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RECENSIONI

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RECENSIONI

Karen L. Wilson, *Bismaya: Recovering the Lost City of Adab* (Oriental Institute Publications, Vol. 138). Pp. xxv+194, figs. 46, tables 14, pls. 113. The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, Chicago 2012. \$80. ISBN-10: 1885923635 (cloth). Free download at <http://oi.uchicago.edu/research/pubs/catalog/oip/>

The volume under review is the final publication of the excavations carried out by the University of Chicago at Bismaya, ancient Adab, in southern Iraq, between 1903 and 1905. Although a book and some preliminary articles were published by Edgar Banks, a general re-evaluation of the results from the dig and a more extensive publication of the finds were much needed. As a consequence Karen Wilson (hereafter quoted as W.) attempted to produce a reconstruction of the archaeological work undertaken at Bismaya in the light of both unpublished records and materials. The publication project was made possible by a grant from the Shelby White-Leon Levy Program for Archaeological Publication. The volume is organized into fourteen chapters, while seven appendixes (A-G) have been prepared by Assyriologists.

In the “Preface” W. stresses that, due to the general criticism addressed to Banks’ methods in the field, Bismaya has been put aside in scholarship. The primary goal of the book is therefore to rectify this situation by taking into consideration afresh the original excavation records and the materials housed in the Oriental Institute Museum of Chicago (hereafter OIM). In chapter 1 W. lays out the methodological framework followed in dealing with these materials. As to the finds, more than one thousand objects are part of the OIM collections and were as a consequence analyzed afresh, while the ca. four hundred objects currently housed in the Eski Şark Müzesi of Istanbul were not examined. Chapter 2 is a synthesis of the first recorded surveys in the area of Bismaya, while chapter 3 is a lengthy account concerning the history of the University of Chicago expedition to Bismaya directed by Banks between 1903 and 1904 and by Victor Persons in the final campaign of 1905.

In chapter 4 W. briefly surveys the morphology of the site and the city defences, as observed by

Banks. The site consisted of several low mounds, encompassed by a city wall and bisected by the bed of a canal. A portion of city wall and a gate were partially investigated to the North-West of Mound III (fig. 4.2). On the basis of the use of plano-convex bricks, W. (p. 37) proposes that the fortifications were – at least in part – built during the Early Dynastic period (hereafter ED). Several excavations have demonstrated the persistence of plano-convex bricks from the ED into the Ur III period (cfr. Gibson, McMahon 1995: 5; Sauvage 1998: 120-123; McMahon 2006: 9), as a consequence brick types should be not considered reliable chronological markers. A paragraph is then dedicated to a discussion of watercourses around Adab according to surveys and textual sources.

With chapter 5 W. reviews the archaeological data gathered from the excavations on Mound I. Here the remains of a large public building interpreted as a palace (fig. 5.1) and dated to the Old Babylonian period (hereafter OB) were uncovered. According to Banks (p. 42), the excavators eventually reached the remains of an earlier structure. This situation may be reflected in the two different plans drawn by Banks (fig. 5.2) and Persons (fig. 5.3). Nevertheless, W. does not elaborate on these stratigraphic issues and the matter remains unsettled. A collection of tablets and small finds was seemingly found in the “foundation fill” of the palace mapped by Banks. Yang Zhi proposed to assign more than one hundred tablets from the OIM collection – dating to the reign of Rim-Sin of Larsa – to this building (cfr. Appendix C). If so, the OB date proposed by Banks might be maintained.

Chapter 6 focuses on the excavations on Mound II, interpreted as a cemetery. As demonstrated by W., the burials were connected to domestic buildings. The grave goods were only cursorily described by Banks and not systematically recorded. On the basis of the parallel with the intramural burials excavated at Khafajah (Houses), and on cylinder seals kept at the OIM that appear to match the descriptions provided by Banks, W. proposes to date these remains to the ED/Akkadian period. Unfortunately only one of the seals is illustrated in print (A615, pl. 92c). Chapter 7

deals with the excavations undertaken on Mound III, where an urban quarter characterized by domestic units, streets, courts and intramural burials was uncovered immediately below the surface (fig. 7.1). Inscribed glyptic specimens (A526, pl. 9a, A917, pl. 10a), apparently retrieved *in situ*, allow to date the area to the Akkadian period¹. Also of particular importance is the discovery of a sealed jar (fig. 7.2) containing ten cuneiform tablets and three seal impressions.

