

REVIEWS

Mattias Karlsson: *From the Nile to the Tigris: African Individuals and Groups in Texts from the Neo-Assyrian Empire.*

(State Archives of Assyria Studies 31.) xiv, 282 pp. Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2022. US\$ 49.95. ISBN 978 952 10 9510 8.

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The cover photograph is a fitting choice. It is a detail of the monumental stele erected in 670 BC in Sam'al (modern Zincirli) to celebrate the Assyrian conquests on the Nile in 671 BC, showing King Esarhaddon (681–669 BC) holding on leashes two shackled prisoners, one standing and one kneeling (p. 232). Depicted on the cover is this latter figure whose facial features and hair suggest identification with an African of Sub-Saharan origin. Mattias Karlsson follows the opinio communis when he identifies him with the Kushite crown prince Uš-Anaḥuru in the image caption (front matter). This man is mentioned in the stele's inscription, which narrates the expulsion of Taharqa, king of Kush, from Egypt and the conquest of the capital city Memphis: "I carried off to Assyria his (i.e. Taharqa's) wife, his court ladies, Uš-Anaḥuru, his crown prince, and the rest of his sons and his daughters, his goods, his possessions, his horses, his oxen, his sheep and goats, without number. I tore out the roots of Kush from Egypt. I did not leave a single person there to praise (me)" (translation after E. Leichty, *Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon, King of Assyria (680–669 BC)*, Winona Lake 2011, no. 98: rev. 43–46). Esarhaddon – who included "king of the kings of Lower Egypt, Upper Egypt, and Kush" in the royal titles given on the Zincirli stele – had many other of Egypt's inhabitants brought to Assyria. These and their offspring, as they are attested in archival texts from various Assyrian sites until the empire's collapse at the end of the seventh century BC, constitute the majority of individuals collected and discussed in the volume under review.

Karlsson presents in the introduction previous research, material and method, theory, and a sketch of the historical background going back all the way to the fourth millennium BC with the Uruk and Naqada cultures, and then jumps to the Amarna period of the fourteenth century BC, before turning to the ninth century BC and the Neo-Assyrian period. He states his aim "to discuss relations between Africa and Mesopotamia", more specifically "to identify Africans (Egyptians, Kushites, Libyans) in Neo-Assyrian texts, and to discuss the presence of Africans in the Neo-Assyrian empire from the viewpoints of individual-biographic and collective-demographic levels and perspectives" (p. 1).

To the first end, the chapter entitled "The evidence: the individual level and the biographic perspective" (pp. 13–198) presents 257 entries of "identified Africans" (177 due to their names' African language etymologies, pp. 13–100; the rest with non-African

language names: 43 identified through the ethnonyms Egyptian or Kushite, pp. 100–21; 33 identified through family relations, pp. 121–37; and four identified through institutional links, pp. 137–9) and 88 entries of “likely and possible Africans” (pp. 139–78, typically because an Egyptian etymology has been suggested but is uncertain) as well as 29 of “anonymous Africans”, i.e. of people designated as Egyptian or Kushite in the sources. The chapter is useful for anyone in want of an up-to-date collection of the material, and it saves one the substantial trouble of trawling through the six volumes of *The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire* (1998–2010) and its online updates (<http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/pnao/>), with information on about 30,000 individuals collected therein. One may sympathize that Karlsson did not want to stand accused of merely reproducing the information as found in PNA, his acknowledged main source material (pp. 2–3). However, the resultant presentation is no improvement, and instead excessively bloated, as each entry has two paragraphs of highly repetitive stock phrases in which etymological analysis, gender, source, date and circumstances are embedded. Each entry’s second paragraph is introduced by either “On the basis of the above data, the interrogative words who, what, when, and where can be responded to”, or “On the basis of the above data, identities, properties, and settings can be identified”, and every entry ends with either “The circumstances leading to this individual being in Assyria are difficult to pin down” or “The question how this individual ended up in Assyria is difficult to answer”, followed in almost all cases by “but it is likely that he or older relatives of his came to Assyria forcibly through deportation”. A more concise format would have saved at least a hundred pages, and the reader’s patience.

