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Gendered laws of war

Warlike men and invisible women: how scribes in the Ancient Near East represented warfare

Hommes guerriers et femmes invisibles, le choix des scribes dans le Proche-Orient ancien

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Warlike men and invisible women: how scribes in the Ancient Near East represented warfare

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In the Ancient Near East,¹ the military domain was considered a man's affair. Discussions of it in cuneiform writings leave only a small role to women apart from that of victim and, even then, little is said about them.² More precisely, this view of things reflects the fact that the available sources almost never speak of women as actors, whether it be on the field of battle or when towns were under siege. Extensive and varied data is nevertheless available to the Assyriologist, whether in the form of legislative texts or of a more generally legal nature royal inscriptions, Assyrian palace reliefs³ and so on. But evidence concerning the treatment of women in wartime is not only to be sought in "official" sources; it can also be found in practical texts (the tablets that were produced on a daily basis by royal and provincial administrations as well as by shrines and individuals). They give an idea of the place of women in times of conflict.⁴

¹ By "civilizations of the Ancient Near East" [French: Proche-Orient] I am referring to the civilizations of the vast region running from the Mediterranean coast to present day Iran over a period extending from the second half of the third millennium to the disappearance of the Persian Achaemenid Empire in 331-330 B.C. For reasons relating to my source material, however, I focus on the first millennium and Mesopotamia. NB: consequently for the purposes of this article, the term 'Ancient Near East' will be the preferred term in English, rather than 'Middle East'. [Trans.]

² For an earlier discussion of women in Near Eastern studies, see Chavalas 2014.

³ These consist in orthostate representations of the campaigns of the Assur kings, many of which exist for the ninth to seventh centuries B.C.

⁴ Here, I leave aside literary and religious sources, which do not enter into the framework of a discussion of established practices. For the same reasons, I also

Given the structure of these written records, this article begins with a very brief consideration of the possible existence of “laws of war” in the Ancient Near East. It will then consider some of the available tenuous evidence as to women’s involvement as actors in warfare. Finally, it will address the question of violence done to them, underscoring a particular consequence of this violence (in this case, for the victor) – to wit, the management and exploitation of human beings as “spoils of war”.

The law of war in the Ancient Near East

The various civilizations of the Ancient Near East produced legal codes and many other juridical texts, a large number of which have survived the passage of time. Such sources should allow one to consider one or several laws of war and the place occupied in them by women. And, indeed, the latter are the object of many laws as well as a large number of documents of a juridical nature.

For structural reasons, however, this abundant data, which covers a period of roughly two thousand years, does not particularly lend itself to an examination of the manner in which acts of war committed against women – still less, if at all, those committed by women themselves – were regarded. This situation is not due to a lack of concern regarding the situation of women in times of conflict but rather to source bias: the texts of the Ancient Near East did not genuinely theorize the law of war. War remained a practice, based on the strength of the spear, the right of the strongest, with the latter disposing of the vanquished as he saw fit. Yet prevailing in war was proof of the victor’s divine election and this granted him full legitimacy to subsequently behave as he wished. Moreover, the existence of laws specific to war implies a well-defined situation of conflict. While warfare, from the opening of hostilities to treaties of peace, did indeed exist in the Ancient Near East, the state of belligerency was for its part often vaguely defined and the Ancients did not always distinguish between the onset, aftermath and state of

will not consider the omens of Neo-Assyrian prophetesses concerning political and military subjects, though it should be noted that they seem to have been well-informed regarding the latter issue.

war. Nothing in this framework specifically refers to actions taken by soldiers against women or, for that matter, against men and children. When a population was deported for example, its new status thus depended on the legal system of the victorious state, with individuals being treated as slaves, dependents or even free persons. That system did not in itself reflect either the situation of peace or that of war. As a consequence, no international codification of war existed.

