

Compte rendu

C. CASTEL, M. AL-MAQDISSI, F. VILLENEUVE (éds), *Les maisons dans la Syrie antique du III^e millénaire aux débuts de l'Islam. Pratiques et représentations de l'espace domestique. Actes du Colloque International, Damas 27-30 juin 1992* (BAH CL), IFAPO-Beyrouth (1997), xvii + 344 p.

This volume contains 29 articles based on papers held at an international colloquium in Damascus between June 27th and 30th 1992. It has 344 pages, including two maps showing sites mentioned in Syria, and an Arabic summary. It is well illustrated with a large number of figures, both plans and photographs. An introductory section (pp. I-XVII) presents two forewords, by Madame Najah al-Attar, the Minister of Culture of the Syrian Arab Republic, and by F. Villeneuve, one of the organisers. The other organiser, C. Castel, results. A list of participants and a list of bibliographical abbreviations follow.

The various papers are classified into three sections : The first one deals with « La maison comme production technique et sociale » (pp. 3-101), the second one with « La maison comme lieu de vie » (pp. 105-216) and the third section with « La maison comme lieu symbolique » (pp. 217-327). Short excerpts from the discussion, given as direct speech, follow each paper. At the end, an index of geographical names, and a general map in Arabic of the sites mentioned, are added.

The first section starts with the paper of J.-C. MARGUERON, « Les maisons syriennes du néolithique au premier millénaire : quelques remarques sur la documentation et son interprétation » (p. 3-8). He discusses the methodology of recording and interpreting domestic house architecture with reference to the case of Emar. He shows different possible reconstructions of the secondary floor or roof, illustrated by vertical projection drawings, and implies that it is difficult to make definite decisions¹. In this context one might remark that analysis of the quantity of fallen debris may help to determine the original height of the walls and, thereby, to solve the question of secondary floors. Furthermore, the author points out that the size of a building may help to suggest its original function as palace, temple or house. But he does not consider the inventory of objects or the placement of installations that may give evidence of the functional purposes of the building or its units. Finally, Margueron stresses that the region of the Middle Euphrates is well investigated so that developments of architectural features can easily be sketched.

The next contribution, of L. BADRE, « La maison à Tell Kazel : techniques de construction » (p. 9-14), notes that *pisé* was used for the wall constructions beside mud bricks during Late Bronze and Iron Age, near the Syrian coast².

-
1. For the reconstruction of a secondary floor see also BARDESCHI (1998).
 2. As in Neo-Assyrian level 4 at Khirbet Khatuniyeh. See CURTIS – GREEN (1997), 6.

M. YON and O. CALLOT, « L'habitat à Ougarit à la fin du Bronze Récent » (p. 15-28) analyse the houses of the « Ville Sud » and the « Centre de la Ville » at Ugarit. The dwellings date to the 13th and 12th centuries B.C. The authors describe the construction techniques, the spatial organisation and the history of urbanism at the site, as well as the typology of the houses. The latter is based on several factors, such as the accessibility and disposition of the rooms. In addition, the functions of units, the domestic funerals, and the gardens inside the courts are discussed.

T.L. MCCLELLAN, « Houses and Households in North Syria during the Late Bronze Age » (p. 29-59) convincingly proves that the so-called « Temple of the Diviner » and the so-called « Hilani » at Emar were in fact residential units typical for ordinary house architecture. After that, he explains his typology, based on formal criteria and relations of size. Although, he introduces a new terminology, his typology follows the one elaborated by E. Heinrich ³, which is surprisingly not cited. This leads the author, e.g. to the conclusion that central rooms of tripartite and bipartite houses (the so-called *Mittelsaalhäuser*) were roofed, something already proposed by Heinrich years ago. The author's suggestion that this kind of architecture might be a result of Hurrian influence is supported by the house types found at Hurrian Nuzi ⁴. Through the comparison of the Middle Bronze Age houses at Halawa, the author convincingly rejects any Anatolian influence in the domestic architecture at Emar. Here it must be stressed that the type known as *hilani* is surely a Syrian and not an Anatolian invention. Finally, the question of the relationship of houses and households and the ideology of « houses » is briefly discussed ⁵.

