

Reviews

Mattias Karlsson, *Relations of Power in Early Neo-Assyrian State Ideology, Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Records 10*, Boston and Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016, pp. 507 + xiv, ISBN 978-1-61451-691-0, €129.95.

Reviewed by L. R. Siddall

The topic of Mattias Karlsson's study is long overdue. While there have been forays into the history and ideology of the so-called 'Early Neo-Assyrian Period' (934–745 BC), none in recent time has aimed to examine the entire period in a systematic way. This gap in Assyriological research is striking for, as Karlsson states, this is an era when Assyria's distinctive idea of imperialism emerged (pp. 2–3). The study, as it appears here, is a revised version of the author's Doctor of Philosophy thesis submitted to Uppsala University in 2013. The original study concentrated on Assyrian state ideology during the reigns of Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 BC) and his son and successor, Shalmaneser III (858–824 BC). Karlsson has expanded his study to include all ten kings of the Early Neo-Assyrian Period but the focus of the book remains on the reigns of Ashurnasirpal and Shalmaneser. Anyone who is familiar with the 'long ninth century' will recognise why Karlsson's work still concentrates on these kings as the recovered evidence from the period overwhelmingly dates to their reigns: 73% of the texts and 79% of the iconography (p. 5)! Karlsson states that his overarching aim is 'to contribute to the description of Early Neo-Assyrian state ideology' (p. 4). His 'description' is derived from detailed catalogues of the different textual and iconographic motifs found in Assyrian royal inscriptions and art from the period. These catalogues are sizeable and appear as 16 appendices and lists at the end of the book, and come to total 128 pages (pp. 379–507). From these lists and appendices, Karlsson has developed seven studies of Early Neo-Assyrian state ideology. While *Relations of Power* is littered with a number of interesting observations on Assyrian state ideology, readers will be disappointed with the level of analysis and lack of historical interpretation. Karlsson's descriptive framework has resulted in a book that will be deemed useful to the field rather than ground breaking.

Karlsson begins his work with two introductory chapters that outline his aims and methods, the theories that have informed Karlsson's approach, summaries of previous scholarship and overviews of ancient sources used in the study. The discussions of ideology, propaganda, and critical theory will no doubt raise the eyebrows of a number of readers. Karlsson's work is decidedly ahistorical, both in terms of its approach to the study as a whole and his views on the importance of theoretical models, such as Neo-Marxism (*à la* Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser), postcolonialism, and gender theories. For Karlsson, theory is inevitable in the Humanities and

there is a reasonable degree to which one must agree with this statement. However, in justifying the use of critical theory, Karlsson states that 'as long as there are criteria and the used theories are relevant for the study, there is no reason to speak of bias' (p. 27, n. 47). This is indicative of a misunderstanding of the nature of bias in the Arts, Humanities, and Sciences. Bias often operates as a limiting of a scholar's scope or perspective (rather than a prejudice), a point which Karlsson demonstrates in his discussions of Orientalism. However, it seems to the reviewer that it is the structuralist, rather than historical, approach that has limited the level of analysis in this study.

The bulk of the book is made up of the three chapters that chart what Mattias Karlsson identifies as the three-way relations of power in early Neo-Assyrian state ideology: between the great gods of Assyria and foreign lands (ch. 3), between the great gods and the Assyrian king (ch. 4), and between the Assyrian king and foreign lands (ch. 5). Each chapter is subdivided into sections detailing the ancient evidence for the various motifs that illustrate the respective relation of power, combined with a review of the existing literature on each topic. It is interesting that Karlsson rarely brings critical theory to the forefront of his discussion in these chapters. Instead, these chapters are driven by data from his catalogue of textual and iconographical sources. The detailed nature of Karlsson's descriptions will ensure that many will consult this book to find out how a particular motif is attested in the sources. However, most of the findings are not new, as such, rather they demonstrate how Early Neo-Assyrian state ideology conforms to what we know from later times. This is particularly the case in terms of the roles and character of the great gods, the main roles of the Assyrian king, and the recognition that Assyrian imperialism was not motivated by religious conversion of the conquered. What would have helped is an examination of *why* such ideas came to exist in the state ideology.

