RELATIONS BETWEEN EGYPT AND MESOPOTAMIA FROM PREHISTORIC TIMES TO THE END OF THE MIDDLE KINGDOM

BY

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Concluded 1)

II. FROM THE PROTODYNASTIC PERIOD TO THE END OF THE MIDDLE KINGDOM

I will begin with the only definite link I can find between Egypt and Mesopotamia for this entire period 2). In a tomb “probably” of the First Intermediate Period at Helwan, a very distinctive type of metal axe was discovered. This is an “anchor axe”, of which only a few examples have been found in the Near East 3). One example comes from Ur, probably of the Akkadian Period 4), another was found at Byblos 5) and still another from Syria of unknown provenance 6).

1) See pp. 1-45.

2) I am ignoring here the appearance of Mesopotamian objects in the famous Tôd treasure, a collection of precious objects gathered from the Aegean, Syria and Mesopotamia and sent to the Egyptian court by a Syrian ruler. As such, it has no bearing on the relations of Egypt with Mesopotamia, except for what evidence it has to offer on chronological problems.

3) Saad, Royal Excavations at Sakkara and Helwan. ASAE Suppl. No. 3 (Cairo, 1947), pp. 173-74, pl. 88. Vandier, Manuel I, p. 823, fig. 552, mistakenly places this object in the Protodynastic Period.

4) Roy. Cem., p. 306, pl. 224, Type A 14; from Grave PG/691. Comparison of the pottery types found in PG/691 with the Dyala pottery gave a range of Early-Dynastic to Akkadian. While this can only be a tentative date, I do not feel this particular grave can be later than the Akkadian Period.


6) Schaeffer, Ugaritica II (Paris, 1949), p. 64, fig. 28.7. This piece was also published in Petrie, Tools and Weapons, p. 10, pl. 74.171, though it is discussed as a variant of the scalloped axe type.
A fragment from Ugarit is also considered to be of this type; it dates ca 2100 to 1750 B.C. 1). Of the five known examples, only the fragment from Ugarit can be definitely placed in a datable archeological context, though this is still one that covers several centuries. If the example from Ur can be safely dated to the Akkadian Period (it cannot be later and may be earlier), this type could then be in evidence in Mesopotamia some time prior to its appearance at Ugarit. The specimen from Helwan is unfortunately undatable since the grave in which it was found is not described and no other contents of the grave are noted. The axe from Byblos cannot be dated any closer than within the general range of the other examples, and the axe of unknown provenance can of course be given no context at all.

On the origin of this type, only very general remarks have been made. Petrie, knowing only the Syrian axe of unknown provenance and a "simpler form" from Georgia, and wrongly discussing this shape as a variant of the common scalloped axe type, could offer no suggestion. Schaeffer is more explicit and suggests that this type represents "l'étape immédiatement préalable à celle de l'invention de la douille". He further feels that the type originated in Syria "où les armuriers de nos porteurs de torques l'ont ensuite franchie en créant la hache d'armes fenestrée à douille" 2). This would mean that this type could not have come into existence prior to the appearance of Schaeffer's "torque-bearers", a new culture in Syria at the close of the third millennium B.C. whose major contribution was a new and improved armory of metal weapons and personal adornments. In a passing reference to this type of axe, Stronach 3) notes that it probably originated in Mesopotamia and further suggests that a socketed axe type (that is, à douille) would be more likely to develop from a bent tang type than the anchor axe style.

There is thus hardly any specific information on which we can base any definite statements. For the present, we can at least conclude that

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1) Schaeffer, op. cit., fig. 26.8.
2) Ibid., p. 64.
3) Stronach, Anat. St. 7 (1957), 122.