In chapter 8 W. describes the discovery of a tablet archive and some structures on Mound IV, interpreted by the excavator as a “library”. Unfortunately the location of these features was never plotted on map. According to an inscribed seal impression the administrative materials can be dated to the reign of Šarkališarri (p. 70). Below the level of the tablets another large building was encountered and inscribed materials of Naramsuyīn were found. According to the presence of inscribed materials mentioning a sanctuary of In’anak, W. argues that some of the structures uncovered on Mound IV might have been part of a sanctuary dedicated to Istar/In’anak. Though intriguing, the hypothesis cannot be ascertained since the items cannot be allocated to a precise architectural context. Domestic buildings uncovered on a ridge located between Mound I and IV (Mound IVa) also produced tablets, seal impressions, terracotta plaques, dockets and burials datable to the Isin-Larsa/OB period.

Chapter 9 focuses on Mound V where a sequence of superimposed temples was documented. This chapter consists of an improved version of the preliminary article published by W. in 2002, oddly neither quoted in the book nor included in the bibliography. W. focuses firstly on the two shafts sunk in the mound by Banks and proposes a stratigraphic correlation between the two (figs. 9.2-9.3). It must be noted that the 2002 article contains a different proposal as to the relation between the two soundings (cfr. Wilson 2002: fig. 1). In the article W. linked the two pits on the basis of the sand level found at the bottom of both soundings, considered a flat surface. While in the

book it seems that the two soundings are connected on the basis of the mud stratum lying between 5.10 and 5.71 m below the surface (Centre shaft). This is in fact interpreted as a series of floors associated with the so-called earlier temple, lying between 2.50 and 3.85 m (SW shaft). This situation is portrayed in the schematic section of the earlier and later temples (fig. 9.10), that slightly modifies the one proposed in 2002 (*ibidem*, fig. 9). In the former, the mud stratum (c) is depicted on both sides of the platform, however this was not encountered by Banks in the SW shaft. Notwithstanding these limitations, it is clear that the data provided by Banks are conflicting and a perfect match between the two shafts is hard to find.

Save for these pits, the lowest levels were not investigated. While a good array of data was gathered from the three layers of structures interpreted as temples (Periods I-III). The topmost structure consisted of a square platform of mud-bricks with a facing of baked-bricks erected by Sulgir according to inscriptions on the bricks. This building, encompassed by mud-bricks boundary walls and a series of chambers to the NW, was not mapped². W. then describes the two complexes dated to the ED period (p. 82). The so-called “later temple” (fig. 9.5): a squared brick platform enclosed by a thick boundary wall and a series of rooms to the SE, paralleled to the Tell-al ‘Ubaid temple; and the “earlier temple”: a square room with an adjoining wall of baked plano-convex bricks (fig. 9.7), paralleled to the “construction inférieure” of Tello-Tell K. This series of sacred structures can be interpreted as the é-SAR (or Emaḥ) sanctuary dedicated to the goddess Ninḥursaḡak according to *in situ* epigraphic materials (cfr. also G. Marchesi in Marchesi, Marchetti 2011: 224).

Marchetti (in Marchesi, Marchetti 2011: 44-50; cfr. also the first edition in Italian, Marchetti 2006: 64-71) raised several issues on the sequence reconstructed by W. in her 2002 article. The same criticism can be maintained for the analysis presented in the volume under review since the interpretation of the area was not substantially changed³.

¹ Note the presence of some inscribed bricks of Ur III period and a couple of ED tablets that W. defines as “kudurrus”. The term “kudurru”, although used in anachronistic way, indicates “boundary stones” and therefore it is not applicable to clay tablets. In this case “sale documents” appears to be the right definition. The same remark is valid also for pl. 21c. On the use of the term “ancient kudurru” and the difference between kudurrus and sale documents cfr. Gelb et al. 1991: 1-3.

² The presence of an Ur III phase is testified also by inscribed objects and by a sculpted head (pl. 103) retrieved in the rooms located to the West of the ziqqurat.

