The volume under review is an attempt to contextualize the description in 2 Kgs 18–19 of the campaign of Sennacherib of Assyria to Judah in 701 B.C.E., in particular, within a broader picture of what is known about Assyrian intelligence activities. As a starting point, Dubovský believes, justifiably so, in my opinion, that from the biblical description of the Assyrian campaign, in particular from the Rab-Šaqeh incident at the walls of Jerusalem, that the Assyrians possessed quite a lot of information, and of varied content, about the kingdom of Judah. In light of this assumption, Dubovský reviews the relevant evidence in an attempt to discern what types of intelligence activities existed in the Neo-Assyrian Empire and to what extent these capabilities were implemented during the campaign to Judah in 701 and, accordingly, were or were not mirrored in the biblical text.

In the first major section of the book (10–31), Dubovský surveys and discusses evidence of Assyrian intelligence activities in Judah, based on the biblical text. He concludes that the biblical text emphasizes the psychological warfare that the Assyrians implemented, but also aspects of collecting political and military intelligence. The biblical text does not, however, provide information on the means through which this intelligence was collected.

The largest and, for all intents and purposes, the most significant portion of the book is chapter 3 (32–160), where Dubovský discussed case studies from the Neo-Assyrian
sources where there is evidence of intelligence collecting throughout the Neo-Assyrian Empire. The chapter is very important, since Dubovský collects and discusses an impressive corpus of texts that deal, directly or indirectly, with these issues.

In the fourth chapter (161–88) Dubovský reviews Neo-Assyrian sources that indicate quite clearly the sophisticated and effective use of psychological warfare in the Neo-Assyrian Empire, emphasizing Tiglath-pileser III’s last campaign to Babylonia and Sargon II’s campaigns to Babylonia.

In chapter 5 (189–260) Dubovský attempts to contextualize the campaign of Sennacherib in light of what was discussed in the previous chapters, bringing to into the discussion and attempting to synthesize the biblical, textual, and archaeological evidence. Dubovský attempts to re-create the structure of Assyrian intelligence activities in Palestine during and before the campaign and, most importantly, assess the historical implications of this discussion (and the effectiveness, on various levels, of the Assyrian actions). For example, he suggests that the Assyrians misunderstood the theological background of the Judean religion and thus acted counterproductively in the psychological warfare that they implemented.

Finally, in chapter 7 (261–63), Dubovský summarizes his conclusions. These conclusions can be summarized as follows: (1) there was an active and efficient Assyrian intelligence network in Palestine before and during the campaign that had a decisive effect on the campaign and its results; (2) although there was no intelligence service per se, the Assyrians very efficiently were able to obtain and process a wide variety of information about the kingdom of Judah; (3) Dubovský believes that the description in 2 Kgs 18–19 reflect significant realistic descriptions of the Assyrian intelligence workings during the first millennium B.C.E.; (4) the reason that the biblical texts devotes such attention to this aspect was due to the fact that the very efficient Assyrian intelligent gathering, and its integration with their very efficient political, administrative, and military machine, was a new and unknown factor for the Judahites.

All told, the book provides a thorough and impressive review of the relevant evidence for Neo-Assyrian intelligence activities in particular and in the ancient Near East in general. It will undoubtedly serve as a basic resource for anyone studying ancient intelligence activities, warfare, and, needless to say, the Assyrian campaign against Judah in 701 B.C.E.

Due to its importance, I believe it is worthwhile to note some missing bibliographical items (up until the publication of this volume) concerning various topics that can be added to those discussed in the volume:
Studies of Intelligence Activities in the Ancient Near East and Classical World


Studies on the Campaign of Sennacherib to Judah


Finally, it should be stated that the quality of the book itself leaves much to be desired. Although the quality of the paper and the binding undoubtedly keeps the price down, I am not convinced that this will ensure a long shelf-life of this book, which, and unfortunately, as with many volumes produced by the Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico do, may not “weather” well on the long run.

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