

Socio-Political Developments in the Ninevite 5 Period

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This paper is intended as a brief update and revision of previous assessments of social and political developments in the Ninevite 5 period (Schwartz 1985, 1987) in the light of data presented at the December 1988 Yale conference. Before embarking on such a discussion, two caveats are in order. First, it must be emphasized that our sample, although much increased in the past decade, remains quite small, and conclusions drawn at this early date may well have to be abandoned as the sample is augmented. Particularly inhibitive to the investigation of Ninevite 5 social and political developments is the scarcity of results from surface survey, precluding region-wide analyses of the type conducted for southwestern Iran, for example (Hole 1987). Further, the task of discerning patterns applicable to the entire range of societies utilizing Ninevite 5 pottery will inevitably entail over-simplification, since it is not unlikely that regional variation in social and political organization was considerable.

Our most recently acquired data necessitate one significant modification to prior assessments of socio-political developments in the Ninevite 5 period: we can now recognize change toward greater complexity in the later part of the period. The pattern that emerges is of little or no evidence for urban or state systems in the majority of the Ninevite 5 period, increased socio-political complexity in the later part of the period, and the most momentous advances toward urbanization and state formation first visible subsequent to the period.

Early to Middle Ninevite 5 developments

There remain no unequivocal examples of urban centers until the very end of the Ninevite 5 period: Billa, Chagar Bazar, Thalathat, and the Eski Mosul sites are all relatively small settlements with little evidence of marked complexity, with the only exceptions being Jigan, no larger than 20 hectares, and Leilan, no larger than 15 hectares until the very end of the period. We are as yet incompletely informed of the urban status of three large sites: Tell al-Hawa, Nineveh, and Brak, all of which were occupied in the Ninevite 5 period. Tell al-Hawa acquired impressive dimensions in the period, occupying as much as a 42 hectare area (Ball and Wilkinson, this volume), but since Hawa's urbanization is not yet precisely dated within the Ninevite 5 period and could, like Leilan, be a late Ninevite 5 phenomenon, it is too soon to comment conclusively on Hawa's role as a Ninevite 5 urban center.¹ Nineveh and Brak, very large sites, to be sure, are nevertheless of uncertain dimension in the Ninevite 5 period; at Brak, Ninevite 5 sherds have appeared in context thus far at excavation areas ST and TW, some 125 meters apart (J. Oates 1986), presumably allowing for the reconstruction of a settlement of at least that breadth. Survey results largely indicate a corresponding pattern of minimal or nonexistent urbanism (Schwartz 1985, 1987; Weiss 1986; Stein and Wattenmaker, this volume). An exception, again, is provided by the Tell al-Hawa survey data, which indicate the beginnings of an urban system, with a large center surrounded by a ring of smaller satellites. The evaluation of this pattern must await the application of a more closely refined chronology.

While large-scale architecture is suggested at Chagar Bazar, the compounds at Kutan, and the platform at Fisna, in no case is it clearly monumental. Ninevite 5 religious architecture, of which examples have at last been recovered, is again small-scale: a temple at Kash-Kashok is a one-room structure measuring 7 x 8 meters (Suleiman 1988), and the level 3 temple from Tell al-Raqa'i (late Ninevite 5) is also a one-room construction, approximately 5 meters square (Curvers and Schwartz 1990; Fortin and Schwartz, this volume). The single-room building tentatively identified by Mallowan as a shrine at Chagar Bazar 4 (Mallowan 1936: fig. 4; Roaf, this volume) compares favorably to the Raqa'i structure in its recessed entry and similar dimensions.