Nevertheless, Mesopotamian legislative texts specified duties incumbent upon the king which exceeded simply defending the country or expanding his power. Thus, monarchs or their representatives were supposed to ransom their imprisoned subjects to spare them from slavery abroad,⁵ as well as to defend the weak, a category that traditionally included widows.⁶ Moreover, states established legal principles adapted to the situations of individuals who remained “behind the front lines”. Thus women whose husbands were listed as missing in battle could remarry, once a legally defined period had passed, if the goods left behind by their husbands were insufficient to provide for them. Here is what the Code of Hammurabi, king of Babylon between 1792 and 1750 BCE, has to say about the matter:

§ 133. If a man should be captured and there are sufficient provisions in his house, his wife [... will not] enter [another’s house]. If that woman does not keep herself chaste but enters another’s house, they shall charge and convict that woman and cast her into the water.

§ 134. If a man should be captured and there are not sufficient provisions in his house, his wife may enter another’s house; that woman will not be subject to any penalty.

§ 135. If a man should be captured and there are not sufficient provisions in his house, and before his return his wife enters another’s house and bears children, and afterwards her husband returns and gets back to his city, that woman shall return to her first husband; the children shall inherit from their father.⁷

⁵ This duty exceeded the framework of prisoners of war and applied to any “plundered” subject. For an example of repurchase, see Cole 1996, text 72: 158-160.

⁶ The prolog to Hammurabi’s Code thus specifies that the king promulgated the following laws “so that the strong not oppress the weak”.

⁷ For Hammurabi’s Code of Laws and other legislative texts, see Roth 1995, who has very conveniently brought together the texts of Mesopotamian and Hittite

Such measures sought to protect individuals whose status as widows could tremendously weaken their economic situation. They also guaranteed that any husband who had provided in his absence for the proper upkeep of his family could recover his place upon his return. The laws of the Middle Assyrian Empire⁸ reflected those of the earlier, Hammurabi era. There, one learns that the spouse of a prisoner of war could remarry after an absence of two years:⁹

[I]f a woman has been given [in marriage] and her husband is subsequently taken by the enemy (and) she does not have a stepfather or son, she will remain her husband's for two years.¹⁰

During this period, the spouse's situation was taken into account in the following lines, as the text specifies:

During these two years, if she has nothing to eat, she is to make a declaration.¹¹

This declaration allowed her to win recognition as needy. Depending on the status of her husband, the palace or town authorities would then supply her with the means of subsistence for the duration of this two-year period. Finally, should her spouse not return:

She will complete the two years and she will (subsequently) live with the husband of her choice; her tablet will (then) be redrafted as (for) a widow.¹²

In the event that the first husband should return after this two-year period had passed, the spouse was to go back to him. As in paragraph 135 of the Code of Laws of Hammurabi, however, should

laws. For the passage from Hammurabi's Code of Laws cited above, refer to pages 106-107 of the most recent edition, Roth 2014: 153.

⁸ The examples that have been preserved can be dated to the reign of Assyrian king Tiglath Pileser I (1114-1076).

⁹ Cardascia 1969: 217-226. The Middle Assyrian laws are also easily accessible by way of the new edition prepared by Roth 1995: 153-194 and more precisely for tablet A § 45 which interests us here: 170-171. For this same passage, see also Roth: 167.

¹⁰ Middle Assyrian laws, tablet A, § 45, col. Vi, ll. 46-49 (for this passage and those that follow, I follow the translation of Cardascia 1969: 217-218, which I have slightly modified).

¹¹ Tablet A, § 45, col. Vi, ll. 50-51.

¹² Tablet A, § 45, col. Vi, ll. 69-71.

she have remarried in the meantime, any children that may have been born of the second marriage were to remain with the second husband.¹³ It is clear then that by these provisions, the combatant was himself protected and could be certain that, as far as possible, his status, goods and family would be restored to him upon his return.

A marginal documentary case: women “combatants”

Setting aside the question of laws to address the practice of warfare itself, it should immediately be noted that the existence of women “actors” can only be considered in very allusive fashion. In an article devoted to women in war, Amélie Kuhrt searched for signs of their presence on the battlefield.¹⁴ There are very few cases of women directly involved in clashes. The documentary evidence, such as it is, is almost exclusively to be found in sources from outside the Near East and for later periods – that is, dating from the second half of the first millennium BCE. Kuhrt thus notes that Quintus Curtius Rufus¹⁵ stresses the presence of Darius III’s family at the Battle of Issus in 333 – according to him, this was a tradition in the First Persian Empire. On the basis of the written sources, however, it is clear that this falls well short of an active role; the king travelled with his relations, but no specific military role was assigned them. For their part, moreover, the Assyrian and Babylonian kings who immediately preceded the Persians do not seem to have observed any such practice.

