

Reviews of Books

Bronze Age Bureaucracy: Writing and the Practice of Government in Assyria. By NICHOLAS POSTGATE. Cambridge: CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2013. Pp. xi + 484, illus. \$99.

The heart of *Bronze Age Bureaucracy* lies in three central chapters (4, 5, and 6) wherein Postgate treats bureaucratic practice, first in the city of Aššur—represented by five archives; then in Assyrian provinces—also represented by five examples: T. Rimah, T. Billa, T. Chuera, T. Ali, and T. Sheikh Hamad. The last of these chapters also reflects on these archives and reaches general, historical conclusions. Framing this core, the volume's first three chapters are an introduction outlining the structure of the enterprise; a wide-ranging survey of Middle Assyrian economic and social patterns; and a description of scribes, their functions and products, as well as technical terminology pertaining to their activities. Sealing practice and thoughts on the nature of archives also come in for treatment here.

Following the core chapters, two further chapters extend the study to peripheral Late Bronze sites and bureaucracies: Nuzi (ch. 7), Alalah, Ugarit, and Greece (ch. 8). (Chapters 7 and 8 are very welcome, but do not entirely cohere with the structure of the volume and its stated goals—see, for example, the volume's subtitle. They appear as afterthoughts. *De facto*, they are useful appendices to the rest of the book.) A short final chapter summarizes what was established in earlier chapters regarding the nature and taxonomy of bureaucratic record keeping. The book concludes with two appendices (lists of Middle Assyrian kings and late Middle Assyrian eponyms), a bibliography, and four indices (Akkadian words, toponyms and ethnonyms, "selective" subjects, and text citations). Generally outstanding photographs, hand copies, transliterations and translations, and plans punctuate the volume.

The treatment of each archive is marked by detail and thoroughness. A *partial* outline of one such archive, the offerings house archive of the temple of Aššur in Aššur (pp. 89–146), may suffice to impart the flavor of the central chapters of the volume. As he does for all the archives, Postgate begins with a synopsis of all that follows. Designed for the non-specialist (p. 4), the synopsis serves also to anchor for all readers the lengthy descriptions, text editions, interpretations, and historical extrapolations that follow. The lemmata following the synopsis are: Deliveries to the Offering House, The Contribution of the Assyrians, The Offering House and Its Facilities, The Commodities and Their Processors, Cereals, Grinders, The Brewers, Honey, Sesame, Fruit, The Confectioner, Presentation of Offerings, External Contacts, The Archive Ass. 18764, The Texts, etc., etc., etc.

A mere review cannot begin to plumb the riches to be found in Postgate's work. I would single out, however, chapter 3, as a very important study of scribal practice and as a crucial preface to the following chapters. Most important is the careful definition of different terms pertaining to the documents. Through sound inductive analysis, the bureaucratic functions of the assorted documents are fixed, laying the foundation for the discussion in the following chapters. This bears reiteration. The focus, the pivot, is the text, the primary—usually the only—source from which to extrapolate the structure and nature / ethos of Middle Assyrian bureaucracy. This focus is correct; it defines the mechanics of bureaucracy. Furthermore, the mechanics yield the direction of the goal of bureaucracy and of the institutions that used bureaucratic methods.

The repeated stress on sealing and sealed tablets throughout the volume, based on the foundation of chapter 3, is both important and appropriate. Although the practice is not entirely consistent, sealing is particularly identified with externalized bureaucracy, i.e., information transmission between parties, departments, or bureaux, what Postgate dubs "bilateral instruments," as opposed to unsealed texts meant for internal, "intra-" record keeping, which are less official, hence less legally precise. This sharpens one of the dualities of Late Bronze Age bureaucracies, record keeping for two different purposes.

Discussions leading to important definitions mark the volume throughout. I would single out Postgate's discussion of "Assyrian" in the bureaucratic texts (pp. 12–14), where we are led to accept nuance over precision.

Of the archives and bureaucracies upon which Postgate focuses, those of Nuzi (ch. 7) are most familiar to me. His treatment of Nuzi bureaucracy is excellent and to be trusted. Gaps in the discussion, minor errors and omissions, and points of disagreement are excusable, for Nuzi contains by far the largest number of archives of any Late Bronze site in the Near East, yielding thousands of texts (see p. 345 and esp. Pedersén 1998: 15–28, 231). To treat such corpora—practically all are public and private documents—thoroughly and accurately would elude even the most devoted and competent student of the Nuzi texts. That Postgate tackles such a project is courageous. That he substantially succeeds in this effort elicits our admiration.

One observation regarding the Nuzi texts merits special mention—the sheer number of such documents from such a middling settlement. Postgate attributes part of this phenomenon to the relatively thorough excavation of what seems to have been the whole site (p. 370). (And more tablets are surely to be found; the text-rich suburbs have not been completely excavated.) However, as the author admits (p. 372), thorough excavation cannot account completely for the phenomenon.

