

## Buchbesprechungen

GALIL, GERSHON: *The Lower Stratum Families in the Neo-Assyrian Period*. (Culture and History of the Ancient Near East 27). Leiden: Brill, 2007. xviii, 403 S., 1 Kt. 16,5 × 25,4 cm. ISBN 978-90-04-15512-1. Preis: € 120,00.

Any publication that aims to offer a perspective other than that of the king and his officials onto Assyrian society is a highly welcome addition to the field of Neo-Assyrian studies, and in his weighty monograph Gershon Galil of the University of Haifa sets out to analyse Assyria's "lower stratum families" on the basis of the evidence attested in the available Neo-Assyrian documentation.

In the first part of the book, the 177 texts which form this evidence are presented: These are 122 private legal documents, two court decisions, 47 somewhat ill-defined administrative records (including the "Harran census" and various grants and donations) and six letters (p. 20) and cover the period from 800 BCE to the end of the Assyrian empire c. 610 BCE; but overwhelmingly the texts date to the period after 680 BCE, that is the reigns of Esarhaddon, Assurbanipal and his short-lived successors (p. 19). The texts originate in their majority from Nineveh (71 %), with smaller contingents from Assur (17 %), Calah (2 %) and the "periphery" (9 %), namely Dur-Katlimmu, Ma'allanate and Gezer (p. 22). From this corpus, to which we are introduced in the first chapter of the book ("The sources", pp. 19–46), Galil harvested data on 447 "lower stratum families", typically in the form of entries such as e.g. "Hamnunu, his wife, his mother, Adda (and) Il-suri, his brothers, (and) his two sisters, a total of seven persons, slaves of Urda-Issar" (family no. 26, p. 57) or "Kubaba-lunu, his wife (and) his son, a total of three persons" (family no. 169, p. 106); this information is arranged according to the text type from whence it was culled and is presented in full in a second chapter ("A survey of lower stratum families", pp. 47–187), first in prose form and then in a series of 17 tables, again following the same sequence – the separate analysis according to text type is upheld throughout the volume and adds considerably to the bulk of the book. The first part of the book concludes with a commentary on the texts of Galil's corpus and the terms used to describe the families ("The terminology, the formulation of the texts, and the status of the people", pp. 188–256); the prose section is again followed by a lengthy appendix which presents the same data in the form of tables. As in previous volumes of the series "Culture and History of the Ancient Near East", the small format rather cruelly reduces the usefulness of the tables.

The second part of the book (pp. 259–341), albeit much shorter than the somewhat bloated first part, is what makes this volume an interesting and important contribution to Ancient Near Eastern social history; here, Galil presents his data according to family types (pp. 259–272), family size (pp. 273–291) and marriage pattern (pp. 292–301); he scrutinizes childless families (pp. 302–308), the children's age (pp. 309–318) and the phenomenon of single-parent families (pp. 319–326); and he investigates the numerical proportions among family members (pp. 327–333) and the numbers of generations in the

families (pp. 334–341). It is difficult to form a coherent picture of Assyrian society, given that the data refer to rather diverse social circumstances – from family of slaves sold with the property they live on to families of slaves sold on their own (why?) to deportees – but the information presented here certainly offers stimulating food for thought. This is the section of the book that is fullheartedly recommended to anyone interested in the setup of ancient societies.

The volume is supplemented by a short introduction (pp. 1–15), a brief – but problematic – summary (pp. 342–352, see below), a list of bibliographical abbreviations (pp. 353–371), an assortment of indices (sources: pp. 373–383; names: pp. 384–393; terms: pp. 394–396; subjects: 397–403) as well as a composite map of three sections of the Assyrian Empire (p. xviii); presented without an overview map, this rather inept cartographic representation is certainly not an improvement on S. Parpola and M. Porter's 2001 Helsinki Atlas of the Near East in the Neo-Assyrian Period on which it is quite clearly based.

While this is a book with much padding it is regrettable that the introduction is not more exhaustive; especially those parts where key methodological concerns are raised (“What was the degree of freedom of the lower stratum families in the Neo-Assyrian Empire?”, p. 7) could do with a more thorough treatment that puts 1<sup>st</sup> millennium Assyria into the context of other (contemporary, preceding and succeeding) societies of the Near East. Galil claims that “the social structure of the Neo-Assyrian Empire has been discussed extensively in the literature” (p. 1); I would not agree with this statement and am surprised to see two of my own works quoted among the “previous studies”. Galil's curious term “lower stratum family” is a testament to the amount of uncertainty regarding the underlying principles of Neo-Assyrian society and the social standing of the people he is investigating here. Whoever compiled the “Library of congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data” given in the front of the book had no such qualms and boldly used the term “working class” to classify the book's contents. We also gain an intriguing insight into the pre-history of the book and its historiographic context, for here the title is still given as “Lower class families in the Neo-Assyrian period”. Has the fall of the Eastern block rendered Marxist terminology so unfashionable as to feel the need to purge it? Yet the concept of class – and class struggle – nevertheless pervades the volume, especially when the “lower stratum” is juxtaposed with the (ill defined) “middle and upper strata” (e.g. p. 346) with whom it competes for the “means of production” (p. 350).