There remains the very exceptional case of women whose hierarchical position offered them an opportunity to act as leaders in wartime. Once again, the sources are never explicit, at least not when documenting the situation in the Mesopotamian states themselves. It is to be noted, however, that the figures of two queens were closely associated with their reigning sons. The first of them is Shammuramat, better known as Semiramis. As the mother of Adad-nirari III (810-783), she was at his side in the treaties passed with the Western states.¹⁶

¹³ Tablet A, § 45, col. Vi. ll. 72-78.

¹⁴ Kuhrt 2001: 9-11.

¹⁵ Quintus Curtius Rufus 3.8.12, Kuhrt 2001: 9.

¹⁶ It is to be noted that Shammuramat described herself as daughter-in-law of Salmanasar III, a ninth-century king, whose power and prestige served to legitimate

At the start of her son's reign, Shammuramat seems to have led the Assyrian state with such brilliance that she left a memory of herself, doubtless tinged with legend, in the classical sources (particularly the writings of Ctesias).¹⁷ It must be admitted, however, that she is not to be seen explicitly acting as a wartime leader, possibly due to the nature of our documentary sources.¹⁸ It nevertheless remains the case that she appears in her son's inscriptions, particularly when the latter intervened to the west of the Euphrates, as shown by the inscription found at Kızkapanlı near Maraş:¹⁹

Boundary stone of Adad-nirari, king of Assyria, son of Šamši-Adad (V), king of Assyria, (and of) Sammuramat, the palace-woman of Šamši-Adad, king of Assyria, mother of Adad-nirari, strong king, king of Assyria, daughter-in-law of Shalmaneser (III), king of the four quarters.

When Ušpilulume, king of the Kummuhites, caused Adad-nirari, king of Assyria, (and) Sammuramat, the palace woman, to cross the Euphrates; I fought a pitched battle with them – with Ataršumki, son of Adramu, of the city of Arpad, together with eight kings who were with him at the city Paqarahubunu. I took away from them their camp. To save their lives they dispersed. In this (same) year they erected this boundary stone between Ušpilulume, king of the Kummuhites, and Qalparuda, son of Palalam, king of the Gurgumites. [...] ²⁰

an unusual role and actions for a Mesopotamian queen. On the very peculiar figure of Shammuramat / Semiramis, see Bahrani 2001: 176-177 and Asher Greve 2006.

¹⁷ Auburger 1991: 32-47. But see also Herodotus I, 184-188; Diodorus of Sicily, *Bibliotheca historica* II, 5-15.

¹⁸ In the classical sources, she was indeed remembered as having been a warlike queen. However, the remarks of the various authors must very often be treated with caution. For discussions of Shammuramat's role in leading Assyria, see Shramm 1972; Dalley 2005; Siddall 2011: 159-173 and Svärd 2012: 102-104.

¹⁹ Inscription "Adad-narari III A.0.104.3", Grayson 1996: 204-205. For a recent edition in the specific framework of the collection of Assyrian royal inscriptions that assign a particular place to women, see Melville 2014: 228-229.

²⁰ Shammuramat is also one of the rare queens to have a monument in the alley of steles at Assur (Melville 2004: 233, "Stele of Shammuramat, 'lady of the palace' of Šamši-Adad (V), king of the World, king of Assyria, mother of Adad-nirari (III) king of the World, king of Assyria, daughter-in-law of Salmanasar (III), king of the four regions"). Two other queens have a monument in their name in this alley of steles: the name of the first is broken (Dalley 2005: 17, n. 36 proposes to reconstruct

As the monarch officially received credit for armed exploits, the battle that is referred to here, which allowed the Assyrian king to project his army eastward, is recounted in the first person. However, Shammuramat's close association with this military campaign and, in particular, the battle of Paqarahubunu suggests that she may have herself led the armies of her young son.