While evidence of social stratification exists in the mortuary data of the period, it does not exhibit a high degree of differentiation: a five-tier hierarchy of grave wealth has been suggested (Schwartz 1986) of (1) no associated goods, (2) ceramic vessels only, (3) ceramic vessels and stone ornaments, (4) ceramic vessels and copper pins, and (5) ceramic vessels, cylinder seals, stone ornaments, and metal ornaments of

¹ The very small number of Ninevite 5 painted sherds (no later than early Leilan IIIc) found on the Hawa surface, together with the recovery of Ninevite 5 incised motifs characteristic of Leilan IIIc and IIId such as "slash," "panel," "groove" and "dotted wavy line" (Ball, Tacker and Wilkinson 1989: fig. 21; Schwartz 1988: 33) may imply a late Ninevite 5 date for the Hawa expansion.

copper or silver (or, in one case at Jigan, a gold earring); differences in energy expenditure in grave architecture range from simple pits to a mud-brick covering (see also Green, this volume). That the hierarchy of grave wealth observable for the Ninevite 5 graves is a reflection of social stratification is supported by the infant burial G71 at Chagar Bazar with a collection of grave goods wealthier than that of many adults'. However, the extensive differences in wealth and status evinced by contemporary burials in southern Mesopotamia find no parallel here. Likewise, there is no Ninevite 5 parallel to the energy expended on grave architecture in the south as in the vaulted tombs of Kish and Khafajah; nor, for that matter, are there graves comparable in wealth to the rich tombs of fourth millennium Gawra XIA-VIII B. While it is tempting to recognize a trend toward increased status differentiation in the more elaborate graves of later Ninevite 5 contexts (Mohammed Arab 54V:23, Leilan Burial 1, Stratum 19), the small sample size — and the occasional incidence of earlier relatively rich graves (Chagar Bazar G67, G68) — necessitates caution.

Evidence for elites with political and economic power is primarily supplied by the large-scale staple storage evident at the granary at Telul eth-Thalathat Tell V and by the complementary use of glyptic administrative technology (Schwartz 1987). Complex chiefdoms and early states are often characterized by a tributary economy where staples are collected from the population and stored by the central authority, which employs the collected staples to pay for services performed in its service (Earle and D'Altroy 1982). The existence of a centralized administration of goods mobilized by the elite may be inferred from the use of cylinder seals to document the storage and disbursement of goods. The discovery of "Piedmont Jemdet Nasr" seals and sealings with the Thalathat granary and the granaries at Gubba and Madhhur in the Hamrin attests to their association with staple storage.

It would appear that the northern Mesopotamians adopted the administrative technology of proto-Elamite Iran for their own administrative purposes (Schwartz 1987; Pittman 1988), and it is striking that the glazed steatite "Piedmont Jemdet Nasr" seals are the only example of Iranian material culture in early third millennium northern Mesopotamia. How and why this technology was adopted in northern Mesopotamia remains to be elucidated. An appropriate analogy may be the adoption of the cuneiform writing system by complex societies outside of southern Mesopotamia later in the third millennium; perhaps the training of scribes in southern Mesopotamia for work in the periphery (Gelb 1981: 61) was paralleled by similar movements of seal cutters between Iran and northern Mesopotamia in the early third millennium.

The evidence of centralized storage and a complementary administrative technology in the Ninevite 5 period, given the absence of other characteristics of early states or of urbanization, suggests a degree of political complexity equivalent to that of complex chiefdoms. It appears, then, that the establishment of southern Mesopotamian "colonies" in the fourth millennium did not precipitate urban and secondary state development in the local societies of the region (Weiss 1988: xix; Schwartz 1988b: 12). It should be stressed that our understanding of the developments of the Uruk period in northern Mesopotamia is extremely rudimentary, and that, as a corollary, any statement on the impact of such developments will be necessarily tentative. The differential distribution of southern Uruk material culture, usually in association with local material culture, in sites of different size, function, environmental context, and date in northern Mesopotamia (Schwartz 1988b) make for a complicated picture which is just beginning to be interpreted.

Late Ninevite 5

The evidence of urban change toward the end of the Ninevite 5 period derives from Leilan, which expanded from its 15 hectare acropolis to occupy a circumvallated area encompassing 90 hectares at the very end of Leilan III d (Calderone and Weiss, this volume). The late Leilan III d construction of the Leilan acropolis fortifications and city wall evince a scale of deployment of energy and resources and level of organization not previously attested in the Ninevite 5 period.

