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**Reviewed Work: The Court of the  
Palms: A Functional Interpretation  
of the Mari Palace by Yasin M. Al-  
Khalesi**

Patty Gerstenblith



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Review

Reviewed Work(s): *The Court of the Palms: A Functional Interpretation of the Mari Palace*  
by Yasin M. Al-Khalesi

Review by: Patty Gerstenblith

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## BOOK REVIEWS

Authors and publishers are respectfully requested to note that all review copies must be sent directly to Mrs. Patricia N. Boulter, Department of Classics, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, Ohio 45221. The review editor will be glad to receive any suggestions from authors as to names of possible reviewers. Under no circumstances should a book be sent to a specific reviewer. The following are excluded from review and should not be sent: offprints; re-editions except those with great and significant changes; journal volumes except the first in a new series; monographs of very small size and scope; and books dealing with archaeology of the New World.

THE COURT OF THE PALMS: A FUNCTIONAL INTERPRETATION OF THE MARI PALACE, by *Yasin M. Al-Khalesi*, with Appendix by *Ron Glaeseman*. (Bibliotheca Mesopotamica, Vol. 8.) Pp. viii + 85, figs. 36, pls. 6. Undena Publications, Malibu, California, 1978.

The palace at Mari and in particular the unit complex of Court 106 receive a new interpretation in this monograph which attempts to utilize textual information in order to elucidate excavated architectural and artistic remains. Al-Khalesi first presents a general description of the Mari palace and offers interpretations of the functions of the palace units often differing from those of the excavator, Parrot. The major focus of this monograph is, however, the "Inner Court Block" (106, 116, 64-66), here identified with the "Court of the Palms" on the basis of several features mentioned in letters from the Mari archives and the representation of palm trees on the "Investiture" Painting of Court 106. With a digression concerning throne-room suites of various Mesopotamian palaces, Al-Khalesi assigns throne-room functions to both Rooms 64 (for public ceremonial display) and 65 (private) and interprets Room 66 as a sanctuary, the *papahum* of the "Court of the Palms."

Al-Khalesi reconstructs this sanctuary on the basis of several architectural details of Room 66 which seem to correspond to elements depicted in the "Investiture" Painting. He proposes that textual references to repairs of "prancing *lamassu*" should refer to sculptured orthostats with composite guardian figures and specifically to a sculptural representation of the animal in the middle register of the flanking scene of the "Investiture" Painting. On the basis of this hypothesis, it is further suggested that all the figures of the Painting were repeated in sculptural form at the top of and flanking the stairs at the entrance to Room 66 and that the "Investiture" Painting is an illustration of the facade and entrance to the sanctuary (Room 66) as it would have appeared from Room 65, although with the statues of the central figures placed frontally.

This statuary group is assumed to have played a

role in a religious ceremony in which the king participated, although the exact nature of this ceremony could not be determined. The other mural fragments from Court 106 were also part of this overall decorative scheme depicting the goddess' journey to the palace, and Al-Khalesi therefore dates all the Court 106 paintings together, probably in an early phase of Zimrilim's reign.

While the theoretical approach of attempting to combine textual and archaeological evidence is welcome, one may still find problems with the final suggested reconstruction. These problems include, first, the reinterpretation of the term *lamassu* to mean a guardian animal (which is, however, its accepted meaning for the first millennium B.C.) based on the use of the masculine form of the adjective, *raqidutim*. Dossin, however, comments (*Archives royales de Mari* Trans. et Trad. [ARMT]) XIII, 16:6 and 10, n. 3) that one may read either the masculine or feminine form so that there seems to be little evidence for changing the concept of a second millennium *lamassu* as a supplicant goddess.

Secondly, one may question the placement of many features which the texts associate with the "Court of the Palms" (the railing, the covering or veranda, the oil storehouse) in the vicinity of Court 106 and the identification of the *papahum* as a sanctuary and specifically of the *papahum* of the "Court of the Palms" with Room 66 (discussed by R. Glaeseman in the Appendix). The suggestion that the repairs of the "prancing *lamassu*" indicate the existence of sculptured orthostat blocks is also problematic, since the repairs might perhaps be more appropriate to a statue of wood, covered in a precious metal (Rouault, *ARMT* XVIII 187-88). While many of the ideas which Al-Khalesi suggests are tantalizing, each component still seems too tenuous to allow such a major reconstruction. The interpretations of the other units of the Mari palace are also interesting, but since the bases for the conclusions are not fully presented, it is difficult to evaluate their validity. The maps and line drawings are clear and useful in locating the different artistic works under discussion.

