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Review by Marsia Sfakianou Bealby

S. Wachsmann. *The Gurob Ship-Cart Model and Its Mediterranean Context*. Ed Rachal Foundation Nautical Archaeology Series. Texas A&M University Press: College Station, Texas. 2013. ISBN 9781603444293. \$75.00/£67.50. xxvi + 321 pages, 212 black and white photographs, 65 line drawings, 4 figs, 5 maps, and 7 appendices. Open access digital supplement available online at: <http://www.vizin.org/Gurob/Gurob.html>.¹

In 1920, while excavating in Gurob, Guy Brunton and Reginald Engleback discovered a small wooden ship model in tomb 611. As Brunton and Engleback were assigned by Flinders Petrie, the model eventually arrived at the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology in London. The artefact might have been forgotten if Shelley Wachsmann had not decided to handle, photograph and study the model in 2005. The result was the publication of the book reviewed here.

Wachsmann's book is an example of what highly-sophisticated technology can offer to archaeological research. From the examination of the item's pigment under optical polarized light microscope, to the use of radiocarbon for the dating of the model, and a website loaded with 3D computer graphics, all methods employed produce remarkable results and promise a unique educational experience for the reader. This review refers to both the book and the online material accompanying it.

Review of the book

The aim of the book is the study, reconstruction and publication of the Gurob ship-cart model from non-royal New Kingdom tomb 611 (dating to the Eighteenth or Nineteenth Dynasty) (p. 167). Via the in-depth analysis of the find and comparanda, Wachsmann demonstrates how the model is connected to the Aegean world, suggesting that the Sherden (one of the Sea Peoples settled in the Faiyum in the thirteenth century BC) might be responsible for its deposition (p. 206). Moreover, with the model as a starting point, Wachsmann revisits the iconography of ancient ships, thus building upon his publication *Seagoing Ships and Seamanship in the Bronze Age Levant*.²

Chapter 1 tells the story of the item's discovery, and lists previous mentions of the artefact in

¹Last accessed 30th November 2014.

²Texas A&M University Press: Texas, 1998.

scholarship. Wachsmann gives a thorough description of the item (measurements, features, etc.) and its exact state after it was unearthed. The description is accompanied by large, high-quality grey-scale photographs. Any unattached pieces associated or possibly associated with the model (e.g. stanchions, quarter-rudder, wheels, pavois, etc.), are also listed in detail and photographed separately, while comparanda/iconographic parallels are also suggested. In my opinion, the list of terms at the end of the book assists Wachsmann's discussion. This chapter also refers to the date of the Gurob ship-cart model (1256–1054 BC) and its cultic associations (p. 20, 28). All information is presented clearly, but some minor repetition with regard to the model's colour could be avoided with cross-references to appendices 3 and 6.

As the Gurob-ship cart model presents mixed Egyptian and foreign features, chapter 2 discusses iconographic evidence that helps determine the origin of the prototype for the making of this model. Insightful examples are discussed, and through direct comparison, Wachsmann emphasizes that the model's prototype is the Late Helladic galley. These galleys were first used by the Mycenaeans; the Sea Peoples adopted and adapted them to their needs, and according to Wachsmann, Cyprus assisted in the continuation of the Mycenaean Greek galley type across the Greek Dark Ages (c. 1100–800 BC). Other iconographic representations of Helladic ships from Egypt are seen in Medinet Habu and Dakhla Oasis (p. 33, 59).

As four wheels were found together with the ship model, in chapter 3 Wachsmann examines the 'un-Mycenaean' wheeled cart accompanying it, to conclude that the prototype of the Gurob ship-cart model was designed for travel on land. Additionally, the author investigates why the craftsman decided to include wheels, considering on-land boat transport in Greece and Egypt. Of particular interest in this chapter is the comparison of the Gurob model with the two ship models (gold and silver) of queen Ahhotep I (end of the Seventeenth Dynasty) and the wheeled carriage associated with these pieces (p. 88). Wachsmann previously referred to these items in 2010;³ in this book (2013) the author becomes more specific about his 'plunder hypothesis' (see below) and the view that the Minoans were present in the Delta during the Hyksos Period – two notions also suggested in 2010.