³ It seems rather odd that while proposing a parallel with the structures uncovered on Tell K at Tello, W. states that this complex received little consideration in scholarship except for the article offered by H. Crawford (1987). The sequence of superimposed temples dedi-

As to the stratigraphy, four phases (1-4), datable to the ED period, have been reconstructed by Marchetti (in Marchesi, Marchetti 2011: 51, Table 7). In his opinion, two thick mud-brick platforms were built in this spot (phases 1 and 2), the latter of which characterized by stone foundations and with an unscribed copper foundation deposit. Above these structures a third mud-brick terrace was then erected (phase 3). Marchetti grouped W.'s levels a, c, d (fig. 9.10)⁴ – assigned instead to different phases by W. – and assumed that they belonged to the same platform (phase 3). This terrace was flanked by a ramp set along the NW side, and votive offerings were deposited or buried next the ramp (“temple dump”). By contrast with W., Marchetti (2011: 47) proposed to interpret the dump as a favissa, in the light of the Tell al-‘Ubaid temple evidence. The analysis of the inscribed materials together with the stylistic analysis of the sculptures from the favissa allowed Marchetti to propose an ED IIIa date for phase 3 (*ibidem*)⁵.

Lastly in the southern part of the platform a square structure with baked-brick foundations sealed by a pavement coated with bitumen was erected by E'iginimpa'e (phase 4 = W.'s b-e). According to Marchetti, on this elaborate foundation system were probably set the mud-brick uprights of the temple, not recognized by the excavators that were exploring the area by digging tunnels. This was part of a large complex lying on baked mud-bricks foundations and consisting of a sanctuary, subsidiary buildings (western rooms), drains and foundation deposits (phase 4). This interpretation dismisses the one proposed by W. that understood the baked-bricks structure (b) as the cella of a sanctuary (fig. 9.10) that was at some point demolished, filled with mud-bricks (d) and subsequently capped with the baked-brick and bitumen pavement (e). From a structural standpoint, Marchetti – although accepting the parallel assumed

by W. between the “tower” and the “construction inférieure” on Tell K at Tello – proposes to reconstruct the lay-out of the baked-brick building as consisting of two independent cellas, by analogy with Ningirsûk-phase 3 (cf. Marchesi, Marchetti 2011: pl. 9 on Tello and *ibidem*: 219-222 on the historical meaning of this temple type), while W. suggested two en suite rooms with axial approach (fig. 9.8).

To sum up, Marchetti's reconstruction appears more articulated and as a whole more convincing. Also, the strict comparison with the reconstructed sequence of Tell K at Tello (cf. Marchetti in Marchesi, Marchetti 2011: 38-44) and the materials from Tell al-‘Ubaid provides striking similarities. This also helps making sense of the spatial distribution of foundation deposits and ritually discarded materials, excavated by Banks. Further, a more in depth discussion of artistic documentation and epigraphic data allowed Marchetti to propose a more articulated chronological framework for the sequence of ED temples excavated on the mound. It is therefore surprising that no reference whatsoever is made to such proposal in this chapter of the book.

Chapter 10 deals with the work carried out by Banks and Persons on Mound X where burned structures revealed materials and installations (fig. 10.1). Some graves produced a pottery repertoire that might be considered of Akkadian date. In chapter 11 W. summarizes the scanty information regarding the brief investigations carried out on Mounds VI, VII, VIII, IX, XI, XII, XIII, XV, XIV, XVI. Notably, although the account provided by Banks is very brief, it seems that on Mound VI the remains of another ED sacred building were uncovered. The statue head (pl. 76a) and a stone plaque – unfortunately still unpublished – discovered here may in fact be considered temple furniture. Chapters 12 and 13 deal with a bulk of objects of uncertain provenance (table 12.1, pls. 80-98) and with objects purchased by Banks and Persons from the market. Among these items, the chlorite/steatite vessels (pls. 81-83) are considered by W. as coming from the “temple dump” of Mound V. With regard to the items from the market, once in Chicago they were registered as part of the Bismaya collection, and then it was possible to distinguish only few of them from the objects actually excavated on site. The most famous of these unprovenanced objects is the statue of “Baraḥenidu” purchased in Baghdad in 1930 and discussed in a separate chapter (Appendix D).