The second female Assyrian sovereign who may have commanded armies was the wife of Sennacherib, a king who reigned from 704 to 681. Known as Zakutu in Assyrian and Naqī'a in Aramaic, she saw to it that her son Esarhaddon (680-669) succeeded Sennacherib, even though that should not have taken place.²¹ It seems likely that she helped Esarhaddon ascend the throne when his brother Arad-Mullissu took up arms against him.²² Once again, however, no source places her on a battlefield, and all glory is accorded her son, who moreover sponsored the inscriptions relating these events. This is ultimately not very surprising, to the degree that war was considered an exclusively masculine domain, at least as narrated by royal inscriptions.²³

The possibility that certain female sovereigns played an active role in wartime also arises in Assyrian sources from the eighth and seventh centuries BCE, this time in the case of Arab queens. The Assyrian monarchs Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727), Sennacherib (705-681), Esarhaddon (680-669) and finally Ashurbanipal (668-630/627) mention queens who commanded Arab populations and armies.²⁴ Of these, the case of Samsi under Tiglath-Pileser III is the most revealing. Here is what the annals of this monarch have to say:

Zakutu, cf. *infra*) and Libbali-šarrat, Queen of Aššurbanipal (668-630/627). For a convenient publication of these inscriptions, cf. Melville 2014: 232-233.

²¹ On Naqī'a/Zakutu, cf. Melville 1999.

²² Radner 2007.

²³ With the notable exception of what took place in the world of the gods where one of the great warrior figures is Istar, a goddess often likened to Aphrodite in the Hellenistic period. She was a warrior, not a warlord.

²⁴ Eph'al 1982: 118-128 (the queens Samsi, Zabibe under Tiglath-Pileser III, Te'elhunu and Tabua under Sennacherib and Esarhaddon) and 152-153 (Adiya under Ashurbanipal but this latter appeared with her husband). Cf. Kuhrt 2001: 10-11. Esarhaddon also referred to the deportation, by his father Sennacherib, of Queen Apkallatu (*RINAP* 4, Esarhaddon 1, ll. iv1-iv5).

As for Samsi, queen of the Arabs, at Mount Saqurri, [I] de[feated] 9,400 (of her people)]. I took away (from her) 1,000 people, 30,000 camels, 20,000 oxen (etc.). Moreover, she, in order to save her life, [... (and) set out] like a female onager [to the de]sert, a place (where one is always) thirsty. [I set the rest of her possessions] (and) her [ten]ts, her people's safeguard within her camp [on fire].²⁵

Subsequently, the queen obediently paid tribute, all the more so as, following this defeat, a representative of the King of Assyria was assigned to her. Though they provide no details concerning the organization of Samsi's army, these few lines indicate that the queen probably commanded her troops, as she had to flee the camp attacked by the Assyrians in order to avoid capture. This point suggests we next consider the manner in which violence against women may be presented in Mesopotamian sources.²⁶

Violence against women

More ample documentation might therefore seem available concerning violence against women. It is to be noted, however, that such acts are rarely foregrounded in the texts and iconography. Indeed, royal inscriptions such as those found on the orthostates of Assyrian palaces never focus on these questions. They do not boast of systematically attacking women and even less of subjecting them to rape, a practice intended to subjugate the population. This is not, however, a matter of source bias, for the Assyrian monarchs – in

²⁵ *RINAP* 1, Tiglath-Pileser III, 42, ll. 19'-25'.

²⁶ Another text showing a relationship between the queen and the army exists. This is the *Nabonidus Chronicle* (556-539) which specifies that, in year 9 of the last king of Babylon (546), "In the month of nisan, the 5th day, the mother of the king died in Dūr-karašu, on the banks of the Euphrates, upriver from Sippar. The prince (Balthazar and his troops for three days lamented and there was a (general) lamentation. In the month of siwan, a lamentation was instituted in Akkad (Babylonia) for the king's mother" (Glassner 1993: 203). The place of Dūr-karašu means "fortified military camp" but it is unknown exactly what the queen and her son were doing there. On this subject, see the approach adopted by Beaulieu 1989: 197-201. It is possible that Balthazar positioned his army in reaction to the movements of the Persian forces led by Cyrus, who nevertheless took the direction, not of Babylonia, but of Anatolia.

particular those of the ninth century – did not hesitate to describe the tortures inflicted on those unlucky enough to fall into the hands of their troops. To hasten the fall of towns, prisoners were thus impaled or skinned alive under the ramparts, severed heads were stacked into pyramids, and so on. When women are represented in such contexts, by contrast, it is not in order to emphasize the tortures to which they were subjected, but rather their departure by deportation.

