

RECENSIONS

MARRO C. (ed.) 2012. *After the Ubaid. Interpreting change from the Caucasus to Mesopotamia at the dawn of urban civilization (4500-3500 BC). Papers from the Post-Ubaid Horizon in the Fertile Crescent and Beyond, International Workshop held at Fosseuse, 29th June-1st July 2009. Paris: De Boccard; Istanbul: IFEA (Varia Anatolica XXVII). 439 p. By R. CARTER¹*

This volume covers a poorly known phase in Northern Mesopotamia and the Fertile Crescent between the end of the Ubaid period and the start of the Late Chalcolithic 3, at which point Middle Uruk material culture and colonies begin to appear in the region. Quite rightly, the editor (Catherine Marro) and most of the contributors kick against the tendency to frame these developments in southern terms, the concept of Ubaid itself being problematic, and the later Uruk expansion being a distraction to autochthonous developments of complexity and urbanism in certain northern regions by the end of the LC2 period (see *e.g.*, Oates *et al.* 2007).

It is now widely accepted that the structural reorganizations of societies in Southern and Northern Mesopotamia that began in the late 5th and early 4th millennium BC culminated in the emergence of state-level urban civilizations. The fact that the roots of these developments are variously attributed to the Late Ubaid period or the Post-Ubaid/LC1-2 period clearly underlines the fact that we are looking at a long process of cultural and structural change within the region. Any attempt to pinpoint a hard-and-fast beginning to the origins of civilization (to put it crudely), is doomed to failure, but most of the authors present a case that major structural changes occurred in Ancient Near Eastern society at this time, demonstrated by the increasing evidence for mass production, specialization and social inequality. They largely establish this by focusing on the ceramic evidence.

The first two introductory chapters of this volume, by C. Marro and M. Frangipane respectively, take a synthetic look at the Post-Ubaid/LC1-2 evidence from the vast study area, and analyse the roots and significance of the underlying

structural changes that they discern. They reach somewhat different conclusions, with Frangipane laying greater emphasis on the legacy of the Ubaid (see below). There follow a series of regional studies largely focusing on the ceramic assemblages, divided into three sections covering sites in the Khabur (Oates on Tell Brak, Abu Jayyab on Hamoukar, Baldi on Feres al-Sharqi, with a comparative study on Feres al-Sharqi and Hamoukar by Baldi and Abu Jayyab); the Euphrates and Orontes basins (Yamazaki on 'Abr, Helwing on Oylum Höyük, Balossi Restelli on Arslantepe, Gianessi on Tell Afis, and another comparative and synthetic analysis by Balossi Restelli and Helwing on the ceramic traditions west of the Euphrates); and a section entitled "Beyond the Fertile Crescent" that includes sites both in the centre and far east of the geographical range (Gülçur and Marro on Norşuntepe and Ovgular Tepesi, the latter in the Caucasus), and in the far west (Caneva, Palumbi and Pasquino on Yumuktepe, in Cilicia). A final fourth section takes an overview of the various types of Coba bowls (Baldi's third contribution to this volume); and an overview of lithic industries in Northern Mesopotamia (Thomalsky). Apart from Thomalsky's contribution, the emphasis is very firmly on ceramics and ceramic production. This is partly a reflection of the nature of the evidence, as extensive coverage of LC1-2 horizons at any site is rare, with consequent limitations on our ability to work with rarer artefact classes, architectural data or settlement layout.

Major outcomes of the study include a much more detailed demonstration and understanding of the progressive increase in mass production and standardization in ceramic manufacture, particularly with regard to Mass Produced Bowls (MPBs, including Coba bowls) but also other varieties of pottery. Thomalsky offers a similar overview of lithic technologies, which also presents convincing trends towards specialized pro-

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duction (of Canaanite blades) and standardization of raw material procurement. For the pottery, Baldi prefers to use “serial manufacture” to the terms standardization and mass production, because the variability of the product due to the speed of manufacture leads to a degree of variability within certain parameters, and because he doubts that the actual quantity of MPBs was necessarily high. Although the reviewer would question Baldi on his use of EVE measurements to indicate absolute quantity, the careful quantification of the assemblages by nearly all the authors is much to be commended. The trends in ceramic production are so strong that Marro proposes a new chronological designation, the “Standardized Ware period”. This is certainly less prescriptive (and easier to say) than the previous suggestion of “Chaff-Faced-Ware oikumene”, but in reality it is hard to see the need to replace the existing terminology of LC1-2, despite its encoding of the most salient cultural characteristic.

