

Seven Generations Since the Fall of Akkad

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Preface

This volume catches midstream the surge since 1993 of research directed at examining the Akkadian collapse and subsequent history of the Khabur Plains, a period recognized as unique at its terminus even in the 19th century BC as “the seven generations since the Fall of Akkad.” The fifteen papers of this volume were prepared for a workshop at the 8th International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East, May 2, 2012 at Warsaw University. To encourage collaborative discussion, workshop participants pre-distributed their papers in April and were also asked to address “The Four Questions”: When did Akkadian imperialization of the Khabur Plains collapse? How many settlements/persons (Akkadian and local) abandoned the Khabur Plains? What was the size of remnant post-Akkadian settlement on the Khabur Plains? What was the duration of remnant post-Akkadian settlement on the Khabur Plains? However, the number of papers and the limited workshop time available precluded lengthy discussion of divergent views among the contributors, and time was spent mostly on the illustrated and detailed presentation of the pre-distributed papers.

About half of the papers presented focus upon ceramic types and typologies, of various analysis and reporting qualities, for the continuation of some settlement at some sites for some time after the Akkadian abandonment. Other papers, enhanced with multiple high-resolution radiocarbon-dates for settlement durations (Weiss et al, Emberling et al), precise measurement of agricultural and administrative activities (Smith, McCarthy, Emberling et al), and regional settlement distributions (Ristvet, Arrivabeni, Colantoni), develop a framework for Khabur Plains research that confirms and refines adjacent region observations for this period. Alongside the independent paleoclimate data, these researches now provide the archaeological data for the dynamics of regional collapse across the Khabur Plains and northern Mesopotamia.

The essence of this quantitative framework is derived from the Tell Leilan excavations’ stratigraphic occupation sequence, its associated high-resolution radiocarbon chronology, and the Leilan Region Survey, which define (1) region-wide collapse and abandonment at 2254-2220 BC (68.2%), (2) minor remnant settlement for ca. 30-50 years terminating at ca. 2233-2196 (68.2%), with subsequent occupation only at the 84% reduced Tell Mozan refugium, (3) the region-wide Amorite resettlement beginning “seven generations” later at ca. 1969-1919 BC (68.2%). Still awaiting integration within some Khabur Plains analyses is the coincidence of the 4.2 – 3.9 kaBP megadrought, – an abrupt, high magnitude, centuries-long event in west Asia, and globally – with reduced dry-farming agro-production, regional abandonment and the “Fall of Akkad,” habitat-tracking, and the Amorite resettlement.

To be sure, several contributors to this volume do not share in these perspectives. Rafal Koliński reasons Tell Arbid ceramic assemblage analyses will prove the site was inhabited ca. 2200-1900 BC as part of a trade route from Tell Brak to Tell Mozan. Valentina Orsi suggests Tell Barri was occupied through spans across the late third-early second millennium. Carlo Colantoni and Augusta McMahon deploy a chronology unfettered by radiocarbon dates and imagine that Tell Brak excavations will someday locate a major post-Akkadian Hurrian city. Christophe Nicolle reconfigures labile Mohammed Diyab stratigraphy and posits a new reverse occupational chronology. Peter Pfälzner contends that Tell Mozan was a trade-enriched dry-farming city surrounded by Khabur Plains occupations from the Akkadian to the Khabur ware period.

In retrospect, some shared perspectives appear a function of shared data constraints: small excavation exposures (Mohammed Diyab, Barri, Arbid), scarce or uncertainly dated ceramic assemblages (Arbid, Mohammed Diyab, Hamoukar), no radiocarbon data (Chagar Bazar, Barri, Mohammed Diyab, Mozan, Hamoukar), no paleobotanical data (Mohamed Diyab, Barri, Arbid, Chagar Bazar, Hamoukar), no regional survey data (Arbid, Chagar Bazar, Mozan), or unintegrated paleoclimate, geoarchaeological, paleobotanical, and occupational data (Mozan). The value of this volume, therefore, resides in its self-evidence. Archaeologists can evaluate the available data, analyses, and interpretations, and to some degree can assess their limitations, falsifiability, and verisimilitude. Conversely, we can now identify the types and qualities of data required for further testing and refinement region-wide.

For these many accomplishments the contributors deserve thanks and congratulation. A special debt of gratitude is owed Professor Rafał Koliński, who energetically facilitated the workshop's programming within the 8th ICAANE meeting in Warsaw. Moreover, the workshop participants heartily acknowledge the grace and diligence with which Professor Hartmut Kühne arranged for the swift publication of this volume within the series *Studia Chaburensia*. All offer a toast to Tobias Schmidt for his superb typesetting.

Harvey Weiss

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