SOME REMARKS ON CONDITIONS IN THE ASSYRIAN COUNTRYSIDE *)

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In 1901 C.H.W. Johns published an interesting group of texts from the archives of the Neo-Assyrian kings at Nineveh, under the title of 'An Assyrian Doomsday Book or liber censualis of the district round Harran, in the seventh century B.C.'. In contrast to some of his later work, Johns' copy of the texts was remarkably good, and with the edition he gave a full discussion of the evidence provided by the group of texts in differing spheres. No doubt partly because this edition was so thorough, the Doomsday Book has received little attention from scholars since then, apart from passing references. Only quite recently, with the quickening interest in Neo-Assyrian studies, have serious attempts been made once more to investigate these texts (they constitute an important part of the evidence in Dr. J. Zablocka's discussion of the agrarian conditions of the Neo-Assyrian empire, and are discussed also in G. van Driel, Bi.Or. XXVII 3/4 (1970) 175; V.A. Jakobson, in I.M. Diakonoff (ed.) Ancient Mesopotamia 277-295; and in a forthcoming book by the reviewer 'Taxation and Conscription in the Assyrian Empire' Rome 1974). However, in none of these cases has a complete re-examination of the texts been attempted, and this is what the book under review has done; in addition, the author has included 'Schedules' from the Niniveh archives, which have never been properly edited before.

The book begins with a brief introduction on the nature of the texts (pp. 1-12), followed by the edition of the texts themselves (pp. 13-89). The second part of the book discusses the evidence provided by the texts in various fields; it covers the geographical and historical setting

(pp. 91-114: the major centres in the Liber censualis: Sin and Harrān in Sargonid times; and the onomastic and cultural milieu), and the economic and social conditions (The men and the land, pp. 115-133: the family; the socio-economic conditions; movable and immovable property; and the village and landed property). The texts are in general competently edited, and collation has allowed some improvements to Johns’ version, although nothing of great moment; the passing of 70 years has naturally allowed a better comprehension of some problems which baffled Johns. At the end of this review we have listed some detailed corrections or suggestions, based largely on an independent collation of the Doomsday Book texts some years ago; it is encouraging to note that in the majority of cases the results of the two collations were identical.

If we have a criticism of the text editions, it is that rather scant attention is given to the philological problems. This is reflected in the inconvenient absence of an index of Akkadian words, and may also be illustrated by two points of translation. The first concerns the word tillutu, correctly rendered ‘vine’ by the editor; in ADD Johns read this word as be-lut and translated ‘lady-palm’, which possibly does not require refutation. But R.C. Thompson retains this reading in DAB 249-50, and adopts the translation ‘gall-oak’, which has found its way into other works as well (e.g. D. Oates, Studies in the Ancient History of Northern Iraq, p. 46). Since neither of the two dictionaries has yet covered t, for the sake of non-cuneiformists some explanation of the translation ‘vine’ should have been given, especially since a single reference to Harra-Hubullu III would have sufficed (MSL 5 p. 94, ll.19, 22-3). The second word, zamru is admittedly allowed a brief note on p. 28, where it is suggested that the contrast between zamru and urgu (= vegetables) favours a meaning for zamru of ‘fruit’ (in general, rather than any specific kind). However, since this translation is tacitly accepted throughout the rest of the book, it should have been substantiated with more care. Evidence that could have been quoted in favour of the proposal is the mention of ‘mixed zamru’ in Iraq 14 (1952) p. 43 l.123; and the word is also known in Middle Assyrian texts (Sumer 24 (1968) 38 VAT