Regarding terminological matters, Marro summarizes the diversity of comparative terminology in a useful table, but terminological variation still exists within the publication, most notably in the maintenance of the term “Terminal Ubaid” by some authors when discussing the LC1 period, particularly Oates, who has used the term since her earlier analyses of this problematic period (e.g., Oates 1983). Oates’s reluctance to surrender the Terminal Ubaid encodes an important thread of continuity between the material culture of the Ubaid period and that of the Late Chalcolithic, seen across most of the study area. Indeed, even where authors explicitly separate out the Ubaid from the LC, specific elements of continuity are widely acknowledged, including the origin of the all-important MPBs in the Ubaid period (e.g., Marro; Balossi Restelli and Helwing), and the persistence of “Ubaid-like” painted pottery (e.g., Gianessi). MPBs are simultaneously held up as examples of this continuity from the earlier horizon, and markers of the major social reorganization at the start of the Late Chalcolithic, demonstrated by the increase in mass production. As noted by Frangipane, our need to define transitions (e.g. between the Ubaid the Late Chalcolithic) is usually no more than a reflection of our need to divide a continuum of chronological and social development into manageable sections, i.e. periods. We should therefore not be alarmed by such markers of continuity with the Late Ubaid, and indeed they should be highlighted. Indeed, the move towards the simplification of ceramics that eventually culminated in the mass production of plain vessels, can be traced back further still, to the Ubaid 3 period (Karsgaard 2010).

Of all the authors, it is Frangipane who makes most of the legacy of Ubaid society (I use the term in its loosest sense).

For her, the “Ubaid model” left a significant legacy in the north, including hierarchical organization and unequal social-economic relations (leading ultimately to mass production of bowls), public ceremonial areas associated with administrative activity, tripartite architecture, and new iconographic influence on Late Chalcolithic glyptic which apparently originated in the Ubaid period. It would be possible to quibble with some of these purported legacies, particularly the evidence for hierarchical social structure in the Ubaid period, but it is undeniable that Late Chalcolithic societies to a great extent grew out of older (Ubaid period) configurations, and this is particularly evident in the early LC ceramic repertoire. On the other hand, Marro points to the apparent co-existence of contemporary Ubaid (i.e., having Ubaid style painted pottery) and non-Ubaid communities (with Black Faced Burnished Ware) living in proximity in Anatolia, prior to the emergence of the Standardized Ware horizon. Both, it is argued, contributed to the emergence of Late Chalcolithic societies in the north.

Also potentially important is the identification of a variety of new ways to divide the greater region in terms of material culture: Marro in her introduction discerns six “major cultural provinces” (South Caucasus, Upper Euphrates, Western Euphrates, Khabur, Balikh, Cilicia) while also noting a wider north/south axis (i.e., highland vs. lowland, or Anatolia-Caucasus vs. Syria-Mesopotamia) in which major technical developments in the north impacted on Near Eastern societies, and in which multi-directional dynamics between northern and southern societies laid the basis for the emergence of “proto-states” in both regions. Baldi notes the emergence of two “ceramic provinces” in all three of his contributions (one eastern and one western, roughly divided by the Euphrates), while Frangipane also notes two “main cultural areas”, eastern and western, again largely defined by pottery and roughly divided the same way (but with the Balikh leaning towards the western zone on the other side of the Euphrates).

The meaning of these culture zones and ceramic provinces is not tackled in detail, understandably so, as such discussions tend to get bogged down in considerations of the veracity and utility of archaeological cultures. The evidence is simply lacking for the existence of ethnic or extremely large political units at this stage (notwithstanding the evidence for early state development at Brak), and in any case there should be no expectation that such material culture patterns should precisely map onto political or ethnic lines. There is some value in noting them as broad arenas for interaction and communication, but their internal organization cannot be discerned.

A further outcome is a refinement of the chronology, with new radiocarbon evidence pushing back the start of the LC1

period to *ca* 4500 BC, thus adding 2-300 years to the chronology suggested at Santa Fe.

It there are any criticisms it is that Iran has been left largely out of the discussion of this period and likewise Southern Mesopotamia (though perhaps little could be added there owing to the paucity of evidence). The intensive coverage of pottery and restricted discussion of other evidence can be forgiven on the grounds that excavation of this phase at most sites has been extremely limited, particularly for the LC1, leading to a lack of evidence for rarer artefact classes and architecture.

The reviewer's personal feeling is that the authors draw back from exploring the social impact of large-scale craft specialisation and inferred communal activities (*e.g.*, the mass commensality or rationing demonstrated by the MPBs), and avoid investigation of its practical and personal ramifications. By the LC2 period we have evidence for the mass mobilization of labour at Tell Brak (in the form of monumental buildings in TW19-20 at Brak, and the monumental fortifications at Yumuktepe), evidence for the existence of kingship (in the lion glyptic at Brak: McMahon 2009), and by the LC3 there is evidence of mass mortality interpreted as the outcome of large-scale warfare or massacres (at Hamoukar and Tell Majnuna:

Reichel 2011; McMahon 2013). Rather than mere "shared social practices, tastes, trends, needs and traditions", I would argue that in the humble Mass Produced Bowl we see a material correlate of a profound and irreversible reconfiguration of social structure into relations of deep inequality, dependency, violence and coercion.

In conclusion, this volume is highly scholarly and specialist, largely focussing on pottery assemblages from Anatolia, the Caucasus and Northern Mesopotamia. Despite its narrow focus it constitutes an important and potentially influential contribution that will inform future analyses of this formative stage in the emergence of state-level societies. It threatens to reassemble the Near Eastern "Urban Revolution", by placing some of the key developments (most notably mass production of ceramics for communal use, indicating major but otherwise largely invisible shifts in the structure of society) at an earlier date than had previously been suspected. It does this through meticulous work on quantified ceramic assemblages, accompanied by circumspect and insightful synthesis and analysis of the wider picture. The editor and participants are to be commended.

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