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"Sennacherib at the Gates of Jerusalem : story, History and Historiography", Isaac Kalimi, Seth Richardson, Leiden-Boston

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Isaac Kalimi – Seth Richardson (eds.), *Sennacherib at the Gates of Jerusalem. Story, History and Historiography* (Culture and History of the Ancient Near East 71; Leiden – Boston: Brill 2014). Pp. XII + 548 pp. €181,00. ISBN 978-90-04-26561-5; ISSN 1566-2055.

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The book entitled *Sennacherib at the Gates of Jerusalem* is dedicated to the memory of David Weisberg (1938-2012), professor of the Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati. Instead of an expected obituary, the volume begins with a presentation of the twelve contributors to the Memorial Volume (p. IX-XII). This is followed by an introduction summarizing the included articles (p. 1-7).

The first contribution by Isaac Kalimi deals with “Sennacherib’s Campaign in Judah: The Chronicler’s View compared with His ‘Biblical’ Source” (p. 11-50), which is II Kings 18:1-8, 3-37; 19-20, paralleled in Isa. 36-37. The Author stresses the Chronicler’s inaccurate description of the campaign (II Chron. 32), comparing it to the earlier records. The Chronicler emphasizes the religious righteousness of king Hezekiah and the central place of Jerusalem in the whole account. Although the article is a comparative literary study, one would expect that preposterous historical statements will be avoided, as the existence of an Assyrian deity “Nisroch”, probably “Nimrud” = Ninurta according to the Author (p. 45, 47). Sennacherib has been murdered in 681 B.C. by his elder sons “in the palace of his father Sargon”, in Assyrian *Šarrukīn*, in Aramaic *Srkn*, since Neo-Assyrian *š* is usually transcribed *s* in Aramaic and in Hebrew. The reading *Nsrk* in II Kings 19:37 and Isa. 37:35 is the result of a *tiqqūn soferīm*, which consisted in transposing a letter of a divine name in order to obliterate the foreign theonym without losing any graph of the Holy Scriptures. *Srkn* was no divine name, but it is preceded by *byt*, understood by the scribe as “temple”. Other changes followed in the text, as shown by the Septuagint which still reads “his ancestor” after *Nsrk* (cf. *Studia Judaica* 13 [2010] 16-18). While *Byt-Srkn* was Dūr-Šarrukīn, present-day Khorsabad, 16 km north of Nineveh, *nsrk* has been vocalized *nisrok* by the Mediaeval *naqdanīm*, apparently a verbal form meaning “we shall cling” to the killers. Author’s comments should have been complemented by the warning that the

link established in II Chron. 32:21 between the allegedly unsuccessful Sennacherib's campaign against Jerusalem and his murder cannot be historical, because twenty years separated these two events, what the Chronicler did not know. This was an occasion to develop the idea that theological considerations can be based in the Bible on non-existent historical facts or links, because their principles are independent from them.

The second contribution by Mordechai Cogan is a historical article "Cross-examining the Assyrian Witnesses to Sennacherib's Third Campaign: Assessing the Limits of Historical Reconstruction" (p. 51-74). This is a sober overview of the known Assyriological sources related to Sennacherib's campaign to Judah in 701 B.C. Archaeological data related to this campaign, provided mainly by the excavations of Lachish, are presented next in David Ussishkin's article "Sennacherib's Campaign to Judah: the Archaeological Perspective with an Emphasis on Lachish and Jerusalem" (p. 75-103). This is a study summarizing the main results of formerly done researches and excavations in Judah.

The Egyptian-Kushitic intervention in Judah in 701 B.C. offers Jeremy Pope an occasion to examine Assyro-Egyptian relations in this period: "Beyond the Broken Reed: Kushite Intervention and the Limits of *l'Histoire événementielle*" (p. 105-160). The misplaced mention of pharaoh Taharqa in II Kings 19:9 and Isa. 37:9, where his name is misspelled to Tirhaqa, allowed discussing Kushitic foreign policy and pharaoh's activities, although Taharqa was still a boy in 701 and became king only in 690 B.C. The Kushitic king of Egypt in 701 B.C. was called Shebitko (707/6-690 B.C.), who is correctly listed (*Sbtk'*) in Gen. 10:7 and I Chron. 1:9 among "the sons of Kush" (cf. *ZAH* 5 [1992] 146-147; E. Lipiński, *Studia z dziejów i kultury starożytnego Bliskiego Wschodu*, Kraków 2013, p. 191-192). He was thus known in Judah, possibly because of his intervention against Sennacherib in 701 B.C. There is no reference to these data in J. Pope's article.

The contribution of Eckart Frahm concerns "Family Matters: Psychohistorical Reflections on Sennacherib and His Times" (p. 163-222). The Author explains what is psychohistory dealing with personages' private life, and he presents its methodological principles. He regards the results of his long study as only a sketch showing the particular importance of Sennacherib's rapport with his father Sargon II and his later, heedful attitude to the women of his entourage, especially his mother and two of his wives. F. M. Fales then writes about "The Road to Judah: 701 B.C.E. in the Context of Sennacherib's Political Military Strategy" (p. 223-248). Some considerations are developed about the context and the motives of the campaign, which aimed at suppressing secessionist tendencies, ensuring the payment of tribute, and

collecting amounts of booty. Peter Dubovský deals then with “Sennacherib’s Invasion of the Levant through the Eyes of Assyrian Intelligent Service” (p. 249-291). Neo-Assyrian intelligence terminology is thus presented, as well as the means of gathering information. A historical sketch of the development of Assyrian intelligence is then given, followed by an application of the results to Sennacherib’s Levantine campaign.

The last chapters consider the souvenir of Sennacherib in later literature, based mainly on biblical texts, but also on Aḥiqar tradition, as shown by Tawny L. Holm in his “Memories of Sennacherib in Aramaic Tradition” (p. 295-323). “Sennacherib’s Campaign and its Reception in the Time of the Second Temple” is then presented by Gerbern S. Oegerma (p. 325-345), who refers to various texts and presents them in English translation (p. 338-345). Rivka Ulmer deals thereafter with “Sennacherib in Midrashic and Related Literature: Inscribing History in Midrash” (p. 347-387). Various midrashic passages are thus presented, translated, and commented following some themes: siege of Jerusalem, king Hezekiah’s prayer, the angel’s intervention, Hezekiah viewed by Isaiah, the Assyrian exile and the Ten Tribes, Sennacherib’s escape. Christian authors are then examined in Joseph Verheyden’s article “The Devil in Person, the Devil in Disguise: Looking for King Sennacherib in Early Christian Literature” (p. 389-491). The last contribution by Seth Richardson is entitled “The First ‘World Event’: Sennacherib at Jerusalem” (p. 433-505). It is a long chain of historiographic considerations, apparently aimed at justifying the title of the book. The latter ends with a long index of topics (p. 507-533), a short index of key terms (p. 534-535), an index of sources (p. 536-545) and an index of modern authors (p. 546-548).

The impact of the book under review on scholarship can hardly be evaluated, although it contains some contributions that may interest students from various fields. Despite its title, the publication does not aim in the first place at biblical scholars or at historians of ancient Israel and Judah.