

Stephanie Lynn Budin, Megan Cifarelli, Agnès Garcia-Ventura & Adelina Millet Albà (eds), *Gender and Methodology in the Ancient Near East: Approaches from Assyriology and Beyond*. (Barcino Monographica Orientalia 10.) Barcelona: Institut del Pròxim Orient Antic and University de Barcelona Editions, 2019. ISBN: 978-84-9168-073-4. 408 pp.

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INTRODUCTION

It has been almost five years since the first Workshop on Gender Methodology and the Ancient Near East was held in Helsinki, Finland. Since 2014 the event has continued roughly every other year to gather together international scholars concentrating on the study of gender. The current volume presented and reviewed below – *Gender and Methodology in the Ancient Near East: Approaches from Assyriology and Beyond*, edited by Stephanie Lynn Budin (independent scholar), Megan Cifarelli (Manhattanville College), Agnes Garcia-Ventura (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona), and Adelina Millet Albà (Universitat de Barcelona) – presents the proceedings of the second gender workshop held in Barcelona in 2017.

OVERVIEW

The result of an international and interdisciplinary workshop, *Gender and Methodology in the Ancient Near East: Approaches from Assyriology and Beyond* introduces a wide variety of topics concentrating on the study of gender. Consisting altogether of 23 papers presented at the workshop, the volume includes research focusing mainly on Assyriology and Archaeology but also introduces some topics from the neighbouring disciplines of Biblical Studies and Egyptology. Three thematic sections – namely, Assyriology and Ancient Near Eastern Archaeology, Egyptology, and Ancient Israel & Biblical Studies – form the basic thematic frame of the publication, which, together with the workshop behind it, aims to promote joint work and discussion between Assyriologists, archaeologists, and their neighbouring fields of study.

LAYOUT AND DESIGN

The book begins with the most prominent section of its contents – Assyriology and Archaeology – that covers approximately two-thirds of the volume. This first theme is divided further into five smaller sub-sections according to the most prominent features of the articles – such as Bodies, Gender and Sexuality – but since many of the works presented here fit into more than one

sub-section and some are even isolated under their own topics, the division ends up seeming somewhat more awkward than handy for the reader. Compared with the following sections of the book, which are arranged according to separate academic disciplines and/or geographical regions, the division of the first part of the book appears slightly confusing. In addition, the overall aim of the preceding workshop to promote interdisciplinary research and conversation seems to get lost in this arrangement. This becomes evident especially when one reaches the art and archaeology section of the volume, which is organized quite simply under the label of Material Culture and works as a separate sub-section to the more numerous and prominent pieces of textual research. Even though there are some individual studies in the volume that manage to use both textual and archaeological evidence in their conclusions – most notably Ilan Peled's work on gender ambiguity – these studies are classified under other thematic sections than the one concentrating on material culture. This creates a sharp and not necessarily constructive distinction between the various different disciplines, which otherwise manage to benefit from each other in many of the articles presented.

CONTENTS

Since the foundations of the current volume and the workshop behind it strongly lie in “textual” Assyriology, it does not come as a surprise to the reader that the most prominent theme of the book focuses heavily on the elite. “Elite gender” – or the gender identities of the higher social classes – are variously discussed in the book in relation to body image (Érica Couto-Ferreira), goddess cults (Mónica Palermo Fernández), theoretical history (Ann Guinan), and more generally in relation to ancient women holding an elite status (the whole of Section 1.2). These articles give an interesting overview of how elite gender can be approached in studies of the ancient Near East. Even though it focuses primarily on textual sources, the book manages to introduce a wide variety of regions, methodologies, and viewpoints related to ancient identities and even bring the reader face to face with some of the individuals (Anne-Isabelle Langlois) and phenomena (Anne-Caroline Rendu-Loisel) presented in the texts. As such, the book's first section can be seen as a natural continuation of its predecessor published just last year by Eisenbrauns (see Svärd & Garcia-Ventura 2018). With a less theoretical and introductory take than its forerunner, *Gender and Methodology in the Ancient Near East: Approaches from Assyriology and Beyond* gives its reader an even more wide-ranging and case-specific look into the landscape of gender research of the ancient Near East today. The only task that the first section of the book leaves for future volumes is the task of discussing in more depth social diversity and the “common” people, an approach that has been strongly promoted in recent research concentrating on gender. This would, of course, require even more interdisciplinary co-operation with archaeology than what has already been done, but considering the background of the current and past volumes, the challenge seems surmountable. After three successful workshops and two interdisciplinary publications, the goal of the workshop series to bring researchers and research fields closer together is not so far off.

The striving for interdisciplinarity is doubtlessly one of the clearest advantages of the current volume, which, unlike its predecessor, also includes sections concentrating specifically on ancient Egypt and Israel. Even though the length and positioning of these two sections makes them a bit of a curiosity inside the book, their inclusion is nonetheless an important step towards more concrete and wide-ranging interdisciplinary co-operation. In addition – contrary to the book's first section – many of the articles included in this latter part of the publication

also bring to the fore much-needed “unwritten” voices and aspects of the common people (see, e.g., Thais Rocha da Silva and Beth Albert Nakhai). This adds to the diversity – and, at the same time, the potential audience – of the publication, which should by no means be limited solely to “gender researchers”.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As someone who is still a relative newcomer in the field of gender studies, I would argue that *Gender and Methodology in the Ancient Near East: Approaches from Assyriology and Beyond* works both as an introduction and as a review of what is currently being done in the field of gender research in the ancient Near East. Overall, the articles introduced in the volume are numerous and diverse, and even though their emphasis depends somewhat heavily on textual sources and the elite, the many regions, methodologies, and approaches that they present can be of use to a much wider public than merely Assyriologists and those concentrating primarily on gender research. I would argue that *Gender and Methodology in the Ancient Near East: Approaches from Assyriology and Beyond* constitutes a varied and broadly relevant resource for anyone interested in the study of the ancient Near East.

REFERENCES

- SVÄRD, Saana & Agnès GARCIA-VENTURA (eds) 2018. *Studying Gender in the Ancient Near East* (Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale) University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns.