Chapter 8

Bronze Age Reed Boats of Magan and *Magillum*
Boats of Meluḫḫa in Cuneiform Literature

Danièle Michaux-Colombot

The aim of this paper is to restore historic coherence on navigated spaces concerning Magan and Meluḫḫa seafaring. The watercrafts and skippers of Magan and Meluḫḫa only appear in third millennium sources, though documentation on these lands spans the periods down to the Hellenistic era. Unfortunately, misunderstandings about Sumerian geographical concepts have led to interpretive blind views on their geographical orientation. Presuming that navigation on the Lower Sea only referred to the Persian Gulf, scholars have sought Magan in the Omani peninsula and Meluḫḫa in the Indus Valley. Such theories are the prevalent ones in mainstream Assyriological discourses about trade issues.¹ In the 1960s, hot debates² triggered by “the subjective judgement that the Sumerians could not have traded south of Arabia to the Red Sea”,³ left unresolved the question whether Magan and Meluḫḫa, known to be related to Egypt in later sources, referred to the same lands throughout antiquity. Contra

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Parpola’s premises,4 we here propose a revised map of the ancient ecumene,5 with supporting new data from dissenting views.6 The circumnavigation of Arabia is explicit in early sources, providing these are correctly understood. It tallies with the proven fact that the Arabian Sea was a junction between Africa and Asia.7 The discovery of port facilities on the north-western Red Sea shores, greatly supports the evidence, especially in Ayn Soukhna8. The area through which Esharhaddon, in 671 BCE (Figure 8.1),9 and Antiochus IV in

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4 “As a working premise we accept the most widely held theory according to which Meluḫḫa is to be identified with the Indus civilization and its adjacent areas on the basis of various geographical clues and the general nature of Meluḫḫan articles of commerce.” S. Parpola, A. Parpola and R.H. Brunswig, “The Meluḫḫa Village. Evidence of Acculturation of Harappan Traders in Late Third Millennium Mesopotamia?”, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 20, 2 (1977): 126–165, in part. p. 129.