However, a relief from the reign of Ashurbanipal shows the Assyrian army massacring women when capturing a camp, following a victory over Arab troops.²⁷ This represents a rare, explicit case of violence against women by Mesopotamian troops. But it must be noted that the men present in the camp – as well, perhaps, as its children (difficult to make out on the relief) – were subjected to the same treatment.²⁸

The issues raised by this camp's capture may be extended to the conquest of towns. Royal inscriptions and chronicles abundantly recount sieges in which the besieged population may have participated and these are also portrayed on the reliefs of Assyrian palaces. Yet these types of source offer no testimony as to the presence of women combatants. To cite just one of many possible examples, consider the siege conducted in the kingdom of Hamath in present-day Syria during the eleventh campaign of Shalmaneser III (858-824). This was depicted on the bronze reliefs of the gates of Imgur-Enlil (the modern-day city of Balawat). The woman who appears on one of the town's towers²⁹ does not appear to be participating in combat but rather to have adopted what seems a beseeching pose, a stance more in keeping with the canons of the genre.

This image finds support in the evidence of urban sieges uncovered in the course of archeological excavations. The Hasanlu Tepe site, located a short distance south of Lake Urmia in present-day north-west Iran, supplies a particularly interesting case study in this respect. The town was destroyed at the end of the ninth century.

²⁷ Reade 1979: 334 and figure 10.

²⁸ Barnett 1976: Room I, Slab 9.

²⁹ Schachner 2007: banner XIIIa, right.

There, the skeletons of men, women and children were unearthed,³⁰ revealing wounds caused by the collapse of the buildings in which they had taken refuge. Of the 246 individuals exhumed, 157 died in this way. While some of them were found with weapons, this does not appear to be the case of the women or children. The diggers were also able to identify cases of execution. Indeed, the skeletons of some individuals indicate that they were killed by blows to the head. Men, women and children were found among these cases also.

Together with the written and iconographic sources discussed above, this example reveals that women and children, though among the victims of war, do not appear to have been targeted any more than men, in the course of military operations. To judge by the evidence of reliefs and royal inscriptions, male victims could be tortured as well as killed. When practiced on enemy troops and populations, such acts of terror above all targeted men, though it is unclear whether they were combatants. This, at least, is what the available documents suggest, though they are extremely stereotypical and pass over many atrocities in silence while concentrating on others. Thus, while the sources boast of the massacre of an entire population, no particular emphasis is placed on the violence done to women and children. This is perhaps precisely because, in the royal ideologies of the time, attacking what were seen as the weakest categories of the population was not considered an act of bravery. Obviously, this in no way implies that armies did not give themselves over to the rape and torture of women. Yet there seems to have been a prohibition on talking about it, on preserving a memory of it in official writings. The result is that acts of rape as a weapon of terror aiming to subjugate besieged towns³¹ or break the resistance of populations, were not addressed as such. In short, the sources abundantly discuss the tortures inflicted on men, and the massacres of entire populations, but are silent on the violence specifically inflicted on women.

³⁰ Muscarella 1989: 32-34.

³¹ Even if so many scenes of torture of men at the foot of the ramparts are represented.

Deportations

Deportation was one of the main consequences of defeat when the population was not massacred.³² This practice existed in the Ancient Near East well before the famous examples recounted in the Bible of the Assyrian and, above all, Babylonian kings.³³ The customs of war made three types of spoils available to the victor. The order with which these were presented varies from one account to the next.

The first category consisted of what were considered valuable material goods, these being most often divided between precious metals, bronze, finished objects (plate, ivory-inlaid furniture, etc.), the weapons of the vanquished, and foodstuffs.

A second category consisted of livestock, broadly divided between “large and small beasts” (mainly, sheep and cows) and sometimes including animals possessing particular value, such as warhorses, dromedaries and so on.

