**FOSTER, BENJAMIN R. THE AGE OF AGADE. INVENTING EMPIRE IN ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA. NEW YORK: ROUTLEDGE, 2016. 438p. ISBN: 978-1-138-90971-7**

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**Keywords**

Mesopotamia; Akkad; Benjamin Foster

The renowned Assyriologist Benjamin Foster presents, in this ambitious book, a large detailed and instigating painting of the First Empire in the world, the Akkadian Empire (2334-2193 b.c.e.). Exploring and wondering about the political and social history; the material culture, everyday life, spirituality, arts and letters; the legacy of the Era of Akkad and the reasons of survival in later times from this period, Foster proposes to deal, in its interpretation, with the various sources of textual and archeological wealth, exploiting surfaces surveys, floor plans, burials, pottery, chronicles, collections and implements. Despite claiming that his work is of documentary and descriptive nature, rather than explanations of causes and effects, the author takes a position in relation to the debates within the historiography about the period, even seeking always submit all visions about the themes approached. The fascination that the Akkadian Empire exercised on later Mesopotamia society and even on other societies of the Ancient Near East is questioned in this book for the differentiation between the Akkadian Dynasty and its achievements. To trace this route is not easy, because the author makes it clear that, in spite of the wealthy of evidences, they are fragmented, were rewritten and even destroyed by later generations.

Within the long history of Mesopotamia, Foster defines the Akkadian Era by means of an initial cultural and political acceleration with a climax in the middle, an abrupt disintegration of its political order, separating what was before, and what came after. In the first chapter, Foster describes the “rise and fall of the Akkadian Empire” through the biography of great kings of Akkadian dynasty, accentuating their achievements and their legacies. However, the author does not explain in a more general about this appearance and its abrupt fall, as for example: the differentiation between North and South in relation to the political organization of Mesopotamia; the cultural Sumerian elements, a powerful aggregator pre-Akkadian element; and the shortcomings of the spheres of interaction of Akkadian State, reason of several rebellions, powerful element of its fall. These issues could enhance the analysis of Foster, even though he does not propose to do so.

In the second chapter, Benjamin Foster presents a broad framework of Akkadian society, emphasizing the development of administrative and military elite, which ensured the main material resources of the empire, in particular, through the land tenure in a society in which private property was replacing the communal ownership. Thus, sales, loans and transfers of movable were written and witnessed, depicting significant changes in social status. Foster approaches the system of clientele and patronage in the Akkadian Empire with the objective to demonstrate how this system was useful in the management of the empire. The resources of the empire were distributed through ties of dependence that resulted in a web of loyalties and duties in which the central power could offer new opportunities for loyal subjects. Thus, this system created new social groups and reorganized the ancient Sumerian society, including impacts on the relationship between the temple and royal power. Foster finishes the chapter with the rebellions and resistance to the Akkadian hegemony, widely recorded in commemorative inscriptions. According to the author, these opportunities evidence the supremacy and the triumph of the Akkadian kings, however they indicate the difficulties of the empire, expropriating the best land of Sumerian elites, destroying the local leadership and completely dominating the priests of temples, which, in spite of the mutual interests, they lost economic and political influence with the arrival of the Akkadians.

The archaeological site of the City of Akkad was never found. Despite this archeological gap, there is no doubt within the historiography about the existence and the role of the Akkadian Empire. According to Foster, it was an entity maintained by force, with cultural, propagandist and administrative measures, initiated by Sargon, purposing to homogenize the enormous heterogeneity of the Sumerian universe and to conquer territories of different regions. The essence of the new state was the institutionalization of armed conflicts and alliances in peripheral regions maintained by weddings and a long-distance trade. It was fundamental for the supply of raw materials and guarantee of material resources to the center of the empire. The practice of systematic destruction of the walls of the city-states, a form of destroying a symbol of social and political identity, paradoxically aimed at breaking resistance, but also achieving integration imperial. The writing with the development of imperial calligraphy was redirected to propagandist inscriptions with emphasis on the war. Impressive statues were carved to give greater impact to the royal messages, products of a brilliant artistic initiative. Thus, the registered monuments contrast the king figure and his court, proclaiming a new vision of the world throughout the kingdom. The key elements of the Akkadian program emphasized a new