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The beer office of Chagar Bazar (Syria)

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The tell of Chagar Bazar is located in northern Syria, approximately in the center of the Khabur basin. The site has been excavated during campaigns led by M. Mallowan in the 1930's. In 1936-1937, 124 old-Babylonian tablets were uncovered and partaken between Syria (Alep Museum) and Great Britain (British Museum). We had to wait until 1997 and Philippe Talon's edition (with copies made by Hamido Hammade), to get the whole of the documentation discovered by M. Mallowan¹. The 113 tablets discovered in 1937 were part of the archive of the grain office of the Chagar Bazar palace dating from Samsî-Addu's time. The 1937 campaign was the last one carried out on the site, as M. Mallowan then devoted himself to the excavations of Tell Brak.

From 1999 onwards, excavations were resumed by a joint mission, involving the General Directorate of Museums and Antiquities of Syria and the archaeological mission of the University of Liège, led by Professor Önhan Tunca.

1 - Talon 1997 (*OBTCB*). For a picture of the tablets publication before this new edition, see Talon 1997: 3-4. Years 2003 and 2004 did not bring new texts. Since 2005, each campaign has uncovered new tablets. For the 10th campaign in 2008, see Lacambre & Millet Albà (2008). However, the present study will rest upon the only texts published by Talon in 1997, and Tunca & Baghdo in 2008 (*CB III*).

The site I, located on the tell, provided all the tablets discovered since 2000². Every tablets discovered between 2000 and 2002, 214 texts and fragments, were published by D. Lacambre, A. Millet Albà and M. Tanret in Ö. Tunca & A. Baghdo (eds), *Chagar Bazar (Syrie) III. Les trouvailles épigraphiques et sigillographiques du chantier I (2000- 2002) (= CB III). Publications de la Mission archéologique de l'Université de Liège en Syrie*, Louvain, Paris, Dudley (MA), Peeters, 2008.

These new texts have allowed an almost undoubted identification of Chagar Bazar with the ancient Ašnakkum³. They date from the period known as the kingdom of Upper Mesopotamia, a large territorial unit founded by Samsî-Addu at the outset of the 18th century BC (1792-1775 BC according to the middle chronology⁴) over a large part of present days Syria and northern Iraq. He chose Šubat-Enlil (Tell Leilan) as its capital, very near from Chagar Bazar, and put his two sons on the thrones of Ekallâtum (Išme-Dagan) and Mari (Yasmah-Addu).

2 - Cf. Ö. Tunca, Ch. 1. Presentation and archaeological context of the finds in Tunca et Baghdo 2008: 3-15.

3 - Lacambre D. et Millet-Albà A.: Ch. 7. The old name of Chagar Bazar, in Tunca et Baghdo 2008 : 143-154.

4 - The chronology used here follows Charpin et Ziegler 2003: 262.

The tablets of Chagar Bazar come mainly from the archive of the beer office. This office recorded the distribution of beer rations to the palace staff and to individuals on their way through the region (officials or ambassadors) who stopped at Chagar Bazar.

After evoking the context of the discovery of this archive, we analyze the functions of the beer office (notion of office, organization, etc.) and the system of distribution of rations. This study will allow us to understand the social organization of the Chagar Bazar palace and, more widely, that of the Upper Mesopotamian kingdom.

1. THE DISCOVERY CONTEXT OF THE BEER OFFICE ARCHIVE

1.1. THE PALACE (*EKALLUM*) OF CHAGAR BAZAR

The administrative texts tell us that Chagar Bazar had a "palace of the upper city" (*é-galki-ir-hi*)⁵. This is certainly, according to Ö. Tunca, a palatial complex⁶ including, for now, the building where the batch of tablets of 1937 was found and the building currently excavated on Site I from which come the tablets uncovered since 2000.

1.2. THE LOCALISATION OF THE TABLETS DURING THEIR DISCOVERIES

During excavations, two main sets belonging to the beer archive have been found on Site I: the set of 2001 (pit 19.1.-.1), where the tablets have been well preserved (86 documents), and the set of 2002 (pit 71.1.-.1), discovered just below the surface, whose tablets were in a very

5 - *OBTCB* 77, l. 19'.

6 - Tunca et Baghdo 2008 : 15.

poor state of preservation (only 101 texts could be deciphered)⁷.