In the middle Habur, a complex of small sites which appear to have specialized in the processing, storage and distribution of agricultural products, in probable association with larger centers elsewhere (Fortin and Schwartz, this volume), also testify to growing political and economic complexity at the end of the period. The administrative complexity of this cluster of sites is further corroborated by the recovery of apparent numerical tablets from two sites, 'Atij and Raqa'i (found at Raqa'i in level 2 fill, just post-Ninevite 5); writing, in any form, is otherwise unattested in Ninevite 5 contexts.

The adoption of figurative seals toward the end of the period may also indicate the development of greater administrative sophistication in Ninevite 5 societies at this stage, with the two seal varieties, geometric "Piedmont Jemdet Nasr" and figurative, perhaps representative of two levels of administrative hierarchy (Nissen 1977; Schwartz 1987), although there is as yet no clear difference in the way the two varieties were employed (Holly Pittman, personal communication).

Conclusions

The present state of the evidence allows for the reconstruction of an elite mobilizing and controlling agricultural resources early in the Ninevite 5 period, and a development towards urbanization and greater political complexity toward the end of the period evinced by the Leilan expansion and middle Habur complex. But the extant evidence indicates that the "second urban revolution" was in full force only after the period came to an end. Stein and Wattenmaker's survey data from the Leilan area underline the major shift towards nucleation and urbanization in Leilan II (Stein and Wattenmaker, this volume); likewise, it is not until after the Ninevite 5 period that the Tell al-Hawa area is maximally urbanized, with rural sites abandoned and large centers greatly expanded. Comparable evidence from Abu Dhahir shows the site reduced to a small village in Ninevite 5 times but expanded into a larger center in the succeeding period (Ball and Wilkinson, this volume). The floruit of such very large, walled sites as Chuera and the other Kranzhügeln, Khoshi, and Ebla itself, appears to date to the period following the Ninevite 5 era. We can also point to the major post-Ninevite 5 building operations at Tell Brak (D. Oates 1982) and Gawra VI (Rothman 1988) which destroyed earlier Ninevite 5 contexts.

Major changes in craft production are also evident: the wheel-made plain ware of Leilan II and Brak Late Early Dynastic III signify a major shift towards mass-production in the period and away from the meticulously decorated painted or incised Ninevite 5 examples. The intensification of metallurgical production (Muhly, this volume) is likewise to be dated to the post-Ninevite 5 period.

Placing our Ninevite 5 data in a broader Near Eastern context is not an easy task, due both to the relative paucity of contemporaneous material from adjacent regions and to the very few material culture connections between northern Mesopotamia and those regions. The chief material culture link between Ninevite 5 northern Mesopotamia and its environs is to be found in the glyptic material. In the earlier part of the period, Ninevite 5 cylinder seals primarily belong to the Piedmont Jemdet Nasr category, characteristic of the Diyala and proto-Elamite Iran. Northern Mesopotamia was part of the great arc of regions peripheral to southern Mesopotamia which experienced close connections to southern material culture in the fourth millennium which were then severed in the post-Uruk era. Recently retrieved glyptic material from Leilan and Raqa'i in the later part of the Ninevite 5 period now attests to a figurative glyptic style which compares to Early Dynastic II-III in the south (Parayre, this volume; Fortin and Schwartz, this volume). The significance of these glyptic parallels is an issue which requires further clarification (cf. Weiss, this volume).