In the contribution of F. BRAEMER, « Architecture domestique de l'Âge du Fer en Syrie du Nord » (p. 61-71), a formal typology is elaborated. The main types are the well-known bipartite and tripartite houses as well as the so-called « four-room-houses ». The author pays attention on the houses of the « Greek colony » at Al-Mina near Alalakh. Although, he accepts the Greek origin of grid plans in town planning ⁶, he decries the fact that too many unproven hypotheses of L. Woolley led to the cultural assignment of these dwellings. The reviewer agrees with the author that there is no convincing evidence for the presence of Greek colonists at Al-Mina.

J. SEIGNE, « Habitat hellénistique et romain de Gerasa » (p. 73-82) stresses that the most common type at this site, the peristyl-house, is of Western origin. It can be added that several houses of Near Eastern towns were transformed during Hellenistic times from a typical Babylonian central court house into a peristyl-house just by the erection of some columns ⁷.

H. BADAWI, « L'opus sectile nelle case aristocratiche di Tiro nell'epoca tardoantica » (p. 83-94), classifies the mosaics found in the urban houses of Tyre, dating in Late Antiquity. He names his categories « modules ».

G. TATE, « La maison rurale en Syrie du Nord » (p. 95-101), discusses the early Byzantine domestic architecture in the Belus region of Northwestern Syria. He distinguishes dwelling units and production areas. In his typology he separates regular and irregular structures.

The second section opens with the contribution of R. VALLET, « Habuba Kébira sud, approche morphologique de l'habitat » (p. 105-119). Four types are distinguished: houses

3. See HEINRICH (1975) and (1982), recently discussed by MIGLUS (1999).

4. For this see now MIGLUS (1999).

5. For this see also PFÄLZNER (1996).

6. For an opposite opinion see CASTAGNOLI (1971).

7. See House I at the Merkes of Babylon, REUTHER (1926), 90; 148.

with a composite plan⁸ bipartite houses⁹, the houses with a « plan centré »¹⁰, and others. At more-or-less the same time as this article, another one appeared on the same subject by K. Kohlmeyer, one of the excavators of the site¹¹. R. Vallet concludes that the structure of the houses suggests a developing stratification of urban society during the Late Uruk period. It can be added that the earlier Middle Uruk architecture tends to imply a more complex society even in earlier times. Examples of domestic architecture of the Middle Uruk period are known from Tell Brak on the Khabur and Tell Sheikh Hassan, lying very close to Habuba Kabira on the opposite bank of the Euphrates¹².

F. ABDALLAH, « Remarques sur les maisons de l'Âge du Bronze » (p. 121-124), discusses after a short overview of Mari and Aleppo the Level VII houses at Alalakh. He stresses the influence of Syrian domestic architecture in Crete and Egypt, and suggests that the ancient site of Halab, the capital of Yamkhad, lay at al-Aqaba in modern Aleppo. Excavations have just recently proved, however, that the citadel of Aleppo was the location of the main temple of the weather god of Aleppo.

The contribution of P. MATTHIAE, « Typologies and Functions in the Palaces and Houses of Middle Bronze II Ebla » (p. 125-134), deals with the Middle Bronze Age houses at Ebla. Only at two locations was domestic architecture found at this site, both near the southwestern corner of the ancient city close to the city wall. The author comes to the conclusion that the city was divided into several parts — the fortified citadel in the centre, an inner belt of public buildings such as temples and secondary palaces surrounding the citadel, an outer belt with domestic architecture, and the city wall with arsenals and magazines. The street system of Ebla shows a three-step hierarchy : « first, the most important streets entering the town, with radial pattern, from the city gates to the central citadel ; second, main streets of inner circulation with a prevalent South-North and East-West orientation ; third, a basic ring-like street for the inner connection running without interruption at the feet of the lower wall of the citadel ». Probably further roads gave access to the dwelling quarters. The subsequent typology of the houses is based on formal criteria. Three types can be distinguished. All of them show, according to the stratigraphy of nearby Hama, a regional tradition from the Early to the Late Bronze Age. Further, the author stresses the typological relations or parallels between the palace and the domestic architecture, a feature already common in ancient Near Eastern architecture¹³. In the opinion of the author, nucleus families with only few members occupied the houses excavated at Ebla. No traces of production or trade activities were discovered. This leads to the conclusion that « there is no archaeological evidence for a class of merchants or of landowners of some economic relevance ».

