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Review

Reviewed Work(s): La basse vallée de l'Euphrate syrien du néolithique à l'avènement de l'Islam: Géographie, archéologie et histoire by Bernard Geyer and Jean-Yves Monchambert

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area, providing a full record of the architecture and situation of the burial for the first time. The debris from the tomb had been thoroughly turned over in the past, and only a few fragments of artifacts deemed valuable at the time of discovery were found, but the excavation did recover a significant amount of Tuthmoside pottery, discarded by the tomb robbers and providing further information on the contents of the burial.

The book throws a little additional light on the subject of the tomb's occupants. According to an analysis by Hoch in the final chapter, "Manuwai," "Manhata," and "Maruta" are all West Semitic names. They were not princesses, as Winlock termed them, but royal wives of a lesser status than the "great king's wife," usually the only prominent figure in royal documents from this period. It is not clear, however, whether they entered the court of Tuthmosis III as captives from his many campaigns in the Near East, as tribute or gift exchange, or whether (as seems more likely) they represent diplomatic marriage as is attested later in the 18th Dynasty. There is no evidence to suggest how they died, but it is likely that all three were buried at the same time.

It remains a tragedy that this important tomb was not discovered and recorded in full by archaeologists, but Lilyquist and her colleagues at the Metropolitan Museum have done a fine job of analyzing and restoring context and meaning to the material where this has proved possible. It is a dense and detailed study but one that well repays careful reading. It is aimed at specialists and should be of interest to Egyptologists and those working on ancient jewelry, metal-working technology, foreign relations, and perhaps museum studies. The book is beautifully produced and well illustrated and is a real pleasure to handle. It is a joy to see this important material published with such care and placed on a secure academic footing for use as a reference collection.

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LA BASSE VALLÉE DE L'ÉUPHRATE SYRIEN DU NÉOLITHIQUE À L'AVÈNEMENT DE L'ISLAM: GÉOGRAPHIE, ARCHÉOLOGIE ET HISTOIRE, by *Bernard Geyer* and *Jean-Yves Monchambert*. 2 vols. (Bibliothèque Archéologique et Historique 166; Mission Archéologique de Mari 6). Vol. 1, TEXTE. Pp. vi + 328, figs. 176, tables 29; vol. 2, ANNEXES. Pp. 282, figs. 4, pls. 125. Institut Français du Proche-Orient, Beyrouth 2003. ISBN 2-912738-23-7 (vol. 1); 2-912738-24-5 (vol. 2, paper).

The development of archaeological surveys in recent decades has been stimulated by a variety of factors, often rather contingent, such as when they arise in response to salvage concerns. An important concurrent result has

been the emergence of a new sensitivity to the regional dimension of ancient human habitats. The book under consideration is a model of such regional research. It originated as the specific component of a new overall strategy set in place by Margueron when he took over, in 1978, the direction of the excavations at ancient Mari, a major Syro-Mesopotamian urban center in the third and second millennia. As he indicates in his preface to the volume, the wealth of discoveries made since the inception of excavations in 1933 had made it impossible to pay attention to the broader picture within which the archaeology of the site could be understood. Interestingly, he articulates all the environmental reasons why one would expect a priori that Mari should not have become an important urban center: lack of sufficient rainfall, marginal role in terms of trade routes, lack of natural resources. And so the regional survey that he set in motion was planned as something organically linked with the excavations and resources (intellectual as well as logistic) of a major archaeological project. Four years after the beginning of Margueron's tenure as director, the survey project was started, under the supervision of the two authors of this volume.

