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Writing and Ancient Near Eastern Society: Papers in Honour of Alan R. Millard

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Most of the essays in this volume are revisions of papers presented at a public colloquium in Liverpool in April 2003 to honor the work of Alan Millard. The essays are as follows: Pierre Bordreuil, "Migraines d'Épigraphiste" (15–28); Alasdair Livingstone, "Taima' and Nabonidus: It's a Small World" (29–39); Dennis Pardee, "Dresser le bœuf à Ougarit" (41–47); M. C. A. McDonald, "Literacy in an Oral Environment" (49–118); Wolfgang Rölling, "Keilschrift versus Alphabetschrift: Überlegungen zu den *epigraphs* auf Keilschrifttafeln" (119–26); John F. Healey, "The Writing on the Wall: Law in Aramaic Epigraphy" (127–41); David Toshio Tsumura, "'Misspellings' in Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit: Some Cases of Loss or Addition of Signs" (143–53); Graham Davies, "Some Uses of Writing in Ancient Israel in the Light of Recently Published Inscriptions" (155–74); K. A. Kitchen, "Now You See It, Now You Don't! The Monumental Use and Non-use of Writing in the Ancient Near East" (175–87); Daniel I. Block, "What Has Delphi to do with Samaria? Ambiguity and Delusion in Israelite Prophecy" (189–216); Christopher Tuplin, "Darius' Accession in (the) Media" (217–44); K. Lawson Younger Jr., "'Hazeal, Son of a Nobody': Some Reflections in Light of Recent Study" (245–70); George J. Brooke, "4Q341: An Exercise for Spelling and for Spells?" (271–82); John Davies, "The Origins of the Inscribe Greek Stela" (283–300); and Alan Millard, "Only Fragments from the Past: The Role of Accident in our Knowledge of the Ancient Near East" (301–19). Unfortunately, there is neither a comprehensive bibliography nor any index, both of which would have made the volume more useable.

An important theme in some of the essays concerns the paucity of materials and the danger of overinterpreting the extant evidence. For example, Bordreuil discusses how

incomplete our knowledge of epigraphy is, and Healey concludes there “there will never be *enough* evidence” (128). This theme is given its fullest development in Millard’s own excellent essay in which he discusses the “accident of discovery” and “the accident of survival” and how they have lead to “misleading conclusions.”

In addition to Millard’s essay, the essays that I found most interesting were the essays by McDonald, Tsumura, and Graham Davies. “In Literacy in an Oral Environment,” McDonald begins by giving clear and concise definitions of “literacy,” “literate society,” and “nonliterate, or oral, society.” He notes that, even in literate societies, most of the population can nevertheless live in oral enclaves, since their daily lives may be untouched by literacy. After reviewing various comparative anthropological studies, he concludes that “reading and writing are not only clearly separable skills, but they can have different social roles and status, according to the availability of materials, technologies and the needs of different societies” (69). In “‘Misspellings’ in Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit,” Tsumura argues convincingly that some of the anomalous spellings in Ugaritic texts, especially in KTU 1.10, should not be understood as “misspellings” but as variant spellings reflecting a different phonetic reality of the language for that particular scribe. In “Some Uses of Writing in Ancient Israel in the Light of Recently Published Inscriptions,” Graham Davies surveys inscriptions published between 1990 and 2000 and concludes that there is evidence of “military administration, a literary, prophetic or legal text, evidence of temple practices and contributions to their cost, a legal plea, a list of provisions, and indirect evidence of papyrus documents of various kinds and developments in the tax system(s) of ancient Israel” (169–70).

Overall the volume addresses well the issue of interpreting writing in the ancient Near East, and I suspect that all scholars of the Bible and the ancient Near East will find something of interest in the volume.