Crowning these spoils of war was yet another category of “plunder”: human beings. To refer to the men, women and children taken into captivity as “plunder” is not to extrapolate from the preceding list; it in fact reflects Mesopotamian practices as indicated by the vocabulary that is employed and as they are illustrated in text *SAA* 11, 164. This administrative tablet offers records of the individuals deported from a town of which only the first syllable, “Sal[...]”, has been preserved.³⁴ On it can be read, following a heavily damaged list of individual names: (individuals listed) “among the plunder³⁵ of the town of Sal[...]” Men, women and children therefore were part of the “spoils of war”.

An inscription from Assyrian King Ashurnasirpal II (883-859) provides a summary of what was seized. In the course of his sixth campaign (878), for example, he claims to have taken from the king of the small state of Suhu in the region of Middle Euphrates:

³² Fales 2010: 212-219.

³³ For the deportation of 597, cf. 2 Kings, 24 and for 597 and 587, cf. Jeremiah 52.

³⁴ The texts from the *State Archives of Assyria* (*SAA*) are most often documents produced by the royal and provincial administrations. In the case that interests us here, it is not a matter of ideology or public relations but indeed of material, concrete management of the spoils of war, spoils that included human beings.

³⁵ The term used here is *hubtu* = plunder, booty

Silver, gold, tin, casseroles, (and) precious stones of the mountain, the property of his palace, his chariots, teams of horses, equipment for troops, equipment for horses, his palace women (and) valuable booty.³⁶

In royal inscriptions such as this, the scribes gave particular attention to the women of defeated kings,³⁷ that is, those living in their palaces. Doing so, however, served more to underscore the total defeat of the enemy (since his most personal goods have been lost) than to indicate a particular treatment reserved for women. In such cases, the latter joined the victor's palace.

The deportations had several objectives. The first was to break local resistance. This was done by removing those considered the most dangerous categories of the population (political and religious elites, for example), depriving the conquered country of certain specialists (metal- and woodworking trades were affected, etc.) or moving the larger part of the inhabitants elsewhere. In the latter case, to prevent the thereby emptied country from going to waste, the victors repopulated it with other deported people. This practice, which modern historians refer to as "two-way deportation", was frequently implemented beginning with the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III.³⁸ Sometimes assuming a very large scale, such deportations demonstrate that neither the Assyrians nor the Babylonians had a desire to annihilate entire groups. On the contrary, to the degree that the labor force itself was one of the main sources of wealth in the Ancient Near East, the result of military victory should not be to deprive oneself of such a windfall. Captive populations were used to develop under-farmed regions or replace other deported peoples in their country of origin. As a consequence, the

³⁶ *RIMA* 2: 212-214.

³⁷ The question of the kings' women and their organization within the palace is the object of extensive debate among Assyriologists. The literature on this subject is particularly abundant and continues to grow. Disagreement in the first place centers on the validity of using the term "harem", which some reject while others accept with caveats. For a clear overview of the question for the neo-Assyrian period, cf. Melville 1999: 19. For the paleo-Babylonian period, basically the eighteenth-century BC, cf. Ziegler 1999a and 1999b.

³⁸ For a consideration of these deportation practices, whether two-way or not, cf. Luuko 2012: xxxvi-xxxix. On the question of two-way deportations themselves, cf. Oded 1979: 29 ff.

Mesopotamians sometimes moved entire groups while preserving their social structure intact. Upon their arrival, the deportees could in this way rapidly get to work.³⁹

This future labor force was thus carefully monitored throughout the period spanning its departure in exile, the various stages of its journey and arrival at its destination. This gave rise to the establishment of administrative documents such as the following:⁴⁰

334 able-bodied men;
38 children of 5 spans' [rūtu⁴¹] height;
41 children of 4 spans' height;
40 children of 3 spans height;
28 children, weaned;
25 children, sucklings.
Total 172 boys.

349 women;
8 females of 5 spans' height;
22 females of 4 spans' height;
49 females of 3 spans' height;
17 females, weaned;
25 females, sucklings.
Total 121 girls

Grand total 977 people, deportees, from Quê.

