

Wissenskultur im Alten Orient: Weltanschauung, Wissenschaften, Techniken, Technologien. Edited by HANS NEUMANN. Colloquien der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft, vol. 4. Wiesbaden: HARRASSOWITZ VERLAG, 2012. Pp. xi + 433, illus. €42.

As Norman Yoffee suggests in his contribution to this collection, the German term *Wissenskultur* may be rendered in English as “cultural knowledge” (p. 87). Literally, the term means “culture of knowledge” and refers to how knowledge is created, transmitted, and perceived in a society. From this perspective, the approach of the original workshop that took place in Münster in 2002, and this volume with twenty-two contributions that came out of it, is even broader.

Eighteen papers are in German, three in English, and one in French. They are written by experienced scholars and leading specialists in cuneiform studies, ancient Near Eastern archaeology, and art history, and they cover a wide range of topics. These include creation and transmission of knowledge, world perception and religious concepts, understanding of law, astronomical, medical, and mathematical knowledge, magic, figurative art, technological knowledge in agriculture, pottery, creation of seals, and even the modern experimental technology of reproducing ancient mosaics and quartz pottery.

One of the volume’s strengths is its broad temporal and geographical coverage. It includes Babylonia in the third, second, and first millennia BCE, Assyria, the Levant (Ugarit), the Hittite kingdom, and Urartu. Another major benefit is the diversity of methods that its authors use in presenting and analyzing data, including philology, archaeology, art history, and technology.

The majority of the papers are concerned directly or indirectly with knowledge. Several contributions cannot easily be placed within the scope of the book, which does not diminish their scholarly value. The only major drawback as far as I am concerned is that the volume appeared ten years after the original workshop took place. The bibliographies indicate that most of authors did not update their contributions with sources and literature that appeared after 2003.

The structure of the volume is lucid. The editor has grouped contributions with similar topics together and placed key papers by S. Maul, E. Frahm, A. Fuchs, J.-J. Glassner, and G. Selz at the beginning of the volume. These contributions well match the central topic and create the framework of the volume, while also distinguishing themselves by the theoretical ripeness of their discussion and synthesis of their data.

The contribution by Stefan Maul summarizes written data (mainly from the first millennium) on how ancient Mesopotamians imagined the origins of knowledge. On the one hand, as the library of Assurbanipal epitomizes, ancient scholars wanted to accumulate all knowledge in writing. On the other, they regarded knowledge as the

ultimate creation of the gods, who had entrusted it to mankind at the beginning of time. Men cannot therefore expand knowledge or come up with any genuinely new knowledge. Their responsibility is to preserve knowledge. This resulted in a zealous commitment of ancient scribes to set down all possible knowledge in script, and in the high status of the writing itself in ancient Mesopotamia. For me, one of the most valuable observations in Maul’s paper is that the “contradictions” in scholarly and religious works are part of the culture of writing and knowledge in Mesopotamia and in other cultures of the ancient Near East.

Eckart Frahm masterfully assembles scraps of information about the actual transfer of knowledge in the first millennium and comes to a conclusion similar to Maul’s—that a key characteristic of the Mesopotamian culture of knowledge was its interest in the past and especially in the origins of phenomena.

Gebhard Selz analyzes central concepts of the Mesopotamian worldview: kingship, office, “sacred marriage,” and other links between royalty and the gods, and between society and the gods. He introduces the term “axiomatic holism,” which resonates with “the link between everything” in Maul’s paper. According to Selz, “the Mesopotamian world is a whole in a permanently vulnerable and unstable equilibrium, on whose preservation all actions are directed” (p. 62; translation mine).

Doris Prechel addresses the question of how magical knowledge was transmitted in the Hittite royal house. The quest for this knowledge and its preservation was meant primarily to prevent, diminish, or remove negative influences. Similarly to Frahm, Prechel stresses the interest of the royal house in old written sources, especially in rituals, from all parts of the Hittite empire. Another revelation that resonates with Frahm’s discussion is that Hittite kings headhunted for hard-to-get specialists who could read and perform ancient rituals. This approach appears to be an important component of the culture of knowledge fostered in Middle and Late Bronze Age empires.

I was especially captivated by the paper by Andreas Fuchs. He analyzes the structure and contents of the well-known Assyrian royal inscriptions, which are often regarded in cuneiform studies as the ultimate examples of historical narration. Fuchs shows that these sources and accompanying royal reliefs are largely conventions and say virtually nothing on how wars were waged or how tactics of one battle differed from those of another. Nor were these sources intended to transmit knowledge about Assyrian military practice. He comes to the conclusion that the people who wrote about battles had not participated in them and that the artisans who fashioned the famous royal reliefs and the Balawat gates had only very imprecise, sometimes even childish, knowledge of battle tactics, weaponry, and siege gear.