A number of publications about the project have already appeared (listed on 4–5), but this volume represents the full and comprehensive report of the survey as a whole. From 1982 to 1990, there were 17 seasons, each lasting from one to four weeks. The area covered is the valley floor of the Euphrates, for a distance of some 140 km from Der ez-Zor to Abu Kemal on the border with Iraq. A total of 209 archaeological sites were recorded (see ch. 3 and 108, map), and extensive observations were made throughout the territory. A question that is not addressed explicitly, in spite of its presumed interest, pertains to the outer boundaries of the survey. To the east and the west the escarpment defines sharply the width of the valley floor, and the authors give an interesting description of the hydrography of the two sides of the steppe (19–22), emphasizing the dissymmetry between the two, and Geyer mentions the presence of settlements on the edge of the plateau (63). Still, one would like to see a clearer definition of how far away from the riverbanks this settled area could extend, as well as a description of the specific geographical features and a reflection on the impact that this sharp and distinctive aspect of the landscape had on the exploitation of the valley floor itself. A brief description is given (25), and informative profiles are shown in the figures, with the difference in elevation shown (e.g., ca. 40 m in the west and 30 m in the east at the latitude of Mari, 30 m and 22 m at the latitude of Dura-Europos, and 75 m and 110 m at Halabiya-Zalabiya). However, I see no discussion of the significant implications that this feature has, inasmuch as it creates such a sharp break between the irrigable and the non-irrigable areas.

The southern and northern boundaries are also not discussed, and here the choice does not seem as natural as the ones to the east and west. The northern boundary, in particular, seems arbitrary, the Der ez-Zor line showing only a slight widening of the valley floor (which averages 12 km south of Der ez-Zor). There is, of course, nothing wrong in selecting a logistically convenient limit to the investigation, but it would be appropriate to so

indicate. The southern boundary of the survey area coincides with the modern political boundary between Syria and Iraq, and since it is so close to the site of ancient Mari, one wonders if the limit, imposed by the modern political situation, adequately represents the ancient hinterland of Mari. Here, too, I do not see that the question is posed by the authors, although in this case a possible answer is that both a superficial review of satellite photographs and a cursory visual inspection of the terrain south of the border suggest a sharp contrast between the modern Syrian and Iraqi landscapes—the latter exhibiting a much narrower trough and a set of even more unfavorable geographical conditions than on the Syrian side.

The six chapters of the text volume may be divided in two major sections dealing with physical geography (7–74) and human adaptation (75–282). The lion's share of the second volume is a detailed catalogue of surface ceramic finds (described, 7–113; graphed, 114–238), an anthology of 66 references from ancient texts (239–54), and a variety of indices and five foldouts with color maps. A rich and most informative graphic and photographic documentation accompanies the text. Altogether, the work combines an excellent documentary basis with a sophisticated analysis of the data, and it will remain an irreplaceable tool, especially since a very “brusque” progress is dramatically changing a region that had remained “asleep” until the mid 20th century (8).

The geomorphological and especially the geological data are presented in detail, and the catalogue of 206 identified sites forms a solid database. The detail itself is often of great interest. For instance, the slope of the riverbed is of 26 cm/km over the transect from Der ez-Zor to Abu Kemal (a difference in elevation of 33 m over a distance of 127.5 km as the crow flies). But a closer look will show considerable variations; in particular, the blockages at Halabiya and Dura-Europos cause an unexpected sharper slope upstream. Or, again, the aquifer in the valley itself is abundant, but the water is brackish, so that only the river water itself is drinkable (28). Or, yet again, for each site one will find an informative description of the geographical conditions and of the essential archaeological information. But of particular interest to the *AJA* readers will be chapters 2 (dealing with the natural processes of geographical evolution) and 4–6 (dealing with the cultural impact on the landscape). A brief review of the two sections is in order here.

The geomorphological chapter, by Geyer, while technical, explains in a readable way and with well-chosen photographs a number of natural phenomena that affected deeply the archaeological and historical development. The major geological features are stable; the only real cause of change is the river. The river dynamics may be assumed to have caused the disappearance of archaeological sites, particularly in proximity of meanders, but the author is cautious and states lucidly that, while possible and even probable, such disappearances are not in fact attested. One may assume that knowledge of this danger may have guided the initial choice for new settlements, so that, except for small rural settlements, it seems likely that few major sites have disappeared (62 n. 4). Thick alluvial deposits have been observed in excavations that were conducted specifically to study aspects of geo-

morphological history: 1 m at Mari and up to 2.4 m at Terqa (65). This leads to the prudent decision not to attribute much significance to the actual preserved surface of the archaeological sites (66, 133–35) because the evidence it provides remains doubtful.

