

Turkish Foreign Policy, 1774-2000

REVIEWS

THE ANCIENT WORLD

ULLA KOCH-WESTENHOLZ:

Babylonian liver omens: the chapters Manzāzu, Padānu and Pān tākalti of the Babylonian extispicy series, mainly from Aššurbanipal's library.

(Carsten Niebuhr Institute Publications, 25.) 543 pp., 49 plates. Copenhagen Museum Tusulanum Press, 2000.

The cuneiform tablets recovered in the nineteenth century from the ruined palaces of Assyrian kings at Nineveh continue to give up their secrets. Slowly, very slowly, the small international community of Assyriologists is processing the huge morass of primary material and making it available to those who do not read cuneiform. In this pioneering work texts of mythological, literary and historical interest have been most often the focus of scholarly attention. As a consequence, however, a large proportion of the less immediately exciting Assyrian tablets has been neglected, remaining either completely unpublished or available only as unannotated cuneiform texts. Some years ago a Finnish scholar, Simo Parpola, described the archival documents from Nineveh as essentially a 'heap of meaningless junk'. Since then he and others in Helsinki have transformed Neo-Assyrian studies by sorting, studying and editing the tablets in the fifteen volumes of the *State Archives of Assyria* (Helsinki, 1987-). With the project nearing completion there exists at last a tool for research into every aspect of seventh-century Assyria that can be used by everyone. The junk is junk no more.

The book under review represents the beginning of a similar project. Very many tablets from the royal libraries of Nineveh contain texts concerned with divination by inspecting the organs of sacrificial animals. The ancient scholars' reports on individual acts of extispicy have been collected and edited twice, the last time in the *State Archives of Assyria* series. However, the much larger corpus of professional divination compendia, which account for so large a proportion of the Assyrian libraries, has enjoyed very little attention in the last hundred years. Many tablets of omens have been published in cuneiform only and others not at all. Very few editions have been made of any of the many dozens of individual omen compendia from Nineveh.

Extispicy was one of the principal pillars of ancient Mesopotamian religious, intellectual and political life, since it was believed to afford the most reliable means of questioning the gods about their intentions and desires. To be privy to the will of God was what ancient man yearned for most. Diviners held the key to the manipulation of this channel of communication and their expertise was accordingly a vital tool in the exercise of political power. Consequently a book which sets out to make sense of the fragmentary remains of King Aššurbanipal's considerable library of extispicial omen tablets by editing and translating them—this provides the primary source material for the study of a central instrument of Babylonian culture.

Ulla Koch-Westenholz's pioneering work presents a modern edition of about twenty-seven ancient omen compendia and thus begins the transmission

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