Isolated finds related to beer must be added: we can cite, for example, four texts dating from Ennam-Aššur recording the delivery of wort-*billatum*⁸. Finally, other types of documents were discovered such as school texts⁹.

1.3. DISCARDED TABLETS

The overwhelming majority of the texts discovered at Chagar Bazar are of administrative nature. They are dated between the eponymous names of Ennam-Aššur (1789 BC) and Addu-Bâni (1777-1776 BC), i.e. a little more than a decade in all. However, the last years are the most documented, namely Awîliya, Nimer-Sîn and Addu-Bâni (between 1779 and 1776 BC)¹⁰.

The discovered archives were obviously discarded shortly afterwards¹¹: we can therefore speak of « dead » archives¹². This is by no way surprising: the administrative archives of Samsî-Addu period were of no longer interest to the new rulers who occupied the city after the fall of his empire.

This practice is well known, a similar phenomenon being attested for example at Mari, with the archive of oil office at the time of Yasmah-Adad. The tablets have been recovered

7 - Lacambre D., in Tunca et Baghdo 2008 : 204. To locate the discoveries, cf. Tunca et Baghdo 2008: pl. 3.

8 - Set 35.1, *CB* III no 154 to no 157.

9 - *CB* III no 211 to no 214. Cf. M. Tanret, Ch. 4. The school tablets, *CB* III: 127-128.

10 - The inquiry concerning the placing of Ahiyaya's eponymity remains to be solved; for a recent hypothesis, cf. Lacambre 2009.

11 - Cf. introduction *supra* and Ö. Tunca, in Tunca et Baghdo 2008: 10-11, § 1.2.4.1. This is very conspicuous for the lots from pits 19.1.-.1 and 71.1.-.1.

12 - About this notion, cf. Charpin 2002: 506-507.

in the room 116 of the palace¹³, where they have been reused as material for benches built during the reign of Zimrî-Lîm (1775- 1762 BC).

2. THE BEER OFFICE ARCHIVES

The recovered tablets belong to the beer archive. Although discarded, one can presume some proximity between the place of their discovery and the location of the office, a place of management and perhaps a place to make the beer.

2.1. THE NOTION OF OFFICE

The notion of office is still difficult to define precisely. Broadly speaking, the disparity made between different offices is related to a kind of products or productions. For the food by example, each commodity seems to be managed by a particular office (e.g. grain, oil, or beer), which is then responsible for distributing rations to the dependent population.

The question arises as to whether the place of management and that of production are identical.

For Chagar Bazar, it is still too early to know it. The excavation of the area from which the tablets originate is not yet completed.

2.2. THE BEER OFFICE ORGANIZATION

2.2.1. THE RESPONSIBLES

Through the texts analysis, we can establish who was responsible for the outputs of beer. Thus, Huhân and Erra-tukultî were in charge of the office between Ilî-tillatî and Asqudum. In Awîliya, Erra-tukultî was still present, but

Huhân faded out; he seems to have been provisionally replaced by Addu-tukultî and Lâ-awîl-Addu. The following year, in Nimer-Sîn, Zaziya was appointed and he then alternated with Erra-tukultî.

The cycle of their alternation at the head of the beer office has not yet been established. But it is a well-known administrative practice. We found it for example at Mari, in the framework of the oil office management¹⁴.

2.2.2. THE BEER MAKING

The brewing of beer was usually based on barley, which is the most suitable cereal for this purpose, but the Chagar Bazar archives do not document this process. To know it, we must turn to the beer office archives of Tell Leilan, the old Šubat-Enlil, contemporary with the reign of Zimrî-Lîm¹⁵. They record the supply of ingredients for the brewing of beer such as, for example, malt (munu4 or *buqlum*)¹⁶.

Nevertheless, it has been possible to calculate, through the Chagar Bazar archives, a close relationship between the quality of beer brewed and the amount of barley used for their brewing.

Indeed, we note that for the same volume of beer, the higher the amount of barley used, the more one sort of beer was estimated. I was able to differentiate four different qualities of beer, which is of utmost importance in assessing the recipient's social position (see below).

So, we have the upper quality beer « *kaš ša ZUmišu* », the costliest, since with 1.5 volume of grain, only 1 volume of beer is brewed. Then came the good quality beer (*kaš sig₅*) with a rate

¹³ - Charpin 1984, Durand 1985 et Charpin 1987. Lastly see Chambon 2008b: 283 n. 2.