One cannot refrain from the impression that this is an author who shies away from showing his methodological colours yet feels he must present the reader with all the mechanical steps of his investigation and share his working files to the fullest; yet is it sensible to do so when the data derives from easily accessible standard editions? The author has a taste for number crunching but doesn't use any statistics methodology to speak of; yet how meaningful are numerical proportions if not harnessed to a model that attempts to describe and explain the underlying structures of society? The short summary tries to do just that, but on what basis? To establish that the average family size in the period before 680 BCE is 4.36, but afterwards 2.79, is one thing (and why the accession of Esarhaddon to the throne is a meaningful dividing date is nowhere explained; it is first introduced in this function on p. 19); but to argue that this would “indicate the weakening of the lower stratum with a reduction in its family size, as against the strengthening of the middle and upper strata at the expense of the lower stratum at the zenith of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, mainly in the reigns of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal” (p. 346) is highly questionable, especially in the absence, to the best of my knowledge, of quantifiable data on the “middle and upper strata”, whatever they may be; surely the dozen or so families

from the rather special city of Assur, whose setup can be reconstructed to an extent (but usually without the female family members!) on the basis of inheritance documents and other private legal texts, must not be compared directly to the data on “lower stratum families” gained overwhelmingly from the Nineveh archives? Galil announces to present the data on which his bold statement relies in a companion volume to this study (p. 347); for the time being, one should be cautious when using his conclusions in regard to the development of Assyrian society.

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HOLLOWAY, STEVEN W.: *Aššur is King! Aššur is King!*. Religion in the Exercise of Power in the Neo-Assyrian Empire. (Culture and History of the Ancient Near East 10). Leiden/Boston/Köln: Brill, 2002. xxxiv, 559, [29 S.] mit 4 Kt. und 27 Abb. 16 × 24,5 cm. ISBN 90-04-12328-8. Preis: € 147,00.

Steven W. Holloway legt eine kultur- und forschungsgeschichtliche Studie zum assyrischen Imperialismus vor, die aus einer 1992 in Chicago eingereichten Dissertation hervorgegangen ist. Mit dem Titel *Aššur is king!*, einem Zitat aus der assyrischen Krönungsliturgie, konfrontiert Vf. die Leserschaft mit der Frage nach Möglichkeit, Wirksamkeit und ggf. bewusster Instrumentalisierung politischer Theologie in der Geschichte der altorientalischen Reiche. Der Untertitel *Religion in the Exercise of Power in the Neo-Assyrian Empire* fokussiert das Thema auf das Verhältnis von Religion und Politik im Assyrien des 1. Jt. v. Chr. Im Zentrum steht die Frage nach der Art und Weise, welche Funktion(en) Religion in der Gestaltung imperialer Hegemonie für die assyrischen Herrscher des 1. Jahrtausends v. Chr. zukam (S. xv). Dabei geht es weniger um die Mechanismen und Leitbilder der assyrischen Religion für die assyrische Herrschaft, als vielmehr um die Begegnung mit der Religion der Unterworfenen und Beherrschten. Angesichts der bekannten Schwierigkeiten einer solchen Untersuchung an den verfügbaren Text- und Bildquellen jenseits ideologischer Propaganda und positivistischer Geschichtsauffassung, zeigt Vf. sehr deutlich, mit welcher Zielstrebigkeit die assyrischen Könige ein breites Spektrum an Instrumentarien einsetzten, um vermittels der religiösen Anschauungs- und Handlungsmuster Kontrollstrukturen und Akzeptanz für die neuen Machthaber herzustellen.

Der Band gliedert sich in vier Kapitel, wobei das einführende Kapitel 1 den Schwerpunkt auf die Forschungsgeschichte legt. Kapitel 2 und 3 nehmen „Terror“ bzw. „Diplomatie“ als zentrale Herrschaftsinstrumente in den Blick. Kapitel 4 schließlich bezieht die Organe der Machtausübung in die Analyse ein. Ein wissenschaftshistorischer Abriss zur Frühgeschichte der englischen Assyriologie erscheint als Appendix 1. Es folgen Bibliographie, Indices, Sachregister, Textpassagen und Bildquellen; Karten und die (qualitativ gelegentlich unbefriedigenden) Schwarzweiß-Abbildungen beschließen das Werk.

Kapitel 1 (*Historical Perspectives, History of Scholarship and the Scholars' Histories* S. 1–79) bietet einen Abriss der Assyrer-Thematik in der Assyriologie des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts. Die formativen Vorbilder für die Annahme eines religiösen Imperialismus als Merkmal und Movers des assyrischen Expansionsprozesses innerhalb der angelsächsischen Forschung werden herausgearbeitet. Besonders eindrucksvoll demonstriert Vf. an den Arbeiten der Pioniere der Assyriologie nicht nur deren Verhaftung in zeitgenössischen religiösen Paradigmen, sondern auch die Funktionsweise des quellengestütz-