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Studies – incidentally convened by two prominent members of the RAS, Edward Ullendorff and Charles Beckingham – was held at the University of Manchester in 1963; and a third, organised by the present writer, later RAS Librarian, was held in Addis Ababa in 1966. Further conferences followed: in Rome again, and then successively in Nice, Chicago, Tel Aviv, Lund, Addis Ababa (for the second time), Moscow, Paris, Addis Ababa (the convention having by then been established that every third gathering should be in the Ethiopian capital), East Lansing, Michigan, Kyoto, Addis Ababa, and the last to date, Hamburg. Conference Proceedings, in some cases running to two or three volumes, have been published for each of these gatherings, except for that in Paris where, for reasons of financial stringency, only the first volume appeared.

These inter-disciplinary Conferences later spawned a series of International Conferences on the History of Ethiopian Art. The first of these, sponsored by the RAS, was held at the University of London's Warburg Institute in 1989.

A more recent development in the Ethiopian conference saga was the convening by Walter Raunig and Steffen Wenig in Munich in 2002 of the Ersten Internationalen Littmann-Konferenz, i.e. First International Littmann Conference. It was called after the great German Semitist, Enno Littmann (1875–1958), who was *inter alia* founder of archaeological research at the ancient Ethiopian city of Aksum.

The proceedings of this conference contain seven significant papers on the archaeology of northern Ethiopia, including an extensive survey by the prominent Italian scholar Rodolfo Fatovich; four papers on the history of the Horn of Africa, among them one by a young German historian Wolbert Smidt on eighth-century Chinese documentation; eight papers on the history of the Ethiopian church, including a perceptive comparison of the religious policies of the Ethiopian Emperors Zär'a /a'eqob (1434–1468) and Yohannes IV (1872–1889), the Ethiopian historian Dejazmach Zewde Gabre-Sellassie; seven papers broadly connected with Enno Littmann's life and work; and a further seven on recent research, including a thought-provoking essay by the American cultural historian Martha Henze on Oriental carpets and textiles in Ethiopian churches.

Littmann conferences seem to have come to stay, for a second was held recently. Convened very appropriately in the ancient city of Aksum, now a remote provincial town, it opened on the anniversary of Littmann's arrival a century earlier in 1906. The conference, which included a number of important papers, was effortlessly organised by Wolbert Smidt, who will be publishing the proceedings.

Scholarly German interest in Ethiopia, which dates back to the seventeenth-century German linguist Hiob Ludolf, author of the first Ge'ez and Amharic lexicons and grammars, as well as a *Historia Aethiopia* in Frankfurt in 1681, is fully alive. Other expressions of this are to be seen in the successful operation of a largely German-sponsored South Omo Research Centre, in the south of the country, and the flourishing Goethe Institute in Addis Ababa. It has recently acquired new premises, together with the repatriation of 40 paintings by one of Ethiopia's foremost modern artists, the late Gabre-Kristos Desta.

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RITUAL AND POLITICS IN ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA. Edited by BARBARA NEVLING PORTER (American Oriental Series 88). pp. xi, 120. New Haven, American Oriental Society, 2005.

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This volume contains the revised and expanded versions of papers presented at a workshop on "Rituals and Politics in Ancient Mesopotamia", organised by the editor, Barbara Nevling Porter, and held during

the *Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale* at Helsinki in 2001, the proceedings of which have been published elsewhere (S. Parpola and R.M. Whiting [eds], *Sex and Gender in the Ancient Near East. Proceedings of the 47th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale* [Helsinki, 2002]).

Given the meaty topic, it is somewhat surprising to find that the book is a slim volume of 120 pages containing only three papers. Two of these deal with the Neo-Assyrian period (c. 1000 to 600 BC): Julian Reade investigates “Religious Ritual in Assyrian Sculpture” (pp. 7–61, with 32 figures) while Philippe Talon discusses “Cases of Deviation in Neo-Assyrian Annals and Foundation Documents” (p. 99–114), focussing on such inscriptions and the objects they are inscribed on that are to be considered in some way unusual; Talon sees these as material witnesses for the attempt to remedy what he perceives to be the “Curse of the Sargonids” (p. 114). Walther Sallaberger’s paper, “Von politischem Handeln zu rituellem Königtum. Wie im Frühen Mesopotamien ein Herrscher seine Taten darstellt” (pp. 63–93, with an English summary on pp. 95–98), deals with an altogether different age, the period from the Early Dynastic to the Old Babylonian Period (c. 2500 to 1600 BC). Sallaberger analyses how the ruler’s military achievements were represented in royal inscriptions, hymns and year names, focussing on the changing attitudes towards the historical setting in time and place: When royal actions are presented as if timeless and placeless, Sallaberger maintains this is to convey the notion that battle was seen as a ritual enactment meant to re-establish the cosmic order. Sallaberger’s argument is a persuasive one, and it would seem worthwhile to further develop it to also include the evidence of the later periods.

