



Urban and Natural Landscapes of an Ancient Syrian Capital: Settlement and Environment at Tell Mishrifeh/Qatna and in Central-Western Syria. Edited by DANIELE MORANDI BONACOSSI. *Studi Archeologici su Qatna*, vol. 1. Udine: FORUM, EDITRICE UNIVERSITARIA UDINESE, 2007. Pp. 350, illus. €70.

After a long period of relative neglect, archaeologists of Bronze Age Syria have turned their attention to the Orontes valley of inland central Syria. The jewel in the archaeological crown in this region is Tell Mishrifeh, ancient Qatna, one of the major urban centers of Syria in the second millennium B.C. and a rival to Mari and Aleppo. Important, if ambiguous, results had been obtained by the work of du Mesnil du Buisson in the 1920s, but the new excavations have gone further in revealing the archaeological riches of the site.

In 1994 Michel al-Maqdissi inaugurated excavations by a Syrian expedition, and the enterprise was enlarged by the addition of Syro-German and Syro-Italian teams in 1999. The volume under review presents some of the results achieved thus far, with a particular focus on the relationship between Qatna and its natural environment. Originally presented at a conference held at Udine, Italy, in 2004, the papers in the book offer a data-rich collection of new analyses, some in preliminary stages but nearly all containing information and ideas of interest.

Michel al-Maqdissi leads off with a discussion of Qatna's occupational history. Particularly striking is Qatna's expansion from a medium-sized urban center of twenty-five hectares in the third millennium B.C. to a metropolis of over one hundred hectares in the early second millennium, enclosed by massive earthen ramparts. This development coincides with changes in the Qatna hinterland, with a shift from circular fortified tells to rectangular ones. Urban intensification is also seen in early-second-millennium Ebla, and this phenomenon deserves further scrutiny with respect to such problems as the Early to Middle Bronze Age transition, the Amorite emergence, and arguments for and against collapse at the end of EB.

Peter Pfälzner, co-director of the Syro-German team, discusses the second-millennium Qatna Royal Palace, which was built on a decidedly monumental scale: each column base in the hypostyle Hall C had a five-meter deep foundation pit, and the palace wall foundations were set in trenches four to six meters deep. Pfälzner reviews the different sectors of the palace, proposing a distinct function for each. Such one-to-one correspondence of architectural units with discrete functions may be a bit too precise, however, given the frequent evidence of multi-functionality in Bronze Age Near Eastern architecture.

The date of the palace's construction has been subject to debate. Pfälzner proposes an early MB II date, the era of the Zimrilim palace at Mari, since he postulates that the Qatna palace emulated that structure. However, the possibility exists that the Qatna palace was modelled after what must have been a longer-lasting Syrian Middle Bronze palace, that of the kings of Yamhad at Aleppo. Indeed, Daniele Morandi Bonacossi, co-director of the Syro-Italian team, prefers a late MB II date for the Qatna palace, citing late MB II sherds and earlier MB II sealings discovered in the building's foundation trenches.

Morandi Bonacossi's discussion of the history of Qatna and its hinterland reveals that very few Late Bronze Age sites in the Qatna vicinity were apparent in archaeological survey, in clear contradiction to the recently discovered fourteenth-century archive of the Qatna ruler Idanda, which refers to numerous small settlements. Similar discrepancies between textual and archaeological data have been noted in the Alalakh vicinity and in Ur III Babylonia (see J. Casana and T. J. Wilkinson, "Settlement and Landscapes in the Amuq Region," in *The Amuq Valley Regional Projects*, vol. 1: *Surveys in the Plain of Antioch and Orontes Delta, Turkey, 1995–2002*, ed. K. A. Yener [Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 2005], 25–65, and P. Steinkeller, "City and Countryside in Third-Millennium Southern Babylonia," in *Settlement and Society*, ed. E. Stone [Los Angeles: Cotsen Institute of Archaeology, 2007], 185–212), implying that the smallest rural communities may sometimes elude detection by archaeological survey.