¹⁴ - Duponchel 1997 et Chambon 2008b.

¹⁵ - For the date, cf. Van De Mieroop 1994: 308; see also Charpin et Ziegler 2003: 168.

¹⁶ - Van De Mieroop 1994 : 311-317.

1 for 1. There was also a regular beer (*kaš ús*) at a rate 1/2 (grain) for 1 (beer vol.), and finally a second quality beer (*kaš gurnum*), the least estimated, since 1/4 volume of grain was enough to get 1 volume of beer.

2.2.3. CLASSIFYING THE ARCHIVE

After analyzing all the texts discovered, it appeared that the responsible of the beer office sorted his archives according to the type of brewed beer¹⁷. In fact, he was accountable for the supplied barley in relation to the quantity of beer to be brewed. The barley / beer ratio being known, a classification by type of beer allowed him to easily find the amount of barley used for its brewing (for good quality beer, *kaš sig₅*, the ratio being 1:1, a very simple calculation).

We do not have, for Chagar Bazar, texts of intermediate accounting or bill reports of the barley provided. We know this kind of texts thanks to the archives of Tell Leilan¹⁸ or Tell Rimah (old Quatṭarâ)¹⁹.

At Chagar Bazar, this explains why all the texts found together document the same type of beer. It is therefore logical that the tablets batches of 2001 (pit 19.1.-1) and 2002 (pit 71.1.-1) consist only of allocations for good quality beer (*kaš sig₅*)²⁰. Although discarded, these texts keep trace of the archive original classification.

This sorting is also found on other sites such Tell Leilan for example where only the beer of good quality (*kaš sig₅*) is attested in the archive

17- Cf. the analysis presented by Lacambre D. in Tunca et Baghdo 2008: 203-207, § 10.5.

18- Van De Mieroop 1994.

19- Dalley *et al.* 1976.

20- Lacambre D., in Tunca et Baghdo 2008 : 203-205, § 10.5.1 et 338-343, Annexe 3.

of the beer office²¹.

3. RATIONS AND SOCIAL HIERARCHIES

3.1. THE RATION SYSTEM

The palace distributed rations to people who depended on it, at a steady schedule. The amount of these rations differs according to the function, age, or gender of the recipient.

Among food rations, beer is actually considered only as a processed barley ration. We do notice that the reference is always an equivalent given in barley, as illustrated by the case of Ramarum, the main wife of the local leader, *Sîn-iqîšam*. She usually received 10 *qa* of good quality beer (*kaš sig₅*)²² equivalent to the same amount of barley. However, in one particular case, she received 20 *qa* of beer of ordinary quality (*kaš ús*) (CB III n ° 65). This is easily explained when one takes into account the brewing criteria of the four beer qualities. Here, a double volume of lower quality beer required the same amount of barley (in this case, 1 *qa* of barley allowed to produce twice as much beer). The allocation of Ramarum thus remained always equivalent to 10 *qa* of barley.

The amount of rations allows us to assess the rank each one in the social hierarchy.

3.2. THE RECIPIENTS OF RATIONS

As often, the kind of texts provided at Chagar Bazar gives us only a partial view of the local population. It is mainly composed of high ranked

21- Van De Mieroop 1994: 338 and the comment by D. Lacambre in Tunca et Baghdo 2008: 206-207.

22- Millet A. Albà, in Tunca et Baghdo 2008: 250; 1 *qa* equals about 1 liter, but the measurement standard used must be taken into account.

people in the hierarchy of Upper Mesopotamia, receiving good quality beer (kaš sig₅), a fairly expensive beer²³.

We can mention the rations allotted to the leader of Chagar Bazar, Sîn-iqîšam, and to the women of his harem. The quantity of beer allocated to Sîn-iqîšam oscillates between 70 and 90 *qa* of good quality beer (between 84 and 108 liters according to the measurement indicated). As mentioned above, Ramarum, his main wife, received 10 *qa* of good quality beer. Secondary wives received lower rations, between 5 *qa* and 1 *qa* of good beer depending on their social position. At last, the concubines ("musician women") were divided in two broad categories: 10 first-rank concubines ("great musician women") received 1 *qa* of beer; regarding the 23 second-rank concubines ("little musician women"), it seems that they got lower rations, both in quantity and quality (see CB III No. 65).

