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Review of:

Lebeau, M. and Suleiman, A. (eds) 1997: *Subartu III: Tell Beydar, Three Seasons of Excavations (1992-1994). A Preliminary Report*. Turnhout: Brepols Publishers. 244 pages. ISBN 2-503-50584-8.

The last few years have seen a significant geographical shift in emphasis in Middle Eastern archaeology from the Mesopotamian region towards the Syrian deserts. This new focus is finally giving early Bronze Age Syria the place it deserves in history by balancing the past overrepresentation of Mesopotamian data in the archaeological corpus. Several new (or renewed) excavations at sites such as Tell Brak, Tell Chuera and Tell Beydar have demonstrated a profusion of third millennium B.C. settlements, cultures and languages that, up to now, have been seriously underestimated.

It is therefore rather unfortunate that the first publication devoted to the new and exciting Euro-Syrian excavations at Tell Beydar does not live up to its original expectations. One gets the impression while reading the volume that, in spite of the enormous progress being made in the application and adaptation of scientific techniques in Middle Eastern archaeology, the "digging-for-tablets" curse still seems to exert a powerful influence over the processes of site excavation.

Not only does the quality of the miscellaneous articles vary greatly, but the recording of aesthetic detail is often allowed to triumph over the publication of more rigorous scientific data. Simple examples include the often conspicuous absence of stratigraphic analysis or drawings (exception, p.173) and the constant use of photographs instead of architectural drawings (for instance, p.126-132). Pretty though they may be, photographs do not give exact dimensions nor a good representation of building techniques, a fact not to be underestimated considering the difficulties of excavating and studying mudbrick structures.

"La séquence stratigraphique du III^e millénaire (chantier G)" by Philippe Quenet (p.169-178) should give us an idea of the main stratigraphic sequence on which the diachronic study of the site is based. As such, it leaves us with more questions than it answers. The very brief ceramic description and statements such as "Le matériel céramique des couches I à III, enregistré dans sa totalité, représente incomplètement l'éventail des types de poterie connus pour le Bronze Ancien de Syrie du Nord" do not inspire much confidence. One might get the impression that the excavator has not even considered the possibility of the existence of a regional pottery sequence.

The drawings in the "Stratigraphical Study of the Seleucid-Parthian Levels" in "Field A" by T. Boiy and R.M. Galàn (p.23-33) show us how it might have been for the other chapters. Despite this, the architectural study remains nothing more than a traditional review of building techniques.

On the other hand, the Subartu III-volume does contain some good specialist chapters, the discussion of the glyptic finds by Béatrice Teissier being the first to

spring to mind. However, the brief glimpses offered to us by field director Dr. Marc Lebeau's introductory chapter on the chronological development and spatial extent of the different architectural areas across this large site (p.7-21) barely provide more than a cursory treatment of the data.

For example, the importance of Tell Beydar within the larger Bronze Age communication system and settlement pattern is only hinted at obliquely and tantalizingly on the map in figure 2 (p.13). It certainly deserves more attention and discussion.

Hopefully, further research and future publications in this series will provide us with more information to allow a full integration of the site in its natural and cultural environment.