

SELIM FERRUH ADALI:

The Scourge of God: The Umman-manda and Its Significance in the First Millennium BC.

(State Archives of Assyria Studies.) xvi, 220 pp. Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2011. \$62. ISBN 978 952 10 1335 5.

doi:10.1017/S0041977X12000110

A revised 2009 University of Sydney dissertation, Selim Ferruh Adalı's book analyses the portrayal of Cimmerians and Medes in Assyrian and Babylonian texts of the first millennium BC as allusions to a literary classic (p. 1), arguing that mentions of Umman-manda are "direct or indirect, deliberate or subliminal, literary allusions" to the so-called *Cuthean Legend of Naram-Sin* (p. 100), attested from the early second to the mid-first millennium BC. The composition's appreciation in courtly circles is demonstrated by manuscripts in the royal libraries of Hattusha and Nineveh. Given that Adalı argues for its direct influence on the inscriptions of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal of Assyria, Nabonidus of Babylon and Cyrus of Persia, the cultural contexts in which the composition is attested in the seventh and sixth centuries BC need more analysis than a few superficial remarks (pp. 103, 105).

Elsewhere, Adalı's book is less terse. The first chapters ("Sources and written form", pp. 3–14; "Etymology", pp. 15–34) present an overview of the orthography of Umman-manda and proposals for its etymology, including Adalı's suggestion "troops of the (distant) terrain" ("Excursus", pp. 173–89), yet Umman-manda's original meaning remains elusive. These chapters are not obviously relevant for the aim of explaining the *Cuthean Legend's* influence on the portrayal of Cimmerians and Medes in Mesopotamian historiography. A discussion of how first-millennium users viewed the etymology of the word would have been more useful: in the inscriptions of Esarhaddon, Umman-manda was clearly understood to mean "numerous army", as Adalı himself points out (p. 85). Chapter 3 analyses Umman-manda in "The omen tradition" (pp. 35–42), which Adalı links to the *Cuthean Legend*, although he concedes that the omens' succinctness makes this difficult to prove. These chapters will need to incorporate a new inscription of Sin-iddinam of Larsa (eighteenth century BC) which mentions the Umman-manda (K. Volk in A.R. George (ed.), *Cuneiform Royal Inscriptions and Related Texts in the Schøyen Collection*, Bethesda, 2011, 59–88 no. 37, esp. 87–8).

Chapter 4 finally turns to the Umman-manda in the *Cuthean Legend*, as the enemy of Naram-Sin of Akkade (“The literary texts”, pp. 43–71, 71–3 on a badly preserved passage in the *Esagila Chronicle*). The chapter opens with discussions of the description of Naram-Sin’s enemy in the various versions of the composition. A synopsis of the *Cuthean Legend* (pp. 63–4) leads to a discussion of its key message: advocating avoidance of military confrontation with the Umman-manda, powerful mountain peoples from the east, created by the gods to cause destruction and destined to be subsequently destroyed by the gods. Adalı stresses that this course of action is advised only in relation to this specific enemy, not as a general reaction. He suggests that a leader who was keen to avoid military conflict with a newly emerging power could reference the *Cuthean Legend* to “gloss over or justify real life involuntary submission to and/or military inactivity against foreign peoples from the mountain frontier” (pp. 70–71, also p. 170). The flow of the argument is interrupted with chapter 5 (“From Anatolia to Levant”, pp. 75–83), which deals with four poorly preserved and/or understood references to Umman-manda in second millennium BC texts, but resumed in chapter 6 on “Literary allusions” (pp. 85–105) to the *Cuthean Legend* in first-millennium BC sources: “Offspring of Tiamat” and “Seed of destruction” used for Cimmerians in Assyrian texts of the seventh century BC and (less convincingly) the adverb *lemniš* “in an evil way” in Babylonian sources on the Medes. A discussion of the evidence for the Umman-manda, Cimmerians and Medes in “Neo-Assyrian sources” (pp. 107–32) and “Neo-Babylonian sources” (pp. 133–67) follows.

Elnathan Weissert is credited for inspiring Adalı’s approach (p. 100) with his analysis of literary allusions to the *Epic of Creation* in the 691 BC version of the annals of Sennacherib of Assyria: “Creating a political climate: literary allusions to Enuma Elish in Sennacherib’s account of the Battle of Halule” in H. Waetzoldt and H. Hauptmann (eds), *Assyrien im Wandel der Zeiten* (Heidelberg, 1997), 191–202. Weissert demonstrated that the portrayal of Babylon’s inhabitants as the monstrous opponents of the divine hero in the *Epic of Creation* had the specific goal of ensuring support for Sennacherib’s preparation of the assault on Babylon, elucidating the creative processes and the political impact of writing royal inscriptions. That the portrayal of the Cimmerians in the Assyrian inscriptions references the *Cuthean Legend* is compelling, but Adalı neither engages with the editorial process of the inscriptions nor investigates possible developments in the Cimmerians’ evaluation, for they were only on occasion called Umman-manda. The discussion of Umman-manda in Neo-Babylonian texts does not fully satisfy either. Adalı suggests that the reference in the Cyrus Cylinder is dependent on Nabonidus’ Ehulhul Cylinder which in turn was influenced by Assurbanipal’s inscriptions (pp. 155–9) – a credible hypothesis. An analysis of this transmission process would have been more effective in elucidating the use of the term in this body of texts than the rather forced focus on the *Cuthean Legend*.

The final chapter (“Emerging patterns”, pp. 169–71) stresses that the use of Umman-manda was not indiscriminate in Assyrian and Babylonian texts and asks why the Cimmerians and Medes were designated as Umman-manda, concluding that this is due to the fact that “they came from a distant land in the east”, “conducted destructive military campaigns into civilized areas and gained great power” and “were destined to be destroyed by the gods without interference of the Mesopotamian king” (p. 169). The use of the term would imply that Assyrians and Babylonians, respectively, thought that they could not control these peoples militarily, which necessitated diplomatic engagement instead (p. 170). Adalı closes his study with a clarion call for an in-depth literary analysis of the *Cuthean Legend* (p. 171). A bibliography (pp. 191–211) and indexes (pp. 213–8) conclude the volume.

Adali's book has much to offer to readers with an interest in Mesopotamian literature and its reception. One hopes that it will reach this audience despite a title that does little to announce that it is a study of literary allusions to a cuneiform classic.

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