

Zitierhinweis

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up. This publication is one that not only encourages one to purchase it, but also to purchase others by the author.

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MARC VAN DE MIEROOP, *Cuneiform Texts and the Writing of History*. Routledge, London and New York, 1999. ISBN 0-415-19533-0. Pp.196, fig 8.

This is a general book for both specialists and laymen, which tells us how to deal with the abundant cuneiform materials in the study of various aspects of history: political, social, economic, and gender. It also provides an introduction to the written sources from Mesopotamia for academics and students. The author, Professor Marc van de Mieroop, is an Assyriologist at Columbia University in New York.

In the introduction, the author says that his book aims at investigating the practices of historians of Mesopotamian civilization, the first recorded culture in human history. He wants to show us the various uses of the abundant cuneiform textual material in the research of history, and, as an Assyriologist, he will disregard what archaeology and art history, or other sciences, tell us about ancient Mesopotamia, and will focus almost wholly on written sources. He also presents a useful table (table 1) to give a chronological chart of Mesopotamian history.

Chapter one is named The First Half of History. The author classifies all the cuneiform sources into six categories: Administrative documents, private legal documents, letters, historiographic texts, literary texts and scholarly texts. He illustrates the characters of these texts and explains how to use them, which is very important for a beginner in Assyriology and in the history of ancient Near East. In the end, he tells us the history of the use and western spread of cuneiform writing, which was adopted in neighboring lands such as western Iran, Anatolia, Syria-Palestine and Egypt, where it was used as a diplomatic language. In this chapter, the author uses table 2 to show approximate numbers of various text types in the periods of Babylonian and Assyrian history and table 3 to show the chronology of Mesopotamian history with selected finds.

Chapter two is named History From Above. Now, we will see some interesting things about the study of Assyrian royal inscriptions and Sargon of Agade. Almost every student of Assyriology has to read Sennacherib's inscriptions during his study, but has he thought something more about it? Since royal inscriptions often give us propagandistic information, we have to take their accuracy with a grain of salt, and

they should always be questioned, evaluated and used critically (p. 55). For example, all of Sennacherib's annalistic texts refer to his first formal campaign, which started in late 703 BC, but they give us slightly different versions. Thus, the narrative of one campaign was constantly rewritten according to the situation that existed at the time of writing instead of the situation of the past which had no relevance any more, as in the case of a Babylonian king, Bel-ibni, of whose rule we have four different versions. (p. 42). Furthermore, the Assyrian royal introductory titulary can reflect the ruler's real accomplishments and an ideology of rule. For instance, in the texts, titles of Tiglath-pileser I, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon have those of the kings of Babylon after they conquered Babylon. As for Sargon of Agade, lots of stories about his birth and achievements were made many years later than his own time, but are considered as history by some historians uncritically. Those little stories are much more narrative than the texts surviving from the reign of Sargon itself (p. 76). So they are more attractive to historians. Hence, a student should be cautious when he uses a narrative text to study Mesopotamian history because the extant sources of Mesopotamia are different from those of other civilizations.

Chapter three is named History From Below. Here, the author studies "non-elite people", "those who were not part of the upper levels of the temple and state, hierarchies that directed the political life" (p. 88). This is the new horizon, since, in the traditional history, no one would bother to write about those common people, who were often illiterate, especially in ancient times. Traditionally, the so called "historic" documentation is almost entirely concerned with nobles and kings. The historians writing about the large number of economic texts of Mesopotamia now use prosopography to study the people in low status. First, the author introduces the study on the "foresters"—a group of men worked in the forest—in Umma of Ur III period. Then he mentions the story about Innaja, an Old Assyrian merchant, and shows us the life and social status of Assyrian traders. At last, he introduces the effects of war upon common city residents and farmers: for instance, the hunger in Nippur during the Neo-Babylonians' fought against Assyrians, which is reflected in the archive of Ninurta-uballit.

Chapter four is named Economic History. One of the primary concerns of cuneiform texts is about the economic transactions. In this chapter, the author describes some theories on ancient economics: the primitivism-modernism debate (i.e. whether we can apply concepts and models of the study of modern economy to the study of the ancient economy); Marxist interpretations; the theory of Max Weber and modernist approaches. The author thinks that we cannot apply contemporary economic theories to the study of the ancient Mesopotamians, and can not imagine that was a free-market capitalist economy. "The challenge to the economic historian of Mesopotamia remains the proper evaluation of the textual data within a larger

structure that does justice to the importance of the individual transaction records, without a loss of proportion" (p122f). Then, as an example, he shows us the study of the agriculture in Ur III Lagash where there are a great number of texts to study. However, there are still some problems such as to what extent of the state's control in the economy, which are too obvious to the accountants of antiquity to mention, but too obscure to modern scholars who impose their views on the ancient economy upon the evidence. Now the problem is, however, acknowledge where these views derive.

Chapter Five is named Gender and Mesopotamian History. Here we can see a variety of ways that scholars have used and the ideas, which have long influenced them in the study of Mesopotamian women. The author wants to remind us to avoid "preconceptions and *a priori* assumptions based on ideas on women in classical antiquity and in the Islamic Middle East" (p. 138). For example, the "harem" during Islamic Middle East and Herodotus' description of Babylonian women, which are ideas some scholars cannot resist to accept, but which are not necessarily the cases of women in ancient Mesopotamia.

In Conclusions the author warns us that Assyriologists are historians who study Mesopotamian civilization, and they should understand this civilization according to its own sources. They should not be influenced by the structure of other civilizations. Hence, at the moment, reading, editing, and understanding the cuneiform texts are the most important task for them.

For a student of Assyriology, apart from studying Akkadian grammar and a general history of Mesopotamia, he should learn cuneiform sources and the way to approach them, which will be the main material for his future research. As a student of Assyriology, I recommend this book to my counterparts. Though it maybe not be perfect, it is a very good guide for a beginner because, until now, there have been few books of this kind. The reader will find this book more interesting than a general history book, since it provides us with the wide background and deeper knowledge of 150 years of academic studies about Assyriology.

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The Followers of Horus: Eastern Desert Survey Report Vol. 1, edited by David Rohl, Institute for the Study of Interdisciplinary Sciences (ISIS), printed by Bezier Journals, Oxon, UK: 2000 (ISBN 0-9513811-3-X), \$49.00 US/ £29.00 UK Paperback, 200 pp.