Changes due to human intervention, in particular the great irrigation works that have had a profound impact on the ancient landscape, begin only in the Bronze Age in the valley floor; they may go back to the Neolithic on the plateau, even though they remained limited because of the restricted extent of human occupation (70). Driving these changes was the need to combat aridity, that of the soil even more than that of the climate. Of three known aquifers, only the most superficial is the one that is truly operative; alimented by the river, it contains a great many minerals that modify rather negatively its qualification as sweet water. The result is a major process of salinization (less in the Khabur than in the Euphrates basin), for which the texts of Mari already have a term (*eqel idrāni*): only 37% of the irrigable area is exempt (73). This explains the lack of wells at Mari, which is interesting if one considers how important wells are in the steppe.

The discussion of the sites (ch. 4), by Monchambert, is as sophisticated methodologically as it is exhaustive in terms of documentation. This is clear from the start, where criteria are stated for differentiating permanent from nomadic settlements, in particular the height and horizontal extent of the site, the location vis-à-vis water sources, and the density of surface material. But the author clearly highlights the limitations of each criterion taken by itself. The total number of settlement sites is 171, of which only 9 can be identified as seasonal in the Islamic period, whereas of the 157 permanent settlements, 85 are pre-Islamic and 72 Islamic (110–12). The total number of funerary sites is 30, half of which are necropoleis (161–63).

The situation studied in this book is archaeologically unique because of the vast amount of epigraphic information we have from the texts of Mari (and to a much more limited extent, Terqa) about geographical features of the terrain and about the rural settlements, more than 100 of which are mentioned by name (a small selection of the textual sources is presented in vol. 2, appx. 3, 239–41). The scarcity of firm correlations between textual information and field reconnaissance is addressed especially (111–13, 135); a Mesopotamian specialist will find an important and well-balanced discussion of old and new identifications of site with ancient toponomastics (135–61). The important conclusion that is of interest beyond the geographical limits of the study is that one must carefully calibrate the results derived from field observations before drawing far-reaching conclusions about density of occupation and the developmental history of a territory. Several interesting graphics (117–19) present in detail the various correlations. The study of the relationship between settlements and water courses (120–32) is particularly illuminating and is supported by clear cartographic illustrations.

The final two chapters (by both authors) are masterly treatments that bring to fruition for archaeology the results of the geographical research. How enlightening the discussion of the canal systems can be, is shown by the

fact that somebody as familiar with the terrain as I am is led to discover a whole new landscape, thanks to their presentation. Bold, and yet fully convincing, is their argument in support of the interpretation of the Nahr Dawrin canal as having been built in the early third millennium to provide a better navigation course for the newly established city of Mari; its course, 116 km long, cut by one-third the course along the Euphrates and provided easy navigation for the transportation of essential food supplies and of metal imports from the Khabur (212–27).

The history of the territory (ch. 6) is a model of its kind. For each major historical period, the authors describe in sequence the geographical context, the historical development, and the human exploitation of the environment. The text is rich in new insights, thorough in its documentation, and judicious in assessing diverse opinions, all accompanied by superb graphics that are as detailed as they are readable. It is impossible to do it justice within the limits of this review, but the treatment should appeal as a standard in every respect. The only additional aspect I would have expected to see treated is an overall description of the nature of the territory, its identity as it were, and its symbiotic relationship with the surrounding steppe. It is curious, in particular, that the word “zor,” and especially the concept it denotes, occurs only in the legend to three graphics (249, 254, 259), even though it is of crucial importance for a proper understanding of the modern as well as ancient land use.