Brief remarks follow, pertaining to some of the very few issues requiring refinement or with which I take issue. The general statements (p. 372) that Nuzi scribal practices probably did not extend beyond Arrapha itself (including the area that includes Nuzi, Arrapha-City, and “Tall al-Fahhār”), and that we do not know how far back such conventions go or if they survived the Assyrian destruction, must now be qualified with evidence not available to Postgate when he wrote *Bronze Age Bureaucracy*. Evidence of Nuzi-like scribal practice is now to be found outside the land of Arrapha, in the (Lullubian?) east, at Bakr Awa in the Shahrizor Plain (cf. Maidman 2018: 23a, excursus 3). It is unclear whether or not the few tablets were produced at Bakr Awa or were sent there. Nuzi-like writing practices probably did not go farther back than Nuzi generation I (see Maidman 2018: 20–21). And there is slight evidence that Postgate is right, and that Nuzi scribal practice probably did not survive the end of Nuzi level II (Maidman 2014).

Postgate avers that the “most elaborate household at Nuzi was almost certainly the House of Šilwa-Teššup [son of the king]” (p. 372). The archives of the house of Tehip-tilla son of Puhi-šenni, however, were at least as complex and certainly larger than the text collection of Šilwa-tešup, albeit with somewhat different economic foci (e.g., greater emphasis on real estate acquisition and evidence for an inter-urban banking enterprise). His assertion that “. . . the only substantial evidence for private land tenure comes from Aššur” (p. 31) must have been meant to apply to Assyria only, not to this near neighbor of Assyria.

The author considers the *halšuhlu* in the Nuzi texts to be a district governor, as the same-named official certainly was in the Middle Assyrian texts (p. 375 with n. 134). His response to my judgment that the *halšuhlu* was a minor real estate official at Nuzi (Maidman 1981: 235–40, 244–46) is to note (p. 375 n. 134) that two other scholars consider that *halšu* is a district. Strictly speaking, the issues of defining *halšuhlu* and *halšu* ought initially to be kept separate. Yet, at Nuzi, *halšu* is not an administrative district (Maidman 1981: 240–44). In any case, the issue of the official called *halšuhlu* (as opposed to the significance of *halšu*) has not been seriously addressed since Maidman 1981.

In addition to the relevant texts listed in Maidman 1981: 235 n. 9, see now *EN* 9/3 385:5–6. That text contributes to the discussion the fact that the person called *halšuhlu* is not a high personage and does not in that text deal with real estate (that this office, curiously, also deals with matters other than real estate is already noted in Maidman 1981: 238–39). I exclude those texts from the Tehip-tilla archive where that person appears as a *halšuhlu* and as a principal party in the acquisition of real estate. It was the latter fact, not the former, that resulted in the retention of these texts in the family archives.

Furthermore, it needs to be repeated that Tehip-tilla son of Puhi-šenni was himself a *halšuhlu* (Maidman 1981: 237–38 n. 17). Recall that this Tehip-tilla was a private landowner, the greatest such magnate among the Nuzi upper class and generator of most of the largest private archive yet to have been discovered in Late Bronze Age Mesopotamia. With many hundreds of texts in his family archives, if Tehip-tilla were a district governor rather than a minor real estate official, then we should find written evidence of this status and function somewhere in his archive.

But unlike the archives of Šilwa-tešup son of the king at Nuzi (p. 377) or Urad-šerūa of Aššur, for example (Postgate 1988; cf. Maidman 1992), the Tehip-tilla archive nowhere reveals its principal as

acting in any official capacity. There is no admixture of government administrative activity and private activity in the house of Tehip-tilla. Indeed, the conspicuous underrepresentation of Tehip-tilla—arguably the single most powerful and best attested individual in Nuzi’s local history—in Postgate’s discussion is attributable to Tehip-tilla’s virtual (but not complete) absence from any governmental context or activity.

Moving on, Postgate’s statement (p. 380) that the sellers of land seal the deeds of sale is only occasionally true and, therefore, not an essential part of such contracts.

In general, there is a lack of treatment of the bureaucratic dimension of Nuzi *private* archives. And yet, when private institutions, such as families, are large enough, bureaucratic aids are necessary for efficient tracking of the economy. For example, *JEN* 641 is a lengthy unsealed internal memorandum, which attempts to organize categories of economic records (on this text, see the references in Maidman 2005: 247b *sub* 641; a more complete study appears in Maidman 1976: 174–83). *JEN* 508 and 521 are two other texts, amongst still others, that would reward study in the context of private bureaucracy. See now further the dockets (unavailable to Postgate) published as *JEN* 882–903.