M. AL-MAQDISSI, « Stratigraphie et maisons à Hamah ; le cas du Bronze Moyen » (p. 135-150), discusses the houses at Hama (Hama H and G). In the first instance, chronological aspects with regard to the ceramic sequence are analysed. A series of well arranged tables offers a good overview of the material. As for the house architecture itself,

-
8. Corresponding mostly to « *Mittelsaalhäuser mit oder ohne vorgelagertem Hof* » in the terminology of HEINRICH (1975) and (1982), which is not cited here. See further MIGLUS (1999).
 9. The « *Mittelsaalhäuser* » of HEINRICH (1975).
 10. The so-called « *regulierte Agglutinate* » in the terminology of HEINRICH (1975).
 11. KOHLMAYER (1996).
 12. See BOESE (1995).
 13. See MIGLUS (1999).

the only point made is that the domestic architecture in both phases was generally uniform.

Ch. FOUCAULT-FOREST, « Modèles d'organisation de l'espace dans l'habitat du Bronze Moyen et du Bronze Récent en Palestine » (p. 151-160), stresses that the main type is the tripartite unit with annexes. One of the results is the observation that court-houses were a « myth ». This fact should be investigated in more detail with reference to the installations. Otherwise the question of how the rooms were lit and ventilated must be reconsidered.

M. GAWLIKOWSKI, « L'habitat à Palmyre de l'Antiquité au Moyen-Âge » (p. 161-166), implies that irregularity of the house shapes and a distinct separation of public and private areas were of Near Eastern origin and show no Western influence. The architectural elements of peristyl and pastas were adoptions from Greek architecture while the *liwan* was a Near Eastern « invention ».

E. FRÉZOULS, « Les maisons à l'ouest du théâtre de Cyrthus » (p. 167-172), suggests that the houses near the theatre of Cyrthus were built on artificial terraces. This hinders chronological correlation of the separate units.

A. ALLARA, « Entre archives et terrain ; l'exemple d'un îlot d'habitation de Doura-Europos » (p. 173-186), suggests that the structure of the units show distinct Mesopotamian tradition, but associated with some Western influences such as elements of decor, colonnades or clines in the main rooms can be observed. The author tries to give a chronological overview with respect to general developments of Parthian domestic architecture in Mesopotamia. The very term Mesopotamian « megaron » is somewhat unsuitable because of its distinct definition as a one-room unit with central hearth and an antechamber. This form almost never appeared in Mesopotamian domestic architecture, only in the case of Syrian *Antentempel*. It is interesting to see that the houses of Dura-Europos are very different to the contemporary ones at Hatra, a site just about 200 km far away to the northeast¹⁴.

A. ABOU ASSAF, « Private Houses at 'Ain Dara in Byzantine Period » (p. 187-190), distinguishes three different types of the small units.

N. SALIBY, « Un palais byzantino-omeyyade à Damas » (p. 191-194), presents an city palace of Byzantine and Umayyad date excavated in the Old City of Damascus. Some mosaics with geometric decoration were discovered inside.

A. GUÉRIN, « Organisation de l'espace habité en milieu rural à la période islamique ; Msayké, un village dans le Léja » (p. 195-202), deals with some well-preserved houses of the Ottoman period at Msayke, a small village in Southern Syria.