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ARCHAEOLOGY IN THE BORDERLANDS: INVESTIGATIONS IN CAUCASIA AND BEYOND, edited by *Adam T. Smith* and *Karen S. Rubinson* (Monograph Series 47). Pp. 270, figs. 190, tables 3. Cotsen Institute of Archaeology, University of California, Los Angeles 2003. \$40. ISBN 1-931745-01-3 (paper).

The book is an elaboration of papers presented at two symposia (AIA and AAA) dedicated to the archaeology of the central Near Eastern highlands. This geographically distinct region, between the Anatolian and the Iranian highlands, covers a territory close to 0.5 million km<sup>2</sup>, extending from the Mesopotamian border formed by the Eastern Taurus Mountains in the south to the piedmont of the northern slopes of the Greater Caucasus Mountains, which borders the steppes of southeastern Europe in the north. In the west its limits are created by the eastern coast of the Black Sea and by the upper part of the Euphrates drainage; in the east it stretches to the western coast of the Caspian Sea. Today the region is divided among six modern nations (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Iran, Russia, and Turkey), and in the course of the last 150 years those divisions have created

major obstacles to its adequate archaeological exploration. The editors, Smith and Rubinson, apply the term “Caucasia” to this whole region of the central Near Eastern highlands, deliberately avoiding (albeit not always consistently) politically motivated geographic neologisms used for different parts of the area, such as Transcaucasia (a Russo-centric perspective), the Armenian Highland(s) (a German-French term), or Eastern Anatolia (a Turkish concept).

Several generations of archaeologists (local, western, and Russian) have discovered, registered, surveyed, or excavated many thousands of sites ranging from the Lower Paleolithic to the late Middle Ages. The importance of this region for the study of Near Eastern civilizations is indeed exceptional: not only did it supply raw commodities to the civilizations of Mesopotamia and Syro-Palestine in the south and metal products to the Bronze Age cultures of southeastern Europe, it also served as a bridge between the steppes of southern Russia and the Near East and as the area where cultural traditions of Anatolia and Iran have met and interacted.

Moreover, Caucasia has followed a unique path of development that can be followed without chronological interruption for the last 5,500 years. Three great civilizations have emerged here, unifying culturally and socio-politically most of the area under consideration and even expanding beyond its borders: the Early Bronze Age Kura-Araxes cultural horizon (i.e., the Early Transcaucasian Culture), the Urartian empire, and the Christian civilization of Armenia and Georgia, which formed in and developed through the high Middle Ages until the Mongol conquests in the 13th century. Those periods of higher integration and increased social complexity have been preceded and followed by cycles of disintegration and decreased complexity. As the editors emphasize in their introduction, these papers “highlight the heterogeneous forces of cultural production that simultaneously marginalize centers and centralize margins in various archaeological places” (2). In my view, an essential value of studies in Caucasian archaeology consists of investigating the processes of integration of heterogeneous elements into complex sociopolitical and/or cultural systems. Such an agenda applies equally to the integration of heterogeneous components into pan-Caucasian complex societies and cultures, and to the integration of Caucasian components into larger systems, which is attestable, to some degree, already in prehistory and more obviously since late antiquity.

While developing innovative approaches, this volume also generalizes the archaeological research of Caucasia. In fact, it may be considered the fifth generalizing monograph produced on this subject (the other four are F. Hançar, *Urgeschichte Kaukasiens* [Vienna 1937]; B. Piotrovskii *Arkheologiya Zakavkaz'ya* [Leningrad 1949]; C. Burney and D. Lang, *The Peoples of the Hills: Ancient Ararat and Caucasus* [London 1971]; and the multivolume series published by the Institute of Archaeology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, *Arkheologiya* [earlier *Arkheologiya SSSR* 1981–]). This book is also the first one published in the United States. *Archaeology in the Borderlands* has an advantage over its predecessors: the diversity of approaches applied by its authors to fieldwork, analysis of