In western Syria, as in northeast Syria and north Mesopotamia, the late fourth-early third millennium has been a poorly documented period, preceded by the Uruk incursion of the fourth millennium and succeeded by the urban and state development of Mardikh IIB1/Amuq I in the mid-third millennium. Survey and excavation in the Karababa basin of the Turkish lower Euphrates, essentially a northern extension of the west Syrian material culture region in this period, has shown a pattern of southern Uruk-related activity in the fourth millennium with some degree of settlement nucleation, a subsequent period of small, dispersed villages in the early third millennium, and the appearance of a three-tiered site size hierarchy with large urban-size centers in the mid-third millennium, contemporary with Mardikh IIB1 (Marfoe 1986: 43, 92, 99); this pattern is analogous to north Mesopotamian developmental history as presently understood.³

Investigation of socio-political developments in the Ninevite 5 period is, as this review has no doubt made clear, still in its formative stages. The collection of data in recent years, exemplified by the material presented in the Yale conference, happily has facilitated the inauguration of systematic studies of Ninevite 5 period developments, but a number of important goals remain to be pursued. First, conclusions on Ninevite 5 society cannot be safely drawn without a sound relative chronology to base them upon; while differences in regional chronologies are being resolved with increasing success, further work is clearly needed on intra-period ceramic change. Changes in the incised pottery have been well-documented (Schwartz 1985, 1988; Roaf and Killick 1987; Calderone and Weiss, this volume), but the same cannot be said for painted Ninevite 5, nor have enough useful undecorated index fossils to distinguish sub-phases within the period yet been isolated.

Of paramount importance is the enlargement of the sample size of almost any category of Ninevite 5 data: when compared to the data sets available from other areas where early complex societies are studied such as southern Mesopotamia, western Iran, or Mesoamerica, our body of information is meager indeed. Expansion of excavated exposures is one goal of obvious concern, since the majority of Ninevite 5 excavations have concentrated on the vertical rather than the horizontal dimension. Further collection and

³ Parenthetically, it can be noted that painted ceramics characteristic of the early to mid-third millennium in the Karababa basin have been found in Ninevite 5 contexts at Tell Kash-Kashok (Suleiman 1988) and perhaps Chagar Bazar (Schwartz 1985: 60).

analysis of paleobotanical, faunal, and paleoenvironmental data is also of extreme importance for the study of the Ninevite 5 economy and for insights into such problems as the extent of nomadic pastoralism in the period.

Especially important is the need for much more systematic archaeological survey work: without survey data to assist us in framing Ninevite 5 developments in their areal context, our understanding will remain significantly truncated. As it stands now, we can say distressingly little on such questions as population dynamics, settlement systems, site function, spatial variation, and relations between center and hinterland. Further, survey work must utilize refined ceramic chronologies to ascertain changes within our relatively lengthy period.

The Ninevite 5 period is still relatively enigmatic, but one can affirm that the past decade of research has increased our knowledge of the period to an extent not paralleled since the initial days of exploration in the 1930's. If research can continue with comparable vigor, we can expect many questions now left open because of scant data to be confronted effectively, thereby eliciting further important questions to address.

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Addendum

With the infusion of new data from the Ninevite 5 region, particularly northeastern Syria, many of the conclusions advanced above must be modified or revised. More recent discussions have been offered by the author in Schwartz 1994a and b and in Akkermans and Schwartz in press. See also Rova 1988 and Roaf 2000 for a general review; Lyonnet 1996, 1998, 2000 on survey results; Hole 1991, 1999; Wilkinson 1994 and McCorriston 1998 on agriculture and economy; Blackman, Stein and Vandiver 1993 and Stein and Blackman 1993 on ceramic production; Zeder 1995, 1998 on animal economy; Marchetti 1996 and D. Matthews 1997 on glyptic; Numoto 1991, 1993, 1994, 1997, Schwartz and Weiss 1992; Weiss et al. 1993; Gut 1995, and R. Matthews 2000 on chronology; and Pfälzner 1997, 1998 and Lebeau et al. 2000 on a new third-millennium periodization of the Jezireh.

In addition to new data from the middle Khabur (see Fortin and Schwartz, above), recent field reports of relevance include Emberling et al. 1999; Kolinski and Lawecka 1992; Lebeau and Suleiman 1997; R. Matthews 1995, 1996, 1999; R. Matthews, W. Matthews and McDonald 1994; Munchaev, Merpert and Bader 1993; Suleiman and Taraqji 1995; Weiss 1990a,b; Weiss et al. 1990; and Wilhelm and Zaccagnini 1993.

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