This tablet provides data for the Cilicians, a people deported from the country of Quê [Quweh], first and foremost by establishing the major population categories by sex.⁴² Men are thus counted first, followed by male children (from the tallest to babies). Employing the same criteria, the scribe then moves on to women. Once again, one notes that the sources – in the present instance, an administrative

³⁹ For an initial consideration of these questions in the Assyrian Empire, cf. Oded 1979. It is extremely difficult to put a number on the mass of deportees but one might consider the study of De Odorico 1995 or that of Fales 2010: 212-219.

⁴⁰ *SAAT* 11, 167.

⁴¹ Equivalent to one-half the length of an adult forearm, this measurement was used to establish the height of children.

⁴² Men and women are presented in this tablet without any connection being drawn between them apart from their regional origin. Other documents more particularly emphasize the deportation of entire families (cf. *SAAT* 11, 154, 172 or 173 for example).

document – do not treat men and women in differentiated fashion. Once the movements had been carried out, it was necessary to make this new source of wealth “bear fruit” and particular care was taken, not just to make the displaced persons work their new lands efficiently, but also to administer them over several generations. Consisting of administrative texts from the First Persian Empire, the “archives of the fortifications of Persepolis”⁴³ furnish an example to this effect:

[List of] women, of Greeks, (who are) *numakaš*, for which Abbateya and Miššabada are responsible, (and) having given birth (in) Persepolis. They (Abbateya and Miššabada) gave them (barley) in thanks.⁴⁴

The term *numakaš* is still not fully understood,⁴⁵ but one here sees that Greek women were present in Fars – the result of Persian deportations from the Ionian coast – and established families there. The next portion of the document specifies that women who give birth to sons are to receive a grain allocation twice as large as that given the others. This document shows that the management of displaced communities was a matter of great importance to the dominant power. It reveals a particular treatment reserved for women, who are here considered valuable to the degree that they allow the community to perpetuate itself over time. This is ultimately one of the rare cases in which women appear in a specific context. What is at issue, however, is no longer a situation of war but rather the consequences resulting from it for the defeated.

The situation of women as actors or victims of war in large measure depends on the very definition of the state of belligerence. However, in the case of the ancient Mesopotamians, the latter was not always very clear. As a result, we cannot specifically examine a law of war that is not an isolated and defined component of a legislative corpus. Yet what one might call customary “laws of war” did indeed exist. These did not take women’s actual participation in combat into account, even if it appears possible to identify certain cases here and there at the highest hierarchical levels.

⁴³ Briant, Henkelman & Stolper 2008.

⁴⁴ Tablet PF 1224, dated February-March 499.

⁴⁵ It refers to a category of dependents.

In all cases, the “laws of war” permitted the victor to determine the destiny of the defeated. With a few exceptions, women in this context are not presented by the sources as the target of particular forms of violence. This obviously does not mean that they were not targeted in this way. But women do not seem to have been the object of a system of terror of the sort one can see at work in the acts of torture regularly practiced on men.

By contrast, women were the object of deportation, sometimes specific (the women of defeated sovereigns), sometimes en masse. In the latter case, their presence had a particular value based, not only on their labor force, but also on their ability to make the newly displaced community prosper in the future.

Ultimately, this overview mainly serves to underscore a particular fact specific to Assyriologist sources: for what are perhaps ideological reasons relating to the duties of monarchs and with the exception of poorly understood enemies such as the Arabs, scribes did not emphasize violence against women in their descriptions of military campaigns. Particular attention must be given to this source bias, for it results in a relative absence of women combatants or victims, an absence that is certainly not representative of reality.

Translated by Ethan RUNDELL

Bibliographical Abbreviations

- RIMA 2 *Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia. Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC. Vol. I, 1114-859 BC* = Grayson 1991
 RIMA 3 *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millenia BC. Vol. II, 858-745 BC* = Grayson 1996
 RINAP *Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period 4*
 RINAP 1 Tadmor & Yamada 2011
 RINAP 4 Leichty 2011
 SAA *State Archives of Assyria*
 SAA 11 Fales & Postgate 1995
 SAAS *State Archives of Assyria Studies*

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