Turning back to the volume in general, the index of Akkadian words is very useful and, as far as I can tell, extensive if not exhaustive. One misses the entry *turru* (see p. 228 n. 68) and *zukkū* (see the discussion on p. 35). Further, the entry “Turšan” in the index of toponyms and ethnonyms should include p. 98. Throughout, one notices the odd authorial and editorial error or omission or inconsistency. In a work of this scope and erudition, these are, of course, mere quibbles.

Some concluding remarks: Postgate’s work, in its scope and detail, constitutes not only a fine synthesis of Late Bronze Age bureaucratic practice, but an effective handbook and research tool benefiting those studying this period of Mesopotamian history. In this respect, *Bronze Age Bureaucracy* is the latest in a series of monographs focusing on Middle Assyrian society and history. Prominent among these contributions are Stefan Jakob’s thorough and masterful description of Middle Assyrian administration (Jakob 2003) and Mario Fales’ very useful summative survey of late Middle Assyrian geo-political history grounded in both epigraphy and archaeology (Fales 2011). Indeed, this trio of works (and the list could be supplemented) constitutes, between them, a synthesis and an excellent *vade mecum* for students of ancient Mesopotamia outside the period and region, whether read whole or used as reference material.

This volume is also a kind of culmination and distillation of decades of careful studies of the Middle Assyrian archival phenomenon by Postgate. The volume is fundamentally important for this reason alone. And this review is, therefore, the appropriate place to apologize for comments I made long ago (Maidman 1992: 159–60), challenging Postgate for a volume of his that I found wanting, because it attempted generalization based on texts far fewer in number than those of the Nuzi archives on which I concentrated. With fecklessness, and narrowness of vision, I criticized Postgate’s attempts. This was churlish and wrong. Postgate’s studies have represented a valiant and successful attempt to fashion a large picture from sources always—and for all of us—too few and too allusive.

At nearly five hundred pages, this ninety-nine dollar volume is a bargain, a treasure trove of data, meticulously organized and enhanced by Postgate’s great erudition, keen judgment, and profound appreciation of the mechanics of Late Bronze Age bureaucratic practice.

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Die assyrischen Königstitel und -epitheta vom Anfang bis Tukulti-Ninurta I. und seinen Nachfolgern.
By VLADIMIR SAZONOV. State Archives of Assyrian Studies, vol. 25. Helsinki: THE NEO-ASSYRIAN TEXT CORPUS PROJECT, 2016. Pp. xiii + 139. \$59 (paper). [Distributed by EISENBRAUNS, Winona Lake, IN]

This short volume treats the royal titles and epithets from the first rulers of Assur to the end of the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I, with particular emphasis on the historical development of titles which imply claims of universal rule. The work continues Cifola's *Analysis of Variants* (1995), which had already covered much of the same ground.

Following an introduction (pp. 1–5) and brief sketch of Old and Middle Assyrian history and royal ideology (pp. 7–18), the individual chapters provide an overview of the titles used in succeeding periods: from the Old Akkadian to the end of the Old Assyrian period (chapter 2, pp. 19–36), from Aššur-uballit I to Shalmaneser I (chapter 3, pp. 37–62) and Tukulti-Ninurta I (chapter 4, pp. 63–100). The last section offers the longest excursus into other periods and regions in sketching the history of the titles *šar šarrāni* “king of kings” and *šar kiššati* “king of the universe” up to the Achaemenids. The study ends with the immediate successors of Tukulti-Ninurta I up to Aššur-rēša-iši I (chapter 5, pp. 101–4).

The main argument re-affirms the presumption that the titulary reflects political status and royal ideology. The modest titles of the earliest rulers, largely borrowed from southern Mesopotamia, are interrupted only by the grander pretensions of Samsī-Addu I's short-lived Kingdom of Upper Mesopotamia. Middle Assyrian changes are already perceptible under Aššur-uballit I, gain pace with Adad-nērarī I's campaigns, and culminate in the adoption of traditional Babylonian titles following Tukulti-Ninurta I's Babylonian conquest. The subsequent abandonment of most of these reflects the presumed collapse of the Middle Assyrian state.

The author's work redirects focus onto the importance of the earlier periods of Assyrian history in shaping Neo-Assyrian ideology. Unfortunately, the work seldom goes beyond the superficial observations noted above. While Cifola herself (1995: 5) had pointed to the need for a more detailed analysis of the relationship between Assyrian and Babylonian royal titulary, Sazonov's comparison is mostly relegated to general assertions of Hurrian, Hittite, and Babylonian influence (e.g., pp. 17, 19). Most attempts at further analysis are problematic. The astonishing claim that Tukulti-Ninurta I was deified (p. 86), based solely on the epithet *šamaš kiššat nišē* “sun(god) of all peoples” (“Sonnen(gott)” on p. 85) and a reference to the god Enlil as father, fails to draw the basic distinction between the inherent sacralization of kingship and deification.