

*Imperial Peripheries in the Neo-Assyrian Period*. Edited by Craig W. Tyson and Virginia R. Herrmann. Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2019. 320 pp. \$28.95. Ebook. ISBN: 9781607328223.

The principles of core and periphery find a somewhat inadvertent analogy within the collection of papers in *Imperial Peripheries in the Neo-Assyrian Period*, as the excellent scholarship on peripheries herein finds itself in remarkable tension with the volume's largely incompatible core theory.

A key strain of thought within post-war, post-colonial North American archaeology and cultural anthropology, imperial core and periphery models seek in essence to combine spatial analysis of empires with a reconstruction of power dynamics and cultural phenomena in order to articulate the unequal relationship between an imperial core and periphery. This is generally defined as imperialism. This approach has its roots in the great imperialism critiques of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, some of which already discussed Assyria and enjoyed its heyday in the World-Systems movement of the 1970s, when various neo-Marxian scholars sought to probe the origins of capitalism by reconstructing often huge core-periphery models stretching hundreds or even thousands of years into the past. More recently, a more restrained, revised version of this approach has been employed by American archaeologists to describe imperial formations, particularly in the New World. This approach has heavily influenced Bradley Parker's work on Assyria.

In their thorough introduction, the editors of this present volume, Herrmann and Tyson, situate their tome within not only this tradition, but particularly Parker's work. This involves a somewhat programmatic *Forschungsgeschichte* (research history) of Assyria's core and periphery which heavily overstates the influence of World-Systems Theory (only one of various structural models emulated in the past decades), concluding with the broadly post-structural imbroglio currently describing study of the Assyrian Empire. In essence, the excellent archaeological and textual image now available has provoked a struggle to find a theoretical construct with which to adequately describe Assyria's imperial career considering the remarkable diversity of phenomena observable on its peripheries.

The post-colonial solution presented in this volume is the inversion of the core-periphery model in order to challenge the notion of a "passive periphery," presenting rather what the editors term a "bottom-up" analysis. The common weakness of such an approach is that it necessitates the retention of the original dialectic: an "active periphery" must be a periphery nonetheless; the subaltern can speak, but it remains a subaltern regardless of what it says. In such a scheme, all Assyrian influence in a periphery is evidence of imperialism and all absence thereof denotes resistance thereto. The explanatory weaknesses of such a mode of analysis are apparent to many of the contributors (especially Darby, Brown, Cifarelli, Cannavò), who distance themselves from it, particularly as it does not describe the primary evidence which they present. Indeed, emic Assyrian sources make very clear the sharp distinction between directly administered territory and vassals beyond, something which studies such as Parker's seeking to

describe imperial control as a spectrum (a notion entirely conceptually foreign to Assyrian sources) have minimized, leading to an oft-counterproductive reconstruction of imperial influence beyond the limits within emic sources.

Turning to the nine individual chapters, Düring's contribution serves as a bridge between his earlier edited volume on Middle Assyria as a "hegemonic empire" and his subsequent work on the imperialization of Assyria. His own reading of Assyria's imperial trajectory is coherently argued, and the sentiment of unifying Middle and early Neo-Assyria strikes something of a chord. He does not engage with the issue of core and periphery beyond emphasising the diverse reactions of Middle and Neo-Assyria to different border areas and the heterogeneity of territorial organization evident thereby.

Guarducci competently handles the issue of Assyrian involvement in the Upper Tigris from a largely archaeological perspective, including detailed discussion of the extremely complicated issue of the region's ceramics, of the *dunnu* system employed during the Middle Assyrian period, and of the settlement intensification and landscape infilling known from elsewhere within the Neo-Assyrian state. Guarducci's emphasis upon nomadic entanglements within these processes is particularly welcome. As with other authors, a drawback is the focus upon the archaeologically well-documented province of Tušḫan, without factoring in the history of the wider Assyrian holdings in the area (including the province of Sinābu/Amēdu/Bīt-Zamāni/Na'iri to the northwest and most likely part of the province of the Cupbearer (*rab šāqê*) to the southeast), and an agrarian bias in explaining Assyria's interests in the region, while textual sources strongly hint at its importance for the breeding of horses, a vital commodity for the early Neo-Assyrian state.

Faust's chapter takes the reader on a heady journey through Assyrian involvement in the southern Levant, which benefits from a wealth of archaeological data, but also showcases the heated synthetic arguments common within Biblical archaeology. He articulates a clear distinction between the ravaged and declining north of the region which had been annexed by Assyria and a prosperous south beyond Aššur's pale. Although a dearth of Assyrian administrative texts means that the actual running of these provinces cannot be reconstructed as is the case for Assyria's northern and eastern frontiers, the weight of the archaeological evidence presented would seem to ring true, especially as a pattern of Assyrian inability to control or foster trade economies has slowly begun to emerge, especially in Phoenicia.

