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Nicholas Postgate, *Bronze Age Bureaucracy: Writing and the Practice of Government in Assyria.* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013. Pp. xi & 484. £65. ISBN 978-1-107-04375-6

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In the first chapter of *Bronze Age Bureaucracy* Postgate clearly states what he intends to achieve with his volume; his aim is to provide a study that enables greater understanding of the administrative and governmental processes that existed during the Middle Assyrian period by examining ten archives. Furthermore he is quite clear as to why this volume is necessary, calling upon the fact that such a study has never been done before and while texts have been published they have not been placed in the necessary social and political context. This opening chapter does not only make it immediately clear to the reader why this book is necessary but also goes on to outline what each chapter will cover and most importantly for any reader clarifies what is meant by the term 'bureaucracy', a term which can be confusing and loaded with connotations that may not always be relevant.

If chapter one is short and relatively straight-forward however the rest of the book certainly is not. This is a volume packed with a wealth of material that threatens to be, at times, overwhelming in its scope, depth and level of detail. Chapters two and three are essentially detailed surveys, the former of the social and economic world of Late Bronze Age Assyria and the latter of the scribal practices and terminology. Chapters four and five form the bulk of the volume and are where Postgate presents the archives. Chapter four includes five archives from Assur itself, explaining the contents and discussing relevant issues whilst chapter five does the same but for five archives from Assyrian provinces. Chapters six to nine summarize the findings, discuss the implications and also contrast and compare the picture created for the Assyrian government and administration to that of Nuzi, Alalaḫ, Ugarit and Greece. Postgate creates a clear picture of the way in which Middle Assyrian administration functioned both within the city and the provinces. He calls upon a vast array of textual evidence, providing texts in transliteration and translation when necessary and summarising content at other times often via the use of well-presented tables. Within the picture provided of administrative processes in Middle Assyria there are gaps. Postgate acknowledges this and is always careful to warn

of the dangers of making assumptions or arguments based on an absence of evidence. What shines through in this volume is the care taken with the evidence and with the reconstruction of the administrative processes and whilst there are, at times, frustrating gaps in the understanding this book is on the whole a comprehensive and extremely detailed account of how bureaucracy functioned in Assyria at this period.

As previously mentioned this volume runs the risk of being overwhelming to a reader but I am loathe to call this a weakness, if anything I would argue that it is a strength due to the manner in which Postgate has handled this potential problem. Firstly the book is excellently structured with a clear and efficient format and superb figures including extremely useful inclusions such as a diagram that illustrates the way in which temple offerings move through the system (pg. 96). These enable greater clarity and understanding of not only the process but of the texts from which our knowledge stems. Another excellent tactic has been to include summaries at the beginning of each archive. Separated from the main text by being placed in italic font these summaries succinctly introduce the main features of the archive such as its location and possible date, an outline of its contents as well as briefly suggesting potential issues for discussion. Already in chapter one Postgate explains that he chose to do this at the suggestion of the publisher's reviewer in order to ensure that readers who might find the level of detail too great might still be able to follow the thread of the book. This tactic combined with others such as citing passages in Akkadian but translating nearly all technical terms into English and keeping the philology to the footnotes ensures that the author achieves another of his aims, which is to address his book to two different audiences. The level of detail, the Akkadian passages and the inclusion of necessary philology ensures the value of the book to specialists. On the other hand the clear structure, helpful appendices including for example the names and dates of Assyrian kings and indices such as lists of Akkadian words in addition to the translation of everything into English ensures that a more general reader can also use and enjoy the book.

Nevertheless it needs to be pointed out that this book is not for the completely uninitiated and some knowledge of the Ancient Near East and specifically of Assyrian history is a prerequisite. As Postgate makes clear at the outset of his volume this is not a textbook. In spite of its high level of detail it does manage to have a broader level of appeal that one might first assume and I think that any student of the Ancient Near East would find this volume extremely useful. For specialists it provides fascinating and intriguing insights, for example the discussion of the difference between Middle and Neo-Assyrian

administrative practices. The volume concludes with a tentative but fascinating suggestion that may have repercussions for our understanding of Assyrian history as a whole. This is that the paralysis that afflicted all levels of Assyrian government and administration by the 13th century BC was caused by a top-heavy bureaucracy and that the developments that led to the rise of the Neo-Assyrian Empire were caused by factors that created a fundamentally new order.