

## Akh Purattim. Vol. 2, Les rives de l'Euphrate

Edited by Jean-Claude Margueron, Olivier Rouault, and Pierre Lombard (*Mémoires d'Archéologie et d'Histoire Régionales Interdisciplinaires*). Pp. 337, figs. 216, tables 7. Maison de l'Orient et de la Méditerranée, Lyon 2007. €35. ISBN 978-2-903264-96-3 (paper).

Born out of exasperation with the publication tardiness in France of preliminary reports of Near Eastern field research, *Akh Purattim* represents a welcome new initiative designed to furnish scholars with timely accounts of archaeological investigations. This, the second volume, mainly provides overdue reports of two key excavations in Syria. As its title implies, *Akh Purattim* is dedicated primarily to "the banks of the Euphrates," an expression used in the 18th century B.C.E. for the kingdom of Mari, which extended from the confluence of the Khabur River to the modern Syrian-Iraqi border. But its remit is wider, so in addition to presenting results from Margueron's excavations at Mari and from Terqa (Tell Ashera), where Rouault's team has been carrying out excavations, this volume also includes studies of the wider Near East, from Babylon to Malatya. The latter are described as "mondes périphériques" (279), a phrase that in Anglo-Saxon traditions leaves readers in little doubt about the core-periphery interpretive framework of the editors.

*Akh Purattim* has a tripartite structure. Preliminary accounts of the 1991–1995 excavations at Mari and Terqa are followed by analyses of specific deposits and artifacts and a final section on studies, primarily of the site of Mari. Perhaps inevitably with such a belated publication, much important material presented here has already appeared elsewhere, often with better illustrations.

The Mari excavation reports deal with results from small-scale investigations in several parts of the site, partly to resolve issues in preparation for the publication of Margueron's

magisterial *Mari: Métropole de l'Euphrate au IIIe et au début du IIe millénaire av. J.-C.* (Paris 2004). As a consequence, there is no overall theme other than contributions to a better understanding of urbanism at Mari during the third millennium B.C.E. The investigators confirm that it was founded early in the millennium when burials were placed on sandy soil (1–36). We still need to determine if these belonged to residents or nonsedentary groups.

The discovery of another elaborate building model of the type first discovered by Parrot in 1954, not far from the Temple of Nini-Zazza, provides Muller and Weygand the opportunity to reconsider all four standardized examples. They make a strong case for interpreting the models and associated pottery and animal bones as evidence of recurrent rituals in residential quarters, and they redate them from late Early Dynastic (ED) III to the beginnings of the new town, termed Ville II, ca. 2500 B.C.E. The redating allows the authors to argue that the models were deployed in foundation rites at the onset of reurbanization, and they suggest that their circular shapes symbolize the new circular town plan of Mari, as well as its buildings. This is debatable, since major circular structures occur at other sites such as Tepe Gawra XIA/B. The authors decry individual initiatives for these rituals, thus implying a top-down custom. But the models occur in different houses, raising the question of private agency in the creation of the second urban revolution in Syria.

Another exceptional discovery is a series of deposits in the ED III temple of the goddess Ninhursag. Chief among these is an assemblage

of a decorated stele, 60 alabaster vessels, 2 schist vessels, 30 shells, and incised bone and beads from a pit beneath the central podium of the cella, confusingly referred to here as the "Lieu Très Saint," or "LTS." As Beyer and Jean-Marie remark, this exceptional quantity of alabaster matches the assemblage in the celebrated tomb of Pu-abi at Ur. Based on analogies from Tepe Gawra, they argue that several pieces originated in the north and were more than 1,000 years old by the time they were buried here. Relics are nothing new, but it follows that these originated from a time before Mari was founded, so they presumably were obtained through contemporary interactions between Mari and the north. Other components of this deposit were undoubtedly manufactured closer to the time of deposition. The decorated bone handle (100 [fig. 15]) is one such piece. Unfortunately, the list of selective comparanda incorporates regionally and chronologically disparate types (88). The Mari example, in fact, is the easternmost instance of an extensive Early Bronze III–IV series known from the Near East and the Aegean. As is clear from Genz's earlier study (overlooked by the authors), the dotted-circle motif of the Mari tube is rare and restricted to Syria (e.g., from Hama, Munbaqa, Banat, Bi'a; see H. Genz, *Ritzverzierte Knochenhülsen des dritten Jahrtausends im Ostmittelmeerraum. Abhandlungen des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins 31* [Wiesbaden 2003]). Possibly used as a kohl container, its presence supplies further evidence for Mari's western connections in the mid third millennium B.C.E.

The outstanding object from this deposit is a gypsum stele depicting a highly stylized face, pubic triangle, and rows of schematized ibex.

Already well known from initial publications, Margueron here substantiates a much earlier date for the plaque by noting stylistic parallels with Ninevite V pottery.

Matoian and Bouquillon present vitreous material finds from the site of Terqa. Their significance can hardly be overstated since the glass is attributed to a workshop of the mid second millennium B.C.E. Unequivocal evidence for Bronze Age glass workshops in western Asia is exceptional, but there are three issues that, for the present, diminish the value of this discovery. First, details of the workshop and its installations will only be given in a subsequent volume of *Akh Purattim*; second, its mid second-millennium date is based on tablets found in its vicinity rather than stratigraphic associations; and last, the context is said to be a dependency of a Mitannian-period public building, which unfortunately lies under modern housing. That said, the presence of a massive 5.1 kg (12 lbs.) glassy ingot is remarkable when it is recalled that Uluburun glass ingots weigh an average of 2 kg. Its heterogeneous composition emphasizes how little we still know of the beginnings of innovatory Syro-Mesopotamian glass industries. *Akh Purattim* is an attractive and necessary addition to libraries for scholars of the ancient Near East.

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