

Claudia Schmidt

University of Münster, Germany

Review of:

**Curtis, J. and Green, A. 1997: *Excavations at Khirbet Khatuniyeh. Saddam Dam Report 11*. London: British Museum Press. 219 pages. ISBN 0-7141-11449.**

The excavations at Khirbet Khatuniyeh were undertaken in 1984-85 as part of the Eski Mosul Dam Salvage Project in northern Iraq. Eight occupation levels, dating from the mid-second millennium B.C. up to the present time, were excavated.

The report starts with a long and detailed introduction describing the excavation and the dramatic circumstances in which it was undertaken, thus providing a useful context within which to understand the results. For example, both the deepest level, 8, which seems to lie directly on the bedrock, and the overlying level 7, were only excavated in a sondage. They have no significant structures, no small finds and most sherds were non-diagnostic. The few sherds with horizontal stripes give only a vague idea of a date in the mid-second millennium BC for level 8, which can be confirmed by two significant Nuzi-ware sherds from higher levels. In the author's opinion, some sherds of level 7 could be of Middle or more probably Late Assyrian date. The collection, however, is too small to support a more secure dating. In addition typical Middle Assyrian types were not present (cf. Pfälzner 1995). Bowls with inverted and thickened rims (Nos. 25-27) are known from Middle Assyrian contexts, but they are more common in the neo-Assyrian period. The mass of the sherds presented are comparable with the indifferent examples of Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta, which generally have a date from the Middle to Late Assyrian periods (Schmidt 1997).

Levels 6 and 5 are distinguished by stone structures clearly datable by the Late Assyrian pottery. The architectural remains of level 4 (the best represented of all) were destroyed by fire. They consisted of two rooms with walls of substantial pisé blocks containing a large number of almost complete storage vessels, as well as items connected with weaving. The authors associate the destruction of this building with an invasion of Medes and Babylonians at the end of the 7th century, and the ceramics, having a clear Late Assyrian character, can be cited in support of this hypothesis. Considering the sparseness of the finds, an interpretation of the remains by the authors as a governor's residence may be too ambitious and specific. However, the small finds from this level (and possibly the underlying level) did include items such as glazed bricks (Nos. 1+3)<sup>1</sup>, an animal-headed drinking-cup (No. 20), and an incense burner (No. 84), suggesting that the inhabitants may have been of high social status. The small finds allow for no definite dating. The hypothesis that level 4 bears traces of the destruction activities by Medes and Babylonians should therefore be approached with greater caution.

The architectural remains of the overlying level 3 are of a more modest character. The building still touches the level 4 pisé walls, suggesting that any hiatus may not have been of long duration. The character of the ceramics is still Assyrian, but with a

higher proportion of mineral and vegetable temper. The authors point to parallels in Qasrij Cliff, the dating of which is still debated (cf. Curtis 1993, 117). A comparable situation is to be found in Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta where a fire destruction level was built upon in a similar manner, also after a short hiatus. The ceramics from both levels in Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta were homogenous and continuous, without any specific type that could be an indicator of post-Assyrian activity. The present lack of ceramic indicators in Qasrij Cliff, Khirbet Khatuniyeh and Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta leads me to consider that, at present, assigning a post-Assyrian date on ceramic chronology is problematic, and can only be based on the thesis of the Median and Babylonian invasion. This may explain why the authors avoided clearly defining their understanding of the term "Late Assyrian".

The level 2 structures are dated by the pottery and an Egyptian faience amulet to the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC. The ceramic assemblage, presented by L. McKenzie, includes some typical Hellenistic vessel types. Level 1 comprises the surface structures which are of a recent (less than 150 years) date.

Following the presentation of the stratigraphic sequence, with a description of and attempt at dating the main structures, the small finds are presented by level in a short report. A brief informative comment is given where significant. The ceramic descriptions are clearly arranged in tables for each level. Due to the small number of significant/datable small finds, the pottery was used as the main tool for dating. The authors discuss the difficulties of using the available material for chronological purposes, and wisely leave their interpretations vague.

Contributions by other researchers are also presented. A neutron activation and petrographic analysis of the ceramics and some pieces of clay found in the excavation, by M.J. Hughes, I.C. Freestone and M.S. Humphrey, showed that the clay derives, as at Qasrij Cliff, from the alluvial sedimentation of the Tigris. Excavated faunal remains were analysed and presented by P. Croft, and modern faunal remains by A. Searight. Excavated shells were examined and reported upon by D. S. Reese.

The presentation of the results of the excavation at Khirbet Khatuniyeh is enhanced by many helpful and well thought-out tables, particularly in the case of ceramics. The general layout of these makes it a simple matter to obtain either a rapid overview of the evidence or more detailed information if required.

The significance of this site in Late Assyrian times (the period of the putative gubernatorial residence) can only be ascertained from a few exceptional small finds and the large number of storage jars in level 4, and the overall importance of the site is largely due to this collection of almost complete jars. These may form a foundation for analysis and, perhaps, chronology, contributing important comparative material to the existing corpus within future discussions of Late Assyrian and post-Assyrian ceramics.

---

<sup>1</sup> Fragments of glazed bricks were found in the Tukulti-Ninurta I. dated level in Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta (C.Schmidt, op.cit.)

### References

- Bernbeck, R. 1993. *Steppe als Kulturlandschaft: das Agig-Gebiet Ostsyriens vom Neolithikum bis zur islamischen Zeit*: 117. Berlin: Reimer.
- Curtis, J.E. 1989. *Excavations at Qasrij Cliff and Khirbet Qasrij*. Saddam Dam Report 10. London: British Museum.
- Pfälzner, P. 1995. *Mittanische und mittelassyrische Keramik, eine chronologische, funktionale und produktionsökonomische Analyse*. BATSH 3. Berlin: Reimer.
- Schmidt, C. 1997. *Aufarbeitung der Befunde der Areale A-F in Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta, Nord-Irak, Kampagnen 1986-89*. Unpubl. Magisterarbeit, Münster.