A noteworthy contribution is presented by H. SEEDEN, « Village Houses in Lebanon; from Kumidi to Baalbek » (p. 203-214). She tries to give an impression of the development of rural domestic architecture in Lebanon from the Bronze Age to modern times. The examples of Byblos, Ibn as-Saqi, Kumidi, Baalbek Buarj, Arsun and Beirut are stressed in an interesting connection of archaeology and anthropology. Unfortunately no real typology is established, which might have helped the better understanding of the relationship between ancient, medieval and modern house forms.

The last section « La maison comme lieu symbolique » begins with the paper of J.-D. FOREST, « L'habitat urukien du Djebel Aruda : approche fonctionnelle et arrière-plans symboliques » (p. 217-234). The author presents some interesting observations on the Late Uruk houses excavated on top of the plateau of Jebel Aruda. He analyses the systems of access, positions of rooms and orientations of the reception suites. One of his theses is that male and female inhabitants of the houses used different ways of access and circulation. He then discusses the origin of Uruk architecture, to which Ubaid architecture

14. For this see VENCO RICCIARDI (1996).

is relevant. The regular plots of the houses signify a planning organisation, which must have worked beyond familial structures during the foundation of the site.

Ö. TUNCA, « Remarques sur la typologie et l'organisation fonctionnelle des temples et des maisons en Mésopotamie à la période protodynastique » (p. 235-242), investigates the relationship of temple and domestic architecture in Early Dynastic Mesopotamia. A typological connection was often stressed by German archaeologists, because of the use of the term *é* or *bitum* equally for both kinds of buildings, and the similar ground plans. The author compares the differing circulation in houses with central courts and with main rooms (*Mittelsaalhäuser*). He then offers various statistical analyses of the relationship of open and covered areas in both houses and temples.

C. CASTEL – D. CHARPIN, « Les maisons mésopotamiennes ; essai de dialogue entre archéologue et épigraphiste » (p. 243-254), discuss the three subjects of the congress in the light of two different disciplines : archaeology and philology. They deal first with the house as a product of technology and then as a product of society. Status, « ethnicity » and neighbourhood¹⁵ are analysed. Then the function of rooms and houses are considered with regard to the cuneiform texts¹⁶. The symbolic aspects are dealt with in view of domestic funeral rites, the separation of « internal » and « external », as well as of « private » and « public » space, and social prestige. This important article should have been placed at the beginning of the volume because of its fundamental considerations.

B. MULLER, « Remarques sur les "marquettes architecturales" de Syrie » (p. 255-268), gives an overview of architectural terracotta models from Syria. A morphological classification is followed by a discussion of the function of these objects. The author analyses the techniques of production as well as the decoration. An anthropological comparison between the models and real architecture leads to the conclusion that the objects were nearly exact copies. The striking comparisons are convincing. One should think, however, about the function of the circular model found at Mari: as far as known, no circular houses were built during the entire Bronze Age in Syria. On the other hand, circular cities were constructed in several cases¹⁷. Indeed, Mari itself was such a circular city. So why should this model not be seen as a copy of such cities, with a rectangular central « citadel » and four equal quarters with walls and gates between ?

F. VILLENEUVE, « Les salles à alcôves dans les maisons d'époque romaine et byzantine en Syrie, particulièrement dans le Hauran » (p. 269-282), distinguishes large alcoves with representative functions comparable with the Iranian *liwan* and small alcoves for private purposes.

J.-Ch. BALTU, « Palais et maisons d'Apamée » (p. 283-296), suggests that the urban élites of Apamea expressed their social prestige and wealth by means of triclinic reception rooms decorated with mosaics. The typical form was the atrium house.

M. GRIESHEIMER, « Sociabilité et rites funéraires ; les porches à banquettes des maisons et des tombeaux du Massif Calcaire » (p. 297-304), states that the connection between funerary and domestic architecture in Roman and Byzantine North Syria led to the usage of *clines* in both building types. The entrances were monumentalised.

A. NACCACHE, « Le décor des maisons de Syrie du Nord comme produit d'une économie locale : l'exemple de Sergilla » (p. 305-312), analyses the decoration found in Byzantine houses in Northern Syria. She comes to the conclusion that local craftsmen created the decors.