Other occasional recipients are attested like messengers or, for example, senior officials coming from Šubat-Enlil in Addu-bâni for the setup of a commemorative-*rânum* building. I refer to the study published in CB III for more details²⁴.

3.3. ORGANIZATION OF THE RATIONS DISTRIBUTION

Two measures are used for the distribution of rations: the Šamaš-measure and the *kinatê*-measure. The first would be the official measure in use throughout the kingdom of Upper Mesopotamia. In this domain, as in that of the calendar, Samsî-Addu

would have force single standard upon his whole empire. But local measures remain, which is probably the case with the *kinatê*-measure or "staff measure"²⁵. The ratio between the two measures is as following: the Šamaš-measure was 1,5 time smaller than the « staff measure » (*kinatê*)²⁶.

The tangible form taken by these distributions is still very poorly known. Can one imagine, following Mr. van De Mieroop, that there were "ration coupons"? According to him, at Tell Leilan: « we may have an indication of how the system of beer distribution worked. A small and flat tag, containing only two lines, was found mixed with the tablets of this archive, L91- 455A: "1 silà kaš sig₅ / [i]r-di lugal: 1.2 liters good beer (for) the royal servants". The tag was sealed, but it is unclear by whom. It might be that people were issued such small tags, almost like coupons, which they could cash in with beer in Muturamê's office. The latter only kept a record of what he took out of his stock, and discarded the tags. The one found here may have been accidentally thrown in with the records he kept on file. »²⁷.

As regards the consumption of beer by the local leader, Sîn-iqîšam, everything points out that the large amounts of beer delivered to him, undoubtedly daily, under the mention "beer for the cellar-*kannum*", were in fact shared with the people invited to his meal. Thus, the amounts ranged generally between 70 and 90 *qa* of good quality beer²⁸.

23 - Information about the whole dependent population of the palace is nevertheless provided by the grain allocation texts published in Talon 1997, and comments idem: 19-31.

24 - Lacambre D. et Millet A. Albà, Ch. 16. Chagar Bazar et le monument-*rânum*, in Tunca et Baghdo 2008 : 295-311.

25 - Chambon 2008a : 443-444.

26 - Powell 1987-1990: 502, Van De Mieroop 1994: 311 et D. Lacambre, in Tunca et Baghdo 2008: 172-174.

27 - VanDeMieroop1994:337-338.

28 - Tunca et Baghdo 2008: 230-233.

In a text which mentions the attendance of a large troop passing through Chagar Bazaar, the amount then reached 400 *qa* (cf. III CB n° 42), with the explicit indication that beer has been distributed "at the banquet".

The meal of one high rank person was not a lonely act but always a shared staging. This is a well-known fact after the archives at Mari relating to the meals of Yasmah-Addu or Zimrî-Lîm²⁹.

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The discovery of the beer archive from Chagar Bazar, ancient Ašnakkum, provides us with very important data about the beer management in a palace of Upper Mesopotamia. Through the system of rations distribution, it documents a part of the life of a city from the beginning of the second millennium BC belonging to the empire of Samsî-Addu. In this way, we get valuable information about Sîn-iqîšam, the local leader, about his family and local high officials, as well as those from the kingdom of Upper Mesopotamia who stopped at Chagar Bazar.

Concerning beer, we handle several archives almost contemporary, all them located in Upper Mesopotamia (Chagar Bazar, Tell Leilan, Tell Rimah for example). They will certainly make it possible in future to undertake studies more comprehensive on that topic. Comparisons with other more southerly sites, where beer was also abundantly brewed, would be all the more interesting as differences exist, especially in the calculation of grain/beer ratios (at Ur, for example).

In addition, it would be very rewarding to compare them with archaeological discoveries from sites such as Tell Bazi, where domestic

facilities for beer brewing of the second half of second millennium BC were brought to light³⁰.

Finally, we are very much looking forward to the pursuit of excavations at Chagar Bazar, in order to see, for example, whether the place of beer brewing and that of the archiving of the tablets of distributions coincided. This would shed new light over the management of a Mesopotamian palace in the beginning of second millennium BC.

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29 - Cf. a presentation in Durand 1997 : 67-68 (with the bibliography).

30 - Otto 2006.
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