Karlsson gets closer to an analysis of the ideological development of Early Neo-Assyrian state ideology in the last four chapters of the book that look at particular avenues of ideological change: how it developed within the kings' reigns (ch. 6); variation between the propaganda at the centre and the periphery (ch. 7); comparing the ideologies of the kings (ch. 8), and how Assyrian state ideology developed from the Old Assyrian Period through to the later Neo-Assyrian Period (ch. 9). There are some rather important findings in these chapters. For instance, in Chapter Six Karlsson demonstrates how the prevailing idea in Assyriology that the kings' titles and epithets were earned through deeds and accomplishments does not fit the data from Ashurnasirpal II's and Shalmaneser III's reigns. This is an important finding, but Karlsson does not look to explain why this was so. This is all the more curious since Karlsson makes a strong case in Chapter Eight that Assyrian kings shaped the ideological expressions of their times but he does not draw on this to account for the differences in the development of titles and epithets during the

reigns of ninth century rulers. From an historiographical point of interest, Karlsson shows in Chapter Eight that the scholarly interest in the imperialism of Ashurnasirpal has been misplaced, since it is Shalmaneser who was the chief architect of the Assyrian empire in terms of territorial expansion and ideological expression; though this point has largely been made by Shigeo Yamada in his 2000 study, *The Construction of the Assyrian Empire*. Curious too is the omission of the antiquarianism evident in the reigns of Shamshi-Adad V and Adad-nirari III from the discussion of the individual ideologies of Assyrian kings in Chapter Eight.

Mattias Karlsson closes his work with a short, four-page chapter that, despite being entitled 'Conclusion of the study' (pp. 327-330), would be best described as a defence. Here, Karlsson takes aim at earlier scholars, labelling them 'naïve' (p.326) and 'haughty' empiricists and reduces them to a blind Rankean idealists who think the 'texts should speak for themselves' (p. 329). Karlsson goes on to defend his approach by reiterating the value of critical theory for understanding the relations of power. This is an odd way to close a study and such statements could be seen to betray his own naïvety of the nature of contemporary empiricism.

As I stated at the beginning of this review, Mattias Karlsson's *Relations of Power* is a useful addition to the study of Assyria in the ninth century. However, had Karlsson taken an historical approach to this study, far more could have been made of the interesting and important observations littered throughout. There is a simple reason for this: the historical method answers questions, the structuralist and theoretical approach, as employed here, makes observations. Those interested in state ideology deserve to find out *why* it was that the Assyrian rulers of the long ninth century expressed the relations of power the way they did. Karlsson's study, though detailed, will leave them wanting in this regard.

L.R. Siddall
Shore, North Sydney

Benjamin W. Roberts and Christopher P. Thornton, eds, *Archaeometallurgy in Global Perspective: Methods and Syntheses*, New York: Springer 2014, 861 pp, 28 Chapters, Index ISBN 978-1-4614-9017-3 Hard Cover AUD 216

Reviewed by David Saunders

I review this volume from the perspective of a metallurgist who has now ventured into the field of archaeometallurgy. For me it has been a long career journey - from blast furnaces to the application of fracture mechanics in structural management and using computer codes, electron microscopes and neutron diffraction. From a practical metallurgist's view, I wished to see if this volume actually took me into the field of archaeometallurgy and provided me the 'global perspective' that allows me to undertake new research into ancient metal artefacts and, further, to be able to contextualise the many journal articles published on the study of ancient metallic artefacts.

Of course, as a 'new player' in this field (the uninitiated? - this volume p3) I have to ask why yet another volume on archaeometallurgy? Does this volume add new perspectives to the seemingly vast number of published works? Significant and ongoing archaeometallurgical research is promulgated in *Der Anschnitt* volumes, proceedings of conferences such as the Archeometallurgy In Europe (AIE), and the Beginnings of the Use of Metals and Alloys (BUMA), conferences on specific sites (e.g. UCL Timna Conference) and specific subjects (e.g. The Archaeology and Anthropology of Mining) and, of course, significant articles and monographs by technical experts such as Renfrew (1986), Muhly (1973) and more recently Weeks (2003) and Golden (2010). To this must be added the significant number of scientific journals that publish archaeometallurgical research. The AIE and BUMA conferences now tend to have a regional focus and so the current volume significantly differs from these conferences in that it attempts to present a global archaeometallurgical perspective, albeit incomplete. As discussed by Roberts and Thornton, (**Chap 1**) pp 1-2, the genesis of this volume from yet another archaeometallurgy conference is itself interesting in that it became more than a record of a significant conference of the Society of American Archaeology, SAA, and while [the] 'volume was never meant to be encyclopaedic or entirely definitive; it is meant to be an educational guide for the teaching of archaeometallurgy to an uninitiated audience'. I suspect this was not the intent of the original conference. It was, as Killick (2015: 298) says, 'archaeometallurgists talking to fellow archaeometallurgists'.

This significant volume is presented in roughly two parts; eleven papers deal with archaeometallurgical research methods, including nine on metallurgy, mining and experimental metallurgy methods and two other papers, one on conservation of metallic artefacts (**12**) and the other on enthoarchaeological research (**9**); and sixteen papers that focus on the current state of archaeometallurgical