15. For this see also STONE (1996).

16. For this see also KALLA (1996).

17. For circular cities in Syria and Mesopotamia see NOVÁK (1999).

The final contribution, C. SALIOU, « La maison urbaine en Syrie aux époques romaine et byzantine d'après la documentation juridique » (p. 313-327), deals with urban houses in Roman and Byzantine Syria with respect to the work of the architect Julian of Ascalon. Saliou draws attention to the fact that Julian notes differing degrees of privacy in a graduation from the private to the public spheres.

The volume with its three sections demonstrates a clear concept, and reflects the complexity of the subject. The presentation is good, and thanks to the geographical index the book can easily be used. Only the relatively poor quality of the illustrations may be criticised. Not only the pre-Hellenistic architecture, but also that of the following periods, is discussed.

Most of the authors use a pure formal typology. Functional aspects are not involved in the typologies themselves and are only discussed as a secondary step. Unfortunately the excavators of many of the sites frequently mentioned, such as Habuba Kabira, Halawa, Munbaqa, Tall Khuera and others, did not participate in the congress. This would have been more authoritative and provided a better understanding of the material.

This very interesting volume, and papers of the 40th RAI, published at about the same time, help us to gain a deeper understanding of Near Eastern domestic architecture, a field that has been neglected for a long time.

Dr. Mirko NOVÁK
Universität Tübingen

Bibliography

- BARDESCHI CH.D. (1998), « Quelques considérations à propos de l'architecture de l'agglomération hourrite de Nuzi », in S. DE MARTINO – F. IMPARATI (eds.), *Studi e Testi* I, Firenze.
- BOESE J. (1995), *Ausgrabungen in Tell Sheikh Hassan I*. Vorläufige Berichte über die Grabungskampagnen 1984-1990 und 1992-1994, Saarbrücken.
- CASTAGNOLI F. (1971), *Orthogonal Town Planning in Antiquity*, Cambridge.
- CURTIS G.J. – GREEN A. (1997), *Excavations at Khirbet Khatuniyeh*, London.
- HEINRICH E. (1975), Stichwort « Haus », B. Archäologisch, *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie* 4, 176-220.
- HEINRICH E. (1982), *Tempel und Heiligtümer im Alten Mesopotamien*, Berlin.
- KALLA G. (1996), « Das altbabylonische Wohnhaus und seine Struktur nach philologischen Quellen », in VEENHOF K.R. (ed.), *Houses and Households in Ancient Mesopotamia* (Papers read at the 40^e Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale), Leiden, 247-256.
- KOHLMEYER K. (1996), « Houses in Habuba Kabira South. Spatial organisation and planning of Late Uruk residential architecture », in VEENHOF K.R. (ed.), *ibid.*, 89-104.
- MIGLUS P. (1999), *Städtische Wohnarchitektur in Babylonien und Assyrien* (Baghdader Forschungen 22), Mainz.
- NOVÁK M. (1999), *Herrschaftsform und Stadtbaukunst-Programm im mesopotamischen Residenzstadtbau von Agade bis Surra man ra'a* (Schriften zur Vorderasiatischen Archäologie 7), Saarbrücken.
- PFÄLZNER P. (1996), « Activity and the social organisation of third millennium B.C. households », in VEENHOF K.R. (ed.), *op. cit.*, 117-128.
- REUTHER O. (1926), *Die Innenstadt von Babylon (Merkes)*, (Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft 47), Leipzig.
- STONE E. (1996), « Houses, households and neighbourhoods in the Old Babylonian period », in VEENHOF K.R. (ed.), *op. cit.*, 229-236.
- VEENHOF K.R. (ed.) (1996), *Houses and Households in Ancient Mesopotamia* (Papers read at the 40^e Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale), Leiden.
- VENCO RICCIARDI R. (1996), « Domestic Architecture at Hatra », in VEENHOF K.R. (ed.), *ibid.*, 309-321.