

Herbert Niehr (ed.), *The Arameans in Ancient Syria* (Handbook of Oriental Studies, Section I, Ancient Near East 106; Leiden: Brill 2014). Pp. xxiv, 462, pls. xlv. \$ 145.24. ISBN 978-90-04-22845-0

HENRYK DRAWNEL

Institute of Biblical Studies
John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin
email: hdrawnel@kul.pl
ORCID: 0000-0003-4425-315X

Being a comprehensive introduction to the current research on the history and culture of the Aramaeans in Syria, the volume edited by Herbert Niehr contains a wealth of information organized into ten chapters written by an international team of specialists. The handbook mostly concentrates on the early Aramaic culture, beginning with the twelfth c. BC and extending the presentation to the defeat of the last Aramaic insurrection against the Assyrian power in 720 BC. The geographic area under investigation includes the territory of central Syria with the exclusion of the Phoenician and Punic cultures, the Luwians and Ugarit. In this monograph, both the indicated time frame and geographic boundaries are rather tentative as the contacts of the Aramaeans with the neighbouring cultures were very rich and productive. Thus, the overview of the Aramaic presence in chapter 9 includes most of the ancient Near East region.

In a short introductory essay (pp. 1-9), Herbert Niehr reviews the sources, chronology, geography, and the state of research in the field of Aramaic studies. The territory of ancient Syria taken in consideration in the present volume extends from the Jazirah region in the east to the Mediterranean in the west, and from the southern Anatolia in the north to Damascus in the south. The regions of Lebanon and Palestine are left out of consideration. H el ene Sader surveys the history of the Aramaic tribes in Syria (pp. 11-36) taking into account the latest research, written sources, and archaeological evidence. The survey concentrates on the two sections of the Iron Age period stresses the cultural continuity between the Late Bronze age population of Syria and the Aramaic tribes of the following period. The new communities structured into independent polities built their cultural and political identity on the North-West languages, domestic autonomy, equality between kin-based groups, and strategic interests of each kingdom.

The essay by Dagmar K uhn (pp. 37-70) analyses the Aramaic society, institutions, law, and economy. Holger Gzella discusses the language and script of Old

Aramaic (pp. 70-107) as reflected in the Tell Fekheriye text, Aramaic inscriptions from central Syria, in the Sam'alian dialect and its successor at Zincirli. The chapter deals with the application of the Phoenician alphabet to Aramaic, the rise of vowel letters, phonology, morphology, morphosyntax, syntax and lexicon. The public epigraphy from the Iron age constitutes the basis for the linguistic description of Aramaic as a Northwest Semitic language, separated from contemporaneous Canaanite and earlier Ugaritic. In his contribution of Aramaic literature (pp. 109-125), Paolo Merlo first debates various narrative patterns and stylistic phrases in royal inscriptions, with much attention paid to the pious and victorious king in contradistinction to the negative portrayal of the king's enemy, battle account, just war and the positive presentation of the present dominion of the king. Some further notes discuss elements of religious and wisdom literature, especially the "words of Aḥiqar."

Herbert Niehr approaches the religion of the Aramaeans of Syria (pp. 127-203) from the point of view of the geographic regions from which the archaeological and epigraphic sources are available. The description of the pantheon, religious character of monarchy, temple, prophecy and divination, magic and funeral as well as mortuary cult begins with the Aramaic sources available from the region located between the Tigris and the Euphrates, then moves from the Euphrates to the Mediterranean and finishes with the area of middle Syria, east of Lebanon.

Dominik Bonatz divides his discussion of Aramaic art (pp. 205-253), strongly influenced by neighbouring cultures, into three parts. First, he deals with monumental sculptural works as exemplified by carved orthostates and portal figures found in archaeological excavations in different Aramaic cities. Then statues and stelae dedicated to gods together with monuments representing rulers are discussed. The article closes with the presentation of glyptic art, ivory products, metal works, and stone vessels.

Since Aramaeans and Luwians coexisted in most of the political entities created after the Late Bronze Age, Mirko Novák argues that Aramaean architecture (pp. 255-271) should always be discussed in conjunction with Luwian or "Neo-Hittite" architecture. Then he concentrates on city planning, citadels and fortifications, palaces and temples, with a short note dedicated to houses and workshops. Chapter 9 dedicated to Aramaeans outside Syria forms the largest section of the book (pp. 273-390). It covers the geographic territories of Assyria (M. Nissinen), Babylonia (M.P. Streck), Anatolia (A. Lemaire), Phoenicia (H. Niehr), Palestine (A. Berlejung), Egypt (A.F. Botta), and Northern Arabia (H. Niehr). Although evidently overstepping the geographic limits established for the publication, the chapter supplements the overview of the Aramaeans in Syria with a succinct overview of Aramaic culture and literature in the ancient Middle East.

The last contribution by John F. Healey presents the Aramaean heritage (pp. 391-402) in regions where Aramaic remained the main language (Edessa, Hatra, Palmyra), or where it had been adopted in a diglossic situation in preference to another, available language (Mesopotamia, Judaea, Nabataea), or in areas that remained under strong Greco-Roman influence (Antioch to Dura Europos). An extensive bibliography, indexes of historical figures, deities, lands and other proper names close the book. The 45 plates with the photographs of Aramaic art and plans of archaeological sites are a precious addition to especially the sections that deal with art and architecture.

The international team of specialists, the vast area of topics concerning the Aramaic culture set within the historical, archaeological and geographical contexts of the ancient Middle East contributed to the creation of an extremely useful handbook in the field of Aramaic studies. Moreover, the publication with its rich bibliography and pieces of Aramaic art presented in the plates undoubtedly constitutes an extensive overview of the current state of research in this vast field of scholarly research that has important ramifications for the study of pre-exilic Israel in its Near Eastern historical and cultural background.