Chapter 14 is a tentative reconstruction of the history of Adab on the basis of both written sourc-

cated to Ningirsûk on Tell K and the artistic and epigraphic documents retrieved therein have received full attention in works by D. Forest (1999: 15-23), and most recently by N. Marchetti (cf. in Italian Marchetti 2006: 53-64; Marchesi, Marchetti 2011: 38-44).

⁴ Note that (a) is interpreted as an early brickwork, (c) as mud-floor layers connected to the “tower” and (d) is considered a mud-brick fill laid inside the “tower”.

⁵ Phase 3 is then compared by Marchetti (in Marchesi, Marchetti 2011: 49) with phase 4 of the Ningirsûk temple at Tello (Tell K) also according to the presence in both levels of inscribed objects dedicated by Mešalim of Kiš. To phase 3 might be associated three rulers of Adab: Ereškisalēsi, Lumma and Medurba, of which Lumma is probably the earliest one and therefore might be considered the builder of this phase (cf. *ibidem*: 51, n. 136).

es and archaeological evidence. On the site no evidence earlier than the ED I period was detected. In this light W. points out that the vessels bearing inscriptions of Lumma and Medurba might be dated to this early period according to their shape.

The evidence from the Diyala sites (see references cited by W.), Nippur (cfr. also ceramic specimens from In'anak XII, Wilson 1986: fig. 11: no. 2), and Ur – where these items (cfr. Woolley 1956: pl. 67: JN.53-56, pl. 32, U.19963: JN.35) are concentrated in the so-called Jemdet Nasr Cemetery, tentatively dated between the JN and the late ED I period (cfr. Forest, 1983; Kolbus, 1983)⁶ – makes clear that such typologies of stone vessels are primarily attested between the late JN and the ED I period in Mesopotamia. A different picture however emerges from Kiš, where some examples – albeit only few – comparable to the Medurba and Lumma vessels, were retrieved in burials excavated in Sounding Y, Houses IV stratum and in the so-called “Flood Stratum” (cfr. respectively Algaze 1983-1984: 186; Moorey 1978: Microfiche 2, E 12; FM.156462; Moorey 1966: pl. IV; Moorey 1978: Microfiche 2, E 14), recently dated between the ED II and the early ED III period (cfr. Marchetti in Marchesi, Marchetti 2011: 75-82, table 10; Zaina 2011: Table 1)⁷. In sum, if attested at all, these specimens seem quite rare in post-ED I contexts. This datum is interesting since according to G. Marchesi (in Marchesi-Marchetti 2011: 160-161, pl. 14: 1-2, 4, where these vessels were illustrated for the first time) both inscriptions display paleographic features of the Fara period (ED IIIa). It is certain that further research on the chronology of stone vessels from ED Mesopotamia is much needed.

W. then provides a reconstruction of the ED sequence of the Adab rulers in the light of the inscribed materials. In this case it seems that she did not take into consideration Marchesi's (in Marchetti 2006: table A1; Marchesi, Marchetti 2011: table 15a-b) historical framework that offers a rich dataset on the ED IIIb rulers. In table 1 is a synopsis of W.'s and Marchesi's lists of rulers.

After chapter 14 the book consists of contributions by other authors regarding written documents such as cuneiform tablets (Appendixes A-C) and inscribed objects (Appendix D). In Appendix

D, A. Westenholz reconsiders the dedicatory inscription of the high official Ur'akkilak for the life of Paragannêdug (or “Baraḥenidu”), viceroy of Adab. Marchesi and Marchetti (2011: 148-149, n. 95, 157-158) have convincingly argued that in this case the donor of the statue (Ur'akkilak) is probably the person portrayed in the statue and therefore the statue is not to be considered a royal representation. Appendixes E and F, prepared again by W., consist of catalogs of the objects retrieved during Banks' excavations and now divided between the Eski Şark Müzesi of Istanbul (Appendix E) and the OIM of Chicago (Appendix F). Appendix G is a bibliographic catalog of Edgar Banks' publications.