To Wachsmann, Ahhotep's silver model was made by Egyptian artisan(s) but received Aegean influences. Specifically, it resembles Minoan iconographic parallels (e.g. the paddled flotilla in the miniature frieze – West House, Akrotiri, Thera) and replicates a relatively small and narrow ten-oared Minoan prototype vessel, with the carriage possibly being a Hyksos influence (p. 91-97). Finally, through a series of pieces of evidence, Wachsmann suggests that Ahhotep's silver model could have been plunder taken by the Egyptians during the conquest of Avaris by Kamose or Ahmose, a scenario that accepts the Minoan presence at Avaris under Hyksos rule. Material culture – notably the Minoan frescoes at Avaris – supports the author in his 'plunder hypothesis', but only if the date of these murals is accepted as Hyksos rather than Thutmosid Period. His discussion of the construction of Minoan vessels on Egyptian soil, on the basis of textual evidence, is equally challenging (p. 97). In effect, because of the fluid interpretation of material culture and texts, the Minoan/Aegean presence in the Delta in the Hyksos Period and/or Eighteenth Dynasty is controversial to the point that scholars can only hypothesise on the topic. It is certain that some readers may find this chapter rather provocative, as it reflects a warm debate in the field.

The rest of chapter 3 discusses iconographic parallels (Egyptian or other) for the wheeled carriage, and on-land transport in general. In my opinion, Wachsmann's comparison with the customs on the day of the *moulid* of sheikh (Sid) Abu el Haggag el Uqsuri (p. 113), when boats on wagons are toured through the streets of modern Luxor, reflects on the aforementioned parallels of earlier Egyptian artistic representations, and the comparison between past and present is reinforced

³S. Wachsmann. 'Ahhotep's silver ship model: The Minoan context', *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* 2:3 (2010): 31-41.

by the photographic material. With respect to references to Greece, Wachsmann sees the representation of a ship on wheels from Pyrgos Livanaton (Kynos) as the closest parallel to the Gurob model, on the basis of stylistic similarities (p. 120). Other iconographic parallels are associated with the Dionysian cult in Greece.

In an attempt to identify the owner of the Gurob ship-cart model, chapter 4 examines the presence of foreigners at Gurob. Ethnological matters are undertaken in this chapter, with a brief study based on local archaeological finds and relevant texts. Wachsmann considers as possible candidates various cultures established, or probably established, at Gurob (Syro-Canaanites, Libyans, Mycenaean, Cypriots, etc.), until the 'closest match' for the ethnic identity of the owner of the Gurob ship-cart model is revealed: the discussion focuses on the Sea Peoples, and specifically on the Sherden (p. 183). Chapter 4 is accompanied by appendix 4 (see below), and the two should be read together.

In chapter 5 Wachsmann concludes by summarizing previous discussions. Addressed topics include: what the model is, who made it, what the sources of inspiration were, the model's cultural and artistic associations, which peoples used Helladic-style galleys, the possible owner and his/her ethnic background, and likely reasons why the item was made.

The book includes seven appendices discussing the methodology followed for the analysis of the artefact. Appendix 1 (by Alexis Catsambis) enhances chapter 1 and the online supplement, and deals with the lines of the Gurob ship-cart model, as a way of conveying its unique form.

Appendix 2 (by Donald H. Sanders) gives a manual for the online component. It also informs the reader about the making of the online component and, in particular, the production of 3D graphics. Pictures of the ship-cart model are also offered in black and white, but visitors can view the same images in colour online. Much of the information in appendix 2 is identical to the information provided on the website.

Appendix 3 (by Dan Davis) investigates the choice of colours for the Gurob model. It is suggested that the artisan who painted the item chose what colours to use on the basis of colour ritual meanings, real ships, and/or Homeric ship descriptions. I maintain that the comparison with colour-associated adjectives used in Homeric poetry is appropriate.

Appendix 4 lists the appearances of Sherden and Tjuk-People mentioned in the Wilbour Papyrus. Translation and locations are based on Gardiner's map of settlements recorded in the Wilbour Papyrus, texts A and B, in WP II (figs. 4.10 and 4.11).⁴

Appendix 5 (by Christine A. Prior) is supplementary to chapters 3 and 4 and describes what parts of the model were radiocarbon-dated and how this was done. It concludes that the wood sample from the wheel is about a century older than the wood sample from the body of the ship model, but it is suggested that old(er) wood was re-used for the making of the wheel.