A selection of environmental science papers includes discussion of the geoarchaeological evidence for a lake adjacent to Qatna (M. Cremaschi), a dramatic decrease in juniper pollen by ca. 1680 B.C., indicative of deforestation and, perhaps, a decline in precipitation (V. Valsecchi), and evidence for dry farming cereal agriculture with a focus on barley, by now a familiar result for Bronze Age Syro-Mesopotamia (L. Peña-Chocarro and M. Rottoli; S. Riehl). Paleopathological studies of human bones include analysis of the elite individuals from the royal hypogeum (A. Canci and F. Bartoli; C. Witzel

and K. Kreutz). The bones in the hypogeum showed signs of having been heated, either intentionally as part of the funerary procedure or as a consequence of the palace above having been burned.

Faunal analysis (E. Vila and L. Gourichon) shows an increasing specialization in sheep/goat pastoralism associated with Qatna's rise to urban and political prominence in the second millennium B.C. In this chapter, I would have appreciated more discussion of the animal bones from the royal hypogeum, particularly in light of the excavators' claim that *kispu* ceremonies honoring deceased royal ancestors took place in the tomb. It is not yet clear to me why a collection of animal bones found under a stone bench need be interpreted as remains of a feast. One might posit that these were joints of meat provided as funerary offerings, as is commonly attested in Bronze Age graves.

In the book's next section are discussions of survey and excavation results from neighboring regions. These include the Akkar plain in northern Lebanon (J.-P. Thalmann), the marl landscape southwest of Qatna (G. Philip), the Orontes valley in the Hama vicinity (K. Bartl and M. al-Maqdissi), the Ghab (M. Fortin), the "arid margins" to the east (B. Geyer), and the fascinating site of Rawda in the latter region (C. Castel). This eastern dry steppe zone is of particular interest for its marked fluctuations of sedentary occupation—there is very little Chalcolithic or early-third-millennium habitation, yet the area is dotted with sites in the mid-late third millennium (EB IV). A second "full world" is documented in the Hellenistic/Roman/Byzantine era. Geyer is inclined to see socio-economic and political motivations behind the peaks of sedentary occupation rather than opportunities afforded by climatic ameliorations.

Papers on textual evidence are presented next. J. Eidem discusses a Late Bronze tablet from the Qatna Lower Town Palace that lists groups of men (soldiers?) associated with different gates of the city. A paper by T. Richter reviews toponyms mentioned in the Idanda archive of the Qatna Royal Palace, many of which seem to be small localities in the Qatna vicinity. Also offered are papers on references to Qatna in the Mari texts, including the information that Qatna was noted for its white horses (N. Ziegler), and evidence for Qatna religious practices (C. Pappi).

Two summary papers by Cremaschi and Geyer conclude the volume. In recapitulating the conclusions of the environmental scientists, Geyer concedes that climatic fluctuations occurred, but he is insistent that they were not overly important to societal developments in the region. In this he is in agreement with many colleagues in the recent volume on the late-third-millennium "crisis" (*Sociétés humaines et changement climatique à la fin du troisième millénaire: Une crise a-t-elle eu lieu en Haute Mésopotamie?*, ed. C. Kuzucuoğlu and C. Marro [Paris: De Boccard, 2007]). While this conclusion may well be correct, I would like to have seen more evidence to justify the minimizing of climate as an important variable in the human history of the region.

Afforded less attention than one would expect in this volume is the question of why Qatna became such a major power center in the second millennium. Reference is made to its location at the nexus of caravan routes and its accessibility to diverse environmental zones (woodland, marsh, dry farming plain, dry steppe), but other variables and historical specificities must have played their part.

At the end of the volume are three attractive watercolor foldouts, providing an artist's reconstructions of Qatna and its landscape in three different periods. Though admittedly speculative, they are useful in synthesizing and envisioning the results of the research contained in the volume.

The Qatna teams are to be commended for their adherence to a multi-disciplinary focus—it would be easy to get distracted by spectacular results from royal tombs or archives. This book will be of great use to anyone interested in Syrian archaeology and in the important new developments in the archaeology of western Syria.

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