This monograph does make two valid contributions. First, it provides a useful summary of Mesopotamian architectural decoration and of the occurrence of

certain iconographic motifs. Al-Khalesi argues that such an architectural program as he proposes for this unit of the Mari palace, although relatively early in date, would tally with what is now known of the decoration of the temple at Tell al-Rimah and at comparable sites. This suggestion, his tracing of the guardian motif in architectural sculpture and his analysis of Mesopotamian and Syrian elements in the art of Mari are all contributions to our understanding of the development of monumental art in Mesopotamia. Second, Al-Khalesi provides a model of the validity and necessity for attempting to bring textual and archaeological evidence together; his methodology demonstrates how much more may be accomplished in the reconstruction of the past when these different sources for evidence are synthesized.

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THE TRANSITION TO MYCENAEAN. A STRATIFIED MIDDLE HELLADIC II TO LATE HELLADIC IIA POTTERY SEQUENCE FROM AYIOS STEPHANOS IN LACONIA, by *Jeremy B. and Sarah H. Rutter*. (*Monumenta Archaeologica* 4.) Pp. ix + 71, ill. in text 19, pls. 17. The Institute of Archaeology, The University of California, Los Angeles, 1976.

This short monograph presents 1012 sherds from the Bronze Age site of Ayios Stephanos in southern Laconia. They came from an area only 9 m. x 5 m. containing a rectangular MH III house excavated in 1973-1974 by Lord W. Taylour, under the auspices (it should have been added) of the British School at Athens. The volume forms an important addition to the first report from that site (Taylour et al., *BSA* 67 [1972] 205-70). Although the material is fragmentary and often scrappy, the excellent stratification allows it to be organized into sixteen deposits representing four phases. Periods I and II are dated within MH II/MM IIIA. Period III, representing the *floruit* of the rectangular house, falls into MH III/MM IIIB. In Period IV we apparently jump a generation into LH IIA/LM IB, but an attempt is made to fill the interval with other sherds from the site.

The presentation throughout is compact and economical—perhaps excessively so. The text, which lacks a detailed catalogue, never tells us when to look for a photograph, or for one of Mrs. Rutter's useful drawings, or for both; there also are no descriptive captions. On the other hand, the total corpus from which the published sherds were chosen had been counted and weighed, and statistics are diligently presented to show the proportion of each ware in each period.

Rutter's study breaks new ground in two directions. First, he defines the various local MH wares of Laconia with unprecedented care and, unlike his predecessor (D. French, *BSA* 67 [1972] 268), is encouraged by the stratification to make a clear distinction between MH II and MH III. Secondly, he identifies a Minoan component throughout the whole series, on the strength of the contemporary deposits from the Minoan colony of Kastri on Kythera. The Minoanizing wares, classified as Oatmeal, Micaceous and Fine, are so abundant that the author suspects the presence of Minoan potters on the site from Period I onwards. The deposits also yield useful correlations between the local MH and the colonial Kytherian MM, especially important for the transition to Mycenaean.

A few points of detail. Kastri deposit Delta (MM IB/MM IIIA), which is compared with Period I, may cover a much shorter time than Rutter fears (n. 22), since colonial MM IB persevered all through the period of palatial MM II. The apparent "gap" in LH I/LM IA is largely filled by the earlier sherds of Period IV, e.g. the Keftiu cups (fig. 30) of types (i) and (ii) at Kastri (*Kythera*, ed. by J.N. Coldstream and G.L. Huxley [London 1972] 284), types which also occur in the LH I deposit at Voroulia in Messenia. The dichotomy, on the criterion of surface, between "Fine Minoanizing" and "Mycenaean Patterned" is somewhat unhappy, resulting in the inclusion of Cretan imports (e.g. no. 865, LM IB Alternating) among "Mycenaean." LM IB bell-cups, considered "noticeably absent" (p. 58), may perhaps be represented by no. 878: cf. *Praktika* 1967 pl. 183b center. The restored drawing of no. 894 looks upside-down.

Studies of this nature are usually undertaken after the conclusion of a dig, when the specialist can survey at leisure all the material from the site that he is ever likely to see. Rutter has been unlucky in his timing, since in 1977 an impressive apsidal house with restorable MH II pots emerged from under his stratified deposits (*JHS-AR* 1978, 31-33). One wonders how many of the earlier sherds published here may prove to join the new finds, and how much more could now be said about the earliest Minoanizing shapes. The conjecture about resident Minoan potters may seem to be supported by spectrographic tests in the British School's Fitch Laboratory (Jones and Rutter, *Archaeometry* 19 [1977] 211-19), which found no difference in composition between native MH and Minoanizing wares. But caution is still needed, since a similar composition is apparently shared not only by Kythera, but by one of the clays recorded among finds at Khania (*Archaeometry* 19 [1977] 218); thus similarity of clays at Ayios Stephanos may well conceal diversity of provenance. Furthermore, the claim advanced in this volume (p. 64) that Laconia forestalled the Argolid in displaying Minoanizing tendencies may need reconsideration when the MH/MM material from Lerna sees publi-