To meet his second objective, the chapter entitled “The evidence: the collective level and the demographic perspective” (pp. 199–211) offers tables with data drawn from the previously presented materials and brief discussions thereof – all of limited meaning as they lack reference to the overall ratios as represented in the Neo-Assyrian material. The section “Demographics and the African group: identities and properties” (pp. 199–206) looks at the relative proportions of “Egyptian, Kushite, and Libyan ethnic groups” (the majority of the available data concerns people classified as Egyptian) and then the distribution of “sex/gender”, “age” (distinguishing between adults and children), and “class” (using the categories “upper”, “lower” and “slave”). In the section “Demographics and the African group: settings and circumstances” (pp. 206–11), Karlsson tables the evidence’s temporal and spatial distribution. As expected, data predating Esarhaddon’s conquest of Egypt is rare; before that, the isolated house sale SAA 6 142 from Nineveh dated to 692 BC, which brings together individuals either identified as Egyptian or bearing Egyptian or Libyan names, constitutes the main evidence. One should have stated this explicitly (also in the discussion on pp. 215–6); it is this singular source, on the basis of which my 2012a paper investigates “the African prisoners of war in the battle of Eltekeh in 701 BC” (quoted on p. 2). It would have been sensible to contextualize properly the statement that “53.0% of the 345 people (i.e., Karlsson’s identified and likely Africans) lived in Assur” (p. 208). Several archives of Egyptian families have been excavated at that site and provide an intriguing window into their lives in Assyria’s ancient cultic centre. Despite the fact that these texts contribute a high proportion of the overall data for Karlsson’s study, it is clear from the rich textual materials of Assur that the city’s Egyptian population was relatively small and that Assur cannot have been the terminus of the majority of deportees from the Nile. The section closes with musings on “the backgrounds to the presence of the African group”, using the categories deported, transferred, subjugated, defeated and naturalized (pp. 210–1).

The conclusion (pp. 212–9) deals with two new topics. The section “Africans in the Neo-Assyrian empire: integration and assimilation” (pp. 212–7) discusses a table of 65 individuals identified as African (specifically, Egyptian or Kushite) whose names are of

Akkadian or West Semitic etymology, before quoting sections of the aforementioned text from Nineveh and of a document from Assur dated to 646 BC (STAT 2 167) in order to reiterate the well-known facts that African, or specifically Egyptian, communities lived within Nineveh and Assur and that some of their members bore names that did not signal their African origins. The brief section “African–Mesopotamian relations: the Neo-Assyrian experience” (pp. 217–9) seeks to place the study into “a historical context, examining the periods before, during, and after Assyrian rule”, using the Amarna period and the Neo-Babylonian Empire as comparisons, and ends in speculation about the fate of the “exiled Africans” after the fall of the Assyrian Empire, without mentioning the fact that Egypt’s Saite Dynasty joined Assyria’s fight against Babylonians and Medes.

After the bibliography (pp. 220–28) and the figures (pp. 229–37), there are appendices offering tables combining the material detailed in the chapter on “the individual level and the biographic perspective” (pp. 238–47) with the categories used in the subsequent chapter for gender/sex, age, class and temporal and spatial distribution, followed by tables of more detailed “demographic statistics” for Karlsson’s groups of identified, likely and anonymous Africans (pp. 247–9) and a table of “Egyptian names and words in cuneiform” (pp. 249–54). The volume concludes with indices of deities, people, places, texts, and Egyptian words (pp. 254–82).

The volume’s main merit is that Mattias Karlsson enables anyone with an interest in the Egyptian, Libyan and Kushite (Nubian) language materials hidden among the masses of onomastic evidence from the Neo-Assyrian textual sources to easily access this data and locate references to the most recent text editions and studies, most of which are available and fully searchable online as part of the Archival Texts of the Assyrian Empire corpus (<http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/atae/>). Moreover, his table of Egyptian names and words as rendered in cuneiform will be useful for the identification of further Egyptian name material in newly discovered sources. By focusing on the people of African origin living in the Assyrian Empire, the book once again highlights this state’s multi-ethnic nature, especially in the seventh century BC.

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Umberto Bongianino: *The Manuscript Tradition of the Islamic West: Maghrebi Round Scripts and the Andalusí Identity*

(Edinburgh Studies in Islamic Art.) 528 pp. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022. £110. ISBN 9781474499583.

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Pre-modern Maghrebi calligraphy has been an outstanding issue for Arabic palaeography when compared with its Eastern counterparts. Through a thorough analysis of the script employed in a wide corpus of Maghrebi manuscripts, Umberto Bongianino has taken the first step towards filling what he describes as “a disconcerting gap” in the scholarship,