One hundred and sixty years ago, scholars as well as the general public were first alerted to the cuneiform record of Sennacherib’s campaign to Judah. In the summer of 1851, the indefatigable Colonel Henry Rawlinson reported in the English literary magazine *Athanaeum* that he had succeeded in reading the name of Hezekiah king of Judah on one of the bull colossi discovered by Austin Layard at Nineveh, and with this announcement, he opened a debate that still attracts new discussants in seemingly unending succession. This is surely due to the fact that the Assyrian account of “the celebrated war against Hezekiah”—Sennacherib’s third military campaign—added a perspective that complemented the biblical account of this same event. And though countless studies over the decades have clarified many of the linguistic, structural and ideological features of the cuneiform and biblical texts, a consensus concerning the course of events in 701 B.C.E., the year of Sennacherib’s campaign, has yet to be achieved. Still, the challenge of integrating the sources into a coherent historical picture is one that most have been unable to forgo.

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2. So H. F. Talbot, "Assyrian Texts Translated," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 19 (1862): 135–98. Talbot’s translation of the Taylor Prism was the first coherent rendition of Sennacherib’s eight campaigns; the Rassam Cylinder, the earliest record of the third campaign, was discovered and published two decades later.
3. Austen Henry Layard, who had discovered the bulls, noted the discrepancies, but thought that there was no difficulty in correlating the two reports; see his remarks in A. H. Layard, *Discoveries in the Ruins of Nineveh and Babylon* (London, 1853), 142–45. He used a translation provided him by Edward Hincks that was good for its day, but Talbot's (above, note 2) certainly reflects the advances made during the next decade.
4. Leo Honor's astute observation, that “the differences which different writers have reached are not due to differences in the sources employed by them, but to different constructions put on them,” still holds true; see L. L. Honor, *Sennacherib’s Invasion of Palestine. A Critical Source Study* (New York, 1926), xiv.
5. The intellectual exercise by Diana V. Edelman to reconstruct Sennacherib's campaign solely on the basis of the biblical text and archaeological finds, as if the cuneiform evidence
The present volume, of which this essay is a part, attests to this continuing endeavor.

My contribution to the discussion is limited to a new cross-examination of the Assyrian witnesses to the events in the West in 701 B.C.E. In using the term cross-examination, I adopt Collingwood’s view of the historian as resembling a “Detective-Inspector,” and to history writing as “scientific history [that] contains no ready-made statements at all . . . the scientific historian does not treat statements as statements but as evidence: not as true or false accounts of the facts of which they profess to be accounts, but as other facts which, if he knows the right questions to ask them, may throw light on these facts.”6 As regards the Assyrian witnesses—the royal inscriptions in general and those of Sennacherib in particular—it is now over a generation that the focus of scholarly interest has shifted from asking direct historical questions to investigating the ideological issues of the Assyrian monarchy as expressed in the texts.7 Numerous studies have disclosed the literary code of the Assyrian imperial ideology embedded in them and called attention to the rhetorical structure imposed on the events reported.8 It has been shown that careful analysis of the “compositional variants” in the royal inscriptions holds the key to “the political and ideological tendencies” current during a particular reign. It is this understanding that circumscribes the use that can be made of the insessional evidence in historical reconstructions.9 As to Sennacherib, Eckart Frahm has provided us with a fresh, thoroughgoing study of all the extant texts of

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7 In retrospect, the conference in 1980 at Cetona, which yielded the volume: Assyrian Royal Inscription: New Horizons, F. M. Fales (ed.), (Rome, 1981), served as the “formal” opening of this new stage of investigation.
8 H. Tadmor surveyed the major contributions to this study in “Propaganda, Literature, Historiography: Cracking the Code of the Assyrian Royal Inscriptions,” in Assyria 1995, ed. S. Parpola and R. Whiting (Helsinki, 1997), 325–338; reprinted in “With my many chariots I have gone up the heights of mountains”: Historical and Literary Studies in Ancient Mesopotamia and Israel, ed. M. Cogan (Jerusalem, 2011), 3–24.