

GIANNI MARCHESI and NICOLÒ MARCHETTI:

Royal Statuary of Early Dynastic Mesopotamia.

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As an updated English-language version of the authors' Italian publication *La statuaria regale nella Mesopotamica Protodinastica* (Rome, 2006), this book will be essential reading for anybody interested in the visual language, archaeology, epigraphy and chronology of Mesopotamia (today's Iraq and eastern Syria) in the period approximately 3000–2400 BC. It was at that time that some of the world's earliest urban centres and political states emerged on the alluvial plains of the rivers Tigris and Euphrates. The principal aim of the book is to identify and establish a relative chronology of Mesopotamian royal statuary. However, it offers much more in describing the social and cultural transformation of Mesopotamian elite society through the analysis of the wider archaeological record. This is not an easy task as the material and literature are extensive. However, the authors have achieved their aim and delivered what is in many respects a ground-breaking study.

Our understanding of the early third millennium BC is reliant primarily on excavations undertaken during the 1920s and 1930s at Ur and at a number of other sites in eastern Mesopotamia (the Diyala River valley). The discoveries established a stratigraphic basis for the study of Mesopotamian art. Later studies were carried out, however, largely independently of this data, particularly those undertaken by proponents of the Berlin School of art history. The work under review prioritizes the archaeological stratification of materials as an important basis for chronological or stylistic reconstructions. Indeed, it is argued that the stylistic traits of Mesopotamian statuary identified by Henry Frankfort in the 1930s and 1940s remain to a large extent valid today. His division of the chronology of the Early Dynastic (ED) period into three main phases, with a further subdivision of ED III into *a* and *b*, remains a fundamental point of reference for Mesopotamian archaeology. Recent debates over whether ED II is in fact a late expression of ED I (i.e. not a period in its own right) are dismissed by the authors, although many may hesitate at such conviction. The question of an absolute chronology is very sensibly avoided.

Chapters 1 to 4 contain a detailed analysis of the archaeological and epigraphic evidence; much of this is contained in footnotes that deserve careful reading. The resulting chronological reconstruction (presented in Tables 12–13) differs at many points from the traditional relative chronology and from other more recent proposals. Of particular interest is a re-evaluation of the so-called Seal-Impression Strata (SIS) levels at Ur, here firmly dated to ED I. These levels lie beneath the famous Royal Cemetery which are convincingly placed in ED IIIb rather than given their more traditional ED IIIa date. An outline of Mesopotamian political development in chapter 2 provides a useful discussion of Early Dynastic rulers and their titles – stress is placed on the hypothetical nature of much of the evidence, especially when this is only palaeographic. The central question of identifying royal imagery among the larger corpus of elite statuary is the focus of chapter 3. This is not an exact science: the interpretation of inscriptions (which are transliterated and translated in chapter 4) can be problematic, and the identification of uninscribed sculptures as royal is based on their material, size, iconography and typology.

The resulting corpus (twelve inscribed and six uninscribed statues) provides the evidence in chapters 5 and 6 for a discussion of the history, nature and purpose of Mesopotamian royal statuary. The image of the so-called priest-king of the late

fourth millennium BC provides a fascinating starting point. Normally interpreted as a depiction of the head of the city's administration, he disappears from the visual record in the early third millennium BC. Marchetti suggests that the priest-king is actually a deity who leaves no trace in later royal iconography. What is missing from this discussion is the nuanced reading of the priest-king imagery by Zainab Bahrani ("Performativity and the image: narrative, representation and the Uruk vase", in E. Ehrenberg (ed.), *Leaving No Stones Unturned: Essays on the Ancient Near East and Egypt in Honor of Donald P. Hansen*. Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2002, 15–22).

Drawing on a careful study of the iconography and themes of Early Dynastic art as set within their proposed chronology, the authors conclude that in the early centuries of the third millennium BC the ruler is invisible. This is because, it is argued, he is part of the state's administrative structure which is represented visually by scenes of banqueting – a ritualized and public event. During the ED IIIa period, however, a language is being formulated to celebrate and represent kingship as the central institution of society, including scenes of battle. By ED IIIb this language is firmly established and would lead ultimately to the royal artistic masterpieces of the Akkadian Empire (about 2300–2150 BC).

The statues of the Mesopotamian elite were dedicated in temples, and the characteristics of Early Dynastic sanctuaries as well as their names are reviewed in the first of three appendixes. The second appendix explores the evidence for royal statues in administrative texts (these all come from Lagash). Appendix C explains the methodology adopted by the authors in the transliteration of inscriptions and proper names; the non-conventional transcriptions of proper names introduced in the work are initially jarring, for example, Sarrumken rather than the more familiar Sargon; Enmetennak rather than Enmetena. The plates at the end of the book are designed well with clear black-and-white photographs.

In conclusion, this book is an important, engaging and multifaceted account that is sure to provoke discussion and debate. It deserves to become a classic interpretation of the archaeology and royal iconography of third millennium BC Mesopotamia and should be the first port of call for anybody interested in a detailed understanding of the period. Marchesi and Marchetti deserve our congratulations and thanks.

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NATHAN WASSERMAN:

Most Probably: Epistemic Modality in Old Babylonian.

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Epistemic modality, – simply put, a certain marked relation of the speaker to the certainty of his words – has never been the subject of systematic research in Assyriology. Better studied is deontic modality, which deals with volition and obligation, expressed in Akkadian mostly by means of verbal mood (cf., for instance, E. Cohen, *The Modal System of Old Babylonian*, Winona Lake, 2005). The book under review, a result of Wasserman's fifteen-year study of the subject, aims to reveal the available part of the epistemic modality kit of Old Babylonian Akkadian in its variety. Linguistic studies of dead languages are inevitably limited to material from