



NAMES AND LANGUAGES IN CUNEIFORM TEXTS

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The volume under review delves into the field of onomastics and, more specifically, anthroponomastics: it investigates personal names attested in cuneiform texts from Babylonia in the first millennium BCE. The *raison d'être* for choosing such a topic is multifarious. Primarily, there is the concept that personal names are not simply meant to identify individuals but also provide information on their social position. For example, they situate individuals within their communities through patronyms and family names. From the point of view of the name-givers, cultural values are also relevant in the selection of such identifiers: national background, mother tongue, religion and social status are but a few elements that have an impact on the choice. This is all the truer in a globalised, multicultural and socially stratified world, such as Babylonia in the first millennium BCE. After an introduction providing a sound historical background that adeptly contextualises the following chapters, the volume is divided into two parts.

Part 1 encompasses six contributions that deal with Babylonian names utilised by communities in southern Mesopotamian cities. This section opens with an essay by F. Joannès on the social aspects of Babylonian naming practices. It continues with two papers on Babylonian male and female names, by J. Giessler and then L. Cousin and Y. Watai, respectively. Chapter 4, written by J.P. Nielsen, analyses the typology of Babylonian family names and is followed by M. Jursa's paper on *Beamtennamen* ('names of officials'). The last chapter of the first part, by C. Thissen, provides an overview of orthographic conventions used in Babylonian names.

Part 2, which includes twelve chapters, investigates non-Babylonian names recorded in Babylonian texts. Each contribution deals with a non-Babylonian language: Assyrian (H.D. Baker), Aramaic (R. Sonneveld), Hebrew (K. Abraham), Phoenician, Moabite and Ammonite (R. Zadok), Egyptian (S. van Gompel), Greek (P. Corò), Old Iranian (J. Tavemier), Elamite (E. Gorris) and Sumerian (U. Gabbay), as well as Arabian names (A. al-Jallad) and Anatolian names (Z. Simon), concluding with other residual names and those of unexplained origin (R. Zadok). All the studies in the second part share a similar structure: first, a brief discussion on the language followed by the historical background, which provides information on the type of written sources relevant to the specific area of research. Then the authors discuss the main name types, analyse their relevant cultural aspects and, finally, present details on the spelling conventions utilised by Babylonian scribes to render non-Babylonian names. Indeed, all the papers in the volume describe in detail the lexical meaning of the names they examine, discussing their formation, grammar and dictionary meaning.

However, the contributions are not limited to a lexicographic and grammatical analysis of names but also enter fully into the modern and significant field of socio-onomastics. Thus, they investigate the social and cultural ways in which names were created, selected and used. In doing so, the contributions provide information on the origin and variants of personal names, family names and even nicknames, taking into account the different perspectives of the name-givers, name-bearers and name-users. Thanks to such analysis, the authors contribute to shedding light on ancient ethnic

minorities as well as other groups of Babylonian citizens who would have otherwise left only scarce or even no traces behind them: deportees, prisoners of war, immigrants, members of defeated royal families, enslaved people, women and orphans.

Personal names appear to be not static entities within Babylonian society, but rather somewhat variable and meaningful. Unfortunately, modern publications do not always analyse such aspects of socio-onomastics and often do not even provide translations of names for non-specialists. A simple index of personal names, as is often found in modern editions of texts, is insufficient to disclose fully the richness and significance of onomastics in studying ancient Mesopotamian society. It is hoped that volumes like the one under review will prompt scholars to include discussions on personal names when providing translations of texts in the future.

The editors of the volume have conceived it as an introduction and guide to the complex topic of the repertoire of personal names found in Babylonian sources. Therefore, its contributions do not profess any claim to exhaustiveness. Instead, the goal is to provide readers with guidelines and tools to understand the topic and conduct research independently. For this reason, the possibility of confronting the contributors' different methodologies and approaches is particularly interesting. In addition, the 'further reading' sections, included in each chapter, are especially useful because the authors do not simply list references, but also describe why each work is relevant for the specific topic investigated, as well as which aspects have a direct bearing on the argument and which methodologies have been used by scholars. As a result, the volume is constantly and proficiently in dialogue with previous publications as well as ideas expressed by scholars over time, putting them to the test and confirming their validity or highlighting their critical aspects in the light of the most recent text editions and discoveries within the field of Assyriology. However, the papers also include elements of originality, and the authors put forward new hypotheses: for example, Jursa's theory on the reason behind the use of *Beamtennamen*, Thissen's proposed method for determining the correct reading of verbal logograms and Zadok's topographical excursus on the centre of Duqulān.

An additional asset of the volume is that it provides a rich overview of the exceptionally abundant and varied array of textual sources and archives available for the region and period investigated, thus supplying readers with a key to interpret them and effectively demonstrating how ancient texts can be read and understood from multiple angles to obtain all kinds of information. Moreover, the editors' choice to include in the discussion languages that are almost always overlooked in traditional Assyriological publications is praiseworthy.

As a result, while describing the languages spoken in the Babylonian empire of the first millennium BCE, the volume provides evidence of the complexity of that society, thus giving a multifaceted and exhaustive description. Indeed, the names discussed are not simply considered as elements of the language, but are also analysed in terms of how they reveal the lives of individuals who are presented within their social and familial contexts. The volume thus fulfils and extends beyond its proposed goals by making a challenging topic intelligible and engaging for colleagues, students and even 'laypeople'.

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