Darby considers the much-discussed issue of Judean pillar figurines (JPFs), rightly challenging stances seeking a direct correlation between resistance to Assyrian hegemony and their (domestic) use while contextualising this within the broader phenomenon of the spread in the employment of figurines during the Early Iron age, and the potential delineation of a Judean identity from neighbouring cultures by use of these figurines. The reviewer found the notion of a rise of figurines relating to a rise in disease epidemics due to the mass movements of peoples during the Neo-Assyrian Empire's establishment interesting, although the most devastating plague periods occurred prior to the Levantine mass deportations of Tukultī-apil-Ešarra III. On the other hand, the reviewer would add that transfer of Mesopotamian ritual and medical

knowledge westwards would seem to be supported by finds of cuneiform medical texts from Huzurīna and now Marqasu (modern Sultantepe and Kahramanmaraş, Turkey, respectively). It would be interesting to consider these findings on the JPFs in light of the now well-documented phenomena of “Euphrates Syrian pillar figurines” and “Euphrates Handmade Syrian Horses and Riders” in the late Neo-Assyrian period.

Brown’s contribution on Edomite foodways is also an excellent summary of the myriad complexities in reconstructing Edom’s political history and neatly integrates new findings from Busayra into prior research, appropriately concluding that these dialogues concerning consumption within an elite belong within a local, Levantine context. This is entirely cogent considering that Assyria never directly conquered the polities of Ammon, Moab, or Edom, nor indeed displayed much overt interest in them until the final century of its rule. Direct expansion into this region was left to the Neo-Babylonian Empire likely in conjunction with its broader trade interests in northern Arabia.

Such pragmatism, unfortunately, cannot be found in Tyson’s contribution, which takes a maximalist approach to Assyrian involvement in Ammon, despite the rather scant evidence. He bolsters his case with repeated appeals to an “imperial framework,” free use of the word “incorporation,” and references to the Neo-Babylonian Empire, which, as noted, pursued an entirely different territorial strategy within this region. All of this nicely fits the theoretical thrust of his introduction but less so with the phenomena visible in the archaeological record, which bespeak a local development of complexity and a competitive elite participating in a Levantine cultural discourse. At most, these were imperial emulators, hardly the “collaborators” of the chapter’s title. Its programmatic findings aside, it remains a useful summary of evidence for the emergence of the Ammonite state.

Cifarelli presents a case study from the key site of Hasanlu in the Zagros region, neatly dismantling not only the assumption of an Assyrianised elite, but also any meaningful core-periphery relationship at all, a dynamic to which the reviewer can only assent. Gilzānu (likely Hasanlu) was a key source of horses for Assyria, but its inaccessibility meant that Assyria could only exact very occasional tribute and seek rather to control the southern exits of trade routes in the Zagros piedmont. Particularly exciting are her discussions of the large collection of much earlier Mesopotamian status symbols at Hasanlu, which point to a historical consciousness stretching back into the Bronze Age and of the expected northwards orientation of much cultural influence.

Cannavò cogently argues Cyprus’s place within the Neo-Assyrian world and is entirely forthright with assumptions (Lulû as Eulelaios, Kition as Kittim as Qarthadasht). As with the case of the independent polities of the southern Levant, it is clear that Cyprus ultimately belonged to the Phoenician sphere of influence, and its Assyrian influences were refractions thereof. A single stele does not a province make; the local ruler may have simply considered this a charming curio from a distant monarch. Rather than Cannavò’s analogy of Britain and China, the reviewer is reminded of Suleyman the Great’s fascinating correspondence with Elisabeth I, in which the English monarch’s demur if cordial statements were translated by overkeen Ottoman

dragomen into obsequious promises of vassalage. Regardless, any tangible core-periphery relationship between Cyprus and Assyria might be dismissed.

Parker's programmatic conclusion of sorts to the volume unveils his ungainly portmanteau of a portmanteau, "neo-pericentrics." A windmill-tilt at a perceived archaeological bias in favour of the imperial core some two decades years late in coming is followed by theorization on the "pathways to power," and the epiphany that empires are made of "relationships" (an "unusual vantage point," despite Systems Theory). A summarizing jaunt through the previous chapters ensues, in which the various refutations of core and periphery's applicability are transmuted into an expression of the periphery's importance.

In sum, the authors of this volume are to be congratulated on their achievement, presenting timely and insightful analysis of various important case studies within and beyond Assyria's pale. The only thorn in one's side is the theoretical superstructure, the counter-productivity of which now seems evident. It is notable that a comparable collection of articles on the edges of the Neo-Assyrian realm since published has foregone such a theoretical bent in favour of simply presenting new data.

Perhaps the future of research into Assyria may not be Assyria at all. With the online publication of the majority of Assyrian primary textual sources and completion of various surveys and excavation projects in Turkey, Syria, and northern Iraq, a long research cycle on Assyria is gradually concluding. In turn, recent and exciting 'peripheral' data are likely to fundamentally alter reconstructions of the economic balance of power during Assyria's ascent in the coming decade. These include new, earlier dates for the Phoenician colonization of the western Mediterranean dating back to the ninth century BCE and the rise of a spectacularly affluent hybrid culture in Ethiopia during roughly the same period. In turn, the concrete effects of the Near Eastern "Dark Age" have rightly come under increasing scrutiny, and the *frisson* of peers such as Babylonia as a driver in Neo-Assyria's rise has been acknowledged. A multiplicity of actors is likely to emerge within this new scenario; that Assyria had the largest territorial extent may not necessarily translate into the most power, or, indeed, economic or cultural influence within the Near East; the previous assumption of such is ironically the result of core and periphery, imperialism theory, and post-colonial models. The development of novel paradigms could do much to address this.

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