In the plates, well-presented and easy to use, the materials are arranged according to the excavation areas/mounds and consist of field photos and new b/w photos of items from known contexts, currently housed in the OIM. The objects are also eventually illustrated by drawings, which are of good quality. With regard to the glyptic finds, it must be noted that cylinder seals illustrations do not include drawings and that no data on the reverses of the seal impressions and on the traces of use eventually preserved are provided. Further, the inscribed brick on pl. 102a is published upside down. The plates are completed by tables of data related with the objects. Finally, plates 103-113 consist of a series of high quality color photos of selected finds, such as the famous “Bismaya head” (pl. 103), the foundation deposit of Eiginimpa'e (pls. 110-111) and the Paragannêdug statue (pls. 112-113).

In general, this well-conceived volume provides an interesting and detailed reconstruction of Bismaya excavations. This contribution will be regarded as a fundamental tool for archaeologists and scholars interested in the early researches concerning ancient Mesopotamia. Also, it is important to stress here that a great deal of data can still be obtained by reviewing old excavations in a systematic way. In the same vein, museum collections are very far from being completely published and fully available to scholars. The illustrations provided in this volume can somehow contribute to fill this gap. Moreover the book can be downloaded for free from the website of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. This policy allows an open access to most of the seminal studies produced by the institute and has to be taken in utmost consideration.

However some specific issues on the book can be raised. In the first place, the stratigraphic reconstruction of Mound V appears to be not entirely

⁶ Woolley (1956: 37) notes that elaborate bowl types typical of the Jemdet Nasr period (types JN.53-60, *ibidem*, pl. 67) are not attested at all in the Royal Cemetery. To this we can add that stone goblets similar to those inscribed by Lumma are not attested in the Cemetery.

⁷ Note that some tall limestone goblets are attested at Kiš, in a stratum - Sounding Y-Houses Stratum IV

Date	Wilson (table 14.1)	Marchesi (in Marchesi, Marchetti 2011: table 15a-b)	Synchronisms	
ED I	Lumma			
ED IIIa		Lumma		
	Ninkisalsi	Ereškisalēsi	Mēšalim	
	Medurba	Medurba		
	Epa'e	Epa'e		
ED IIIb	Lugaldalu	Lugaldalu		
	Muksi	Paragannêdug		
	E'iginimpa'e	E'iginimpa'e		
	Baraḥenidu	Mugêsi		
	Meskigalla ↓		Ursaḡkešak	
			Enme'ânu	Lugalkišešdudûd
			HAR.TU-ašgik	
		Meskigalla	Lugalzagêsi, Šarrumkēn	
Protoimperial and Early Akkadian				

Table 1. Synopsis of ED rulers of Adab

convincing, as well as the historical framework proposed on the basis of the written sources. Also, it seems that most recent works dealing with Mesopotamian excavations and chronology have been overlooked by W. The second issue concerns the use of data and illustrations. Given the large-scale exposure of several areas at the site and the creation of new maps and plans, it would have been useful to produce phase plans of the site. This would have allowed to draw some observations on the development of Adab urban planning over time. The lack of satellite images is also regrettable.

As to the finds, the book cannot be considered a final publication since the large collection of materials housed in Istanbul was not accessed, and not all the finds in the OIM received full attention. This raises an issue concerning online publications. As stated in the White-Levy program data management plan, digital data play an increasing importance in the scholarship and should be considered as outcome of publication projects. In the case of Bismaya, the creation of an online corpus of digital contents containing all the information related with the excavated objects, images, digital plans, data tables, archives and so on, would have provided an exceptional tool for the scholarly community⁸. In this perspective it is worth mentioning

the ongoing al-Hiba publication project directed by Holly Pittman at the University of Pennsylvania and funded by a grant from the White-Levy foundation as well. The team has chosen to create “a digital research environment where the archival data is fully integrated and searchable” in order to build the final reports⁹. This philosophy must be regarded as paramount in publishing excavation reports.

Giacomo Benati

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data on the objects from Bismaya and above all, regrettably no photos or information regarding the contexts of provenance. Digital publication projects aiming at making available on the web data from old excavations and museum collections are currently underway. In this case it is worth mentioning as valuable examples, the Diyala project database (DiyArDa) of the University of Chicago, recently published online, and the ongoing British Museum-Penn Museum Ur digitization project.

⁹ Poster by G. Pizzorno, D. Ashby, H. Bernberg, S. Renette presented at the 2012 ASOR meeting. I thank D. Ashby for providing me a copy of the poster.

⁸ Note that the OIM online database contains very few

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