Appendix 6 (by Ruth Siddall) re-describes the colours on the model and any unattached pieces (white, red, yellow, blue), and the way pigment samples were analysed. Wachsmann suggests that some pigments used on the item were likely to have been imported from the Aegean (e.g. saffron for yellow pigment) (p. 245). In my opinion, such a notion would appear sensible, especially when considering the sources of colour inspiration for the model (appendix 3).

Lastly, the brief note in appendix 7 (Caroline Cartwright) identifies the wood from which the Gurob ship-cart model was made. A wood sample from one of the wheels, found together with the model, is also examined. Both samples are of sycamore fig (p. 249).

As appendices 3 and 6 both deal with colours, it seems to me that they should be placed closer to each other. In any case, these appendices should be read together. The appendices are followed by a very useful list of terms, up-to-date bibliography, endnotes and index. The book is well reasoned and well written, and therefore suitable for both professional and non-professional

⁴A. Gardiner. *The Wilbour Papyrus*, Vol. 2: *Commentary*. (Oxford University Press: London, 1948).

readers alike.

To date the book has had a somewhat negative appraisal. Pomey found that the content constitutes a complex puzzle leading to readers becoming confused and sceptical.⁵ Bachhuber added (referring to chapter 4) that the book content may surprise and concern archaeologists who investigate matters of ethnicity and identity.⁶ Firstly, contra Pomey, I find that no discussion is superfluous. The study of the evidence is coherent and every piece of information is needed for critical comparison. Wachsmann has adequately covered all relevant material in the formulation of his conclusions, which he neatly summarizes in chapter 5. Secondly, with regards to Bachhuber's comments about ethnicity, I am of the opinion that Wachsmann's purpose is not to establish himself as an ethnologist, but simply to provide food-for-thought.

My general impression is that the aim of the book is generously met, and that this publication is a major contribution to the field, mainly because this is the first study in which the Gurob ship-cart model is reconstructed and examined so thoroughly.

Review of the book's online supplement

Wachsmann and his colleagues studied and reconstructed the Gurob ship-cart model from existing pieces. On the supplement's website, the model is first shown as it was excavated, and two hypothetical reconstructions are also suggested. The results are presented with the help of high-quality colour images and graphic media with interactive magnification and rotation features.⁷ The online supplement also includes satellite photography of the site, and a photographic catalogue with colour images of artefacts in high resolution. The creation of this supplement was facilitated by the contribution of the Institute of the Visualization of History (VIZIN), under the guidance of Wachsmann.

At present, the online supplement mainly operates as an educational tool, but its initial scope was the trial-and-error experimentation of the recreation of the model via virtual media. Thus, handling of the actual artefact was limited: as a result, the artefacts were not damaged, and the risk of contamination was also minimized. Moreover, thanks to virtual reality, real-time computer graphics revealed details that would otherwise have gone unnoticed.

I would recommend the reader to use the online supplement while reading the book. The combination of the book and the online material makes following the discussions both memorable and enjoyable. To conclude, as in the case of the book, the online supplement should be greatly welcomed by both students and academics.

⁵P. Pomey. 'Book Review. The Gurob Ship-cart Model and its Mediterranean Context', *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* 42 (2013): 441–442.

⁶C. Bachhuber. 'Review. The Gurob Ship-Cart Model and Its Mediterranean Context by Shelley Wachsmann', *The Institute of Nautical Archaeology Quarterly* 40.3 (2013): 28–29. However, a more welcoming approach is expressed by Assaf Yasur-Landau on the matter, with Yasur-Landau mentioning that 'The quest for meaning of this rather small model causes the book to read much like a good detective story' ('Book Review. The Gurob Ship-Cart Model and Its Mediterranean Context', *American Journal of Archaeology* 118:3 (2014), available at: <http://www.ajaonline.org/online-review-book/1825> (last accessed 30th November 2014)).

⁷While in the book the text is accompanied by black and white maps, drawings and pictures, many of these pictures are in colour in the online supplement.