These brief comments will already have made it clear that the three contributions to this volume, although certainly not mislabelled under the title “Ritual and Politics in Mesopotamia”, have little in common and offer very different approaches; although they have been revised for the publication (p. 4) no discernible effort seems to have been made to develop links between them. While Sallaberger’s paper was originally written for an altogether different workshop on “Rituals and Historiography” (p. 63 n. 1), Talon’s article appears to be the by-product of a work in progress on “Neo-Assyrian Annals and Literacy” (p. 102 n. 15), and Reade’s richly illustrated survey of the various depictions of religious/cultic/ritual scenes to be found in the Assyrian palace sculpture is primarily a collection of data, an important first step towards the analysis of this valuable material which Reade suggests to place in the context of its architectural setting and the written sources (p. 7).

It is interesting to note that the organiser of the workshop and the editor of the volume did not try to offer a synthesis of any kind either; instead, she opted to use her own contribution, “Interactions of Ritual and Politics in Mesopotamia. An Introduction” (pp. 1–6), to provide an outline of the genesis of the workshop, brief summaries of the papers and some comments on the fact that “it quickly became evident during the workshop that both the speakers and the participants in the discussion held varying ideas about the meaning of the word *ritual* and that these unexplored differences contributed to the difficulty of discussing an already complex question” (p. 5); Porter’s own views are informed by the anthropologist David I. Kertzer’s 1988 monograph *Ritual, Politics, and Power* (p. 1) which none of her three contributors appears to have used in their studies.

That the volume could have been more than a collection of three thought-provoking, if largely unrelated articles, had some key issues been agreed on beforehand, is indeed also evident from the excerpts of the open discussion which concluded the Helsinki workshop (additional participants: Stephanie Dalley, Victor Hurowitz, Baruch Levine and Tallay Ornan) that complete the volume (pp. 115–120); these mostly deal with the Neo-Assyrian period and have been grouped under six headings: “Formal Processions and Their Political Impact”; “Letters to Gods: Response to a Problem or Annual Event?”; “What is Ritual and What is Not?”; “Esarhaddon’s Black Stone: Its Provenance and Its Significance for Ritual”; “Rituals: Necessary or Optional?”; “Why Rituals Change”. Some of these questions are of course of fundamental importance, and that they were the subject of controversy in the concluding session of a workshop devoted to “Ritual and Politics in Mesopotamia” illustrates

well that this field of study is by no means exhausted; the publication of this volume highlights the need for further and more comprehensive research.

The subject is indeed under study: another 2005 publication, *Die Welt der Rituale von der Antike bis heute*, edited by Claus Ambos, Stephan Hotz, Gerald Schwedler and Stefan Weinfurter, is the first product of a major interdisciplinary research project with the ambitious title "Ritualdynamik: Soziokulturelle Prozesse in historischer und kulturvergleichender Perspektive", housed at the University of Heidelberg, and the Mesopotamian evidence, again mostly from the Neo-Assyrian period, is dealt with prominently in ten case studies by Claus Ambos and Stefan Maul. Those interested in "Ritual and Politics in Mesopotamia" will find this volume a stimulating companion to Porter's book.

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THE BYZANTINE AND EARLY ISLAMIC NEAR EAST VI: ELITES OLD AND NEW. Edited by JOHN HALDON AND LAWRENCE I. CONRAD. pp 316, figs 18. Princeton, Darwin Press, 2004.

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The ten papers gathered here are the fruits of the sixth workshop, held in 1999, of the Late Antiquity and Early Islam project that was established in 1989 by the authors, together with Averil Cameron, and which has produced a string of high-quality publications, both monographs and, like the volume under review here, proceedings of subject-specific workshops. This volume is a further contribution to that ongoing project, elucidating the changes that occurred in the Near East during this transitional period (ca. 550–750 AD), focusing on the subject of the region's elites.

The first paper and the last paper, by Hugh Kennedy and Michael Morony respectively, treat the question of Islamic elites. The former does so from the point of view of their income, in particular that coming from land grants and landed estates. The material adduced is fascinating and yields a number of very interesting insights, such as that land grants were apparently very often permanent and emphyteutic in the eighth century AD, geared towards the redeployment of abandoned land, that a land-owning aristocracy was flourishing at this time, but that subsequently rulers increasingly appropriated this land and only gave it back out for the purposes of fixed-term tax collection. Morony gives a brief survey of the elites, both Muslim and non-Muslim, that held sway in the two centuries after the Arab conquests. Though his contribution is only ten pages long, he identifies some very useful pieces of evidence, including a silver bowl of Windad Ohrmazd and the stucco decoration of Chal Tarkhan near Rayy, both testifying to the endurance of Sasanian elite aesthetic motifs. The second paper in the book, by William and Fidelity Lancaster, looks at some salient features of leadership among modern Bedouin, providing food for thought on the nature of early Muslim rule, which relied heavily for its military manpower on tribesmen from a similar socio-environmental background.

Papers three and four, by Leslie Brubaker and Averil Cameron, are more theoretical, treating issues of patronage and democratisation respectively. The former is a detailed study of the changing way in which the elite of Thessalonike related to their patron saint Demetrios, from a more personal relationship to a more civic one, members of the elite no longer just individual supplicants but representatives of the urban community alongside its protector, Demetrios. Cameron argues against, sensibly to my mind, the idea that there was a democratisation or popularisation (or 'dumbing down' in contemporary parlance) in sixth–eighth-century Byzantium, an idea that was born of the modern elitist notion that increased recourse to icons and religious literature in these centuries must be a populist phenomenon. She also gives worthwhile discussion about such matters as 'what constitutes an elite', and the changing nature