This volume edited by Hans Neumann is a significant contribution to the field of the intellectual history

of the ancient Near East and should be consulted by all scholars and students working in this area. It is thought-provoking, enlightening, and absorbing reading. This volume about ancient intellectuals and their endeavors will be especially appreciated by their contemporary successors.

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Near Eastern Tribal Societies during the Nineteenth Century: Economy, Society and Politics between Tent and Town. By EVELINE VAN DER STEEN. London: Equinox, 2013. Pp. xvii + 302. \$110. [Distributed by ISD, Bristol, Conn.]

A book that begins by asserting “For as long as we know, Near Eastern society has been fundamentally tribal” (p. xi) had better be ready for a critical reception. I’m not sure that anyone who has ever worked on Hittite Anatolia, Elamite Iran, or Sumerian Mesopotamia wakes up every morning thinking, “My, how tribal the ancient inhabitants of those regions were.” Then again, a book purporting to be about the Near East, which refers to the well-known Anglo-American historian of Islam, Bernard Lewis, as Bernhard (p. 8), does not exactly win the reader’s confidence.

Rather than the “Near East,” this is a book about the Holy Land, or Palestine, Israel, and Jordan (p. 45). It contends that, whereas “Anthropological studies of present-day tribal societies are of little help” in trying “to imagine what a fully tribal society looked like before the age of globalization,” the “vast pool of information, drawn from a time when the great tribes controlled the region: the observations from travellers in the Near East in the nineteenth century, up to World War I” (p. xi) is. Put more directly, E. van der Steen believes that “Nineteenth-century tribal societies can tell us much about the Bronze and Iron Ages that twentieth and twenty-first century society in the region cannot” and “finds it hard not to compare nineteenth-century tribal society with the world of the Old Testament” (p. ix).

Put very simply, this is a highly questionable thesis that glosses over or ignores a vast array of changes, on many levels, that the populations inhabiting the southern Levant underwent between the Iron Age and the nineteenth century. Moreover, apart from mining, predominantly, the English-language literature on the study area, the random insertion of insights from ethnographies of Türkmen tribes (viz. the work of W. Irons) or late twentieth-century Baluchistan (the work of P. C. Salzman) is completely unsystematic. If the nineteenth century is the explicit window through which the Bronze and Iron Ages are to be best understood—as announced in the book’s title—then citations of Herodotus (p. 115), Roman practices (p. 135), Saladin (p. 123), tactics used

by the government of Israel (p. 133), or modern Jordanian and Saudi Arabian laws (p. 120) are simply irrelevant.

This book contains a wealth of synthesized, if not always exhaustively researched, topics, but even if one accepts the thesis that this is all somehow helpful for our understanding of the southern Levant during the Bronze and Iron Ages, the ways in which this might be the case are, more often than not, left unstated, as if they were so obvious as to need no further explication. Yet the entire undertaking is fraught with danger. From my own work on nomads in Iran, I am acutely aware how dissimilar the tribal groups of the nineteenth century were from their Safavid, Timurid, Ilkhanid, early Islamic, late Antique, Seleucid, or Achaemenid-era forerunners. The observations of nineteenth-century visitors may be important in illuminating many topics, but the notion that nineteenth-century “tribal societies” bore any resemblance to those of the Bronze and Iron Ages, and somehow escaped the vicissitudes of the intervening centuries, is simply wishful thinking.

A few specifics: An important, eyewitness account of Wahhabism in action, covering the period from its origins to 1809, which the author has overlooked, is L. A. O. de Corancez, *Histoire des Wahabis, depuis leur origine jusqu’à la fin de 1809* (Paris: L’Imprimerie de Crapelet, 1810).

Map 1 (p. 42): It would be interesting to know how Kinda, a South/Central Arabian tribe in pre-Islamic Arabia, wound up in central Iraq.

The alternative spellings *asabiyyah* and *asabiyyeh* are used, in some cases, in consecutive sentences (p. 105), suggesting extreme slackness in copy-editing.

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Entlassungsgrund: Pazifismus. Albrecht Götze, der Fall Gumbel und die Marburger Universität 1930–1946. By HARALD MAIER-METZ. Academia Marburgensis, vol. 13. Pp. 248, illus. Münster: WAXMANN, 2015. €38 (paper).

Albrecht Goetze—as his surname was spelled after his immigration to the USA in 1934—was not only a leading Assyriologist, but a member of the founding generation of Hittite scholars. Following his service in the German army in the First World War, during which he was severely wounded, he pursued his studies at the University of Heidelberg, where he became an *Extraordinarius* in 1927. In 1930, at the relatively young age of 33, he was appointed to the Chair in Assyriology at the Philipps-Universität in Marburg.

The volume under review deals with Goetze’s short tenure at this institution—he was dismissed already in 1933—and the political climate in Germany and its