrate the marked contrast between the two. This may be compared to
the Assyrian convention of deliberately altering numbers in later editions of text.
In some cases, kings doubled their own numbers with respect to his predecessors
in order to present himself as a greater ruler than his predecessor.16 In the case of
our passage, it seems that we have an interesting reversal of this practice: the
Deuteronomistic author lowers the numbers in order to make a historiographic-
ideological point commensurate with the intentions of the History as whole. If
so, the numbers of the Israelite army registered in II Reg 13,7 can hardly be
derived from a certain archival source, which the author of the Book of Kings
used for his composition.

Notes
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present article and made valuable suggestions. He also drew my attention to the Assyrian parallels.
1 It is not clear whether pr3ym here means “team of horses/horses for a chariot” or “horsemen/
charioteers”. See Montgomery 1951, 82-83; Gray 1977, 596; HALAT III, 919, for literature.
2 For example, Montgomery 1951, 433.
4 Gray 1977, 596.
5 See for example, Elat 1975, 25-35.
6 De Odorico 1995, 103-107.
8 The combination of rkh and pr3 appears also in the Zakkur Inscription, B, l. 2.
9 Cogan and Tadmor 1988, 143.
10 Ibid.
11 The Deuteronomistic authorship of II Reg 13,7 is supported by the use of the verb 3r in hiphil.
It appears 38 times in the Bible, of which 25 times are used in the Deuteronomistic History.
12 I Sam 4,10 also refers to the number of the Israelite foot soldiers (30,000), who fell in a battle.
13 Broshi and Finkelstein 1992, 47-57.
14 Cogan 2001, 214.
15 David hamstrung (qr) the rest of the horses for chariots.
16 See De Odorico 1995, 150-152.

Abbreviations
HALAT = Koehler and Baumgartner 1967-96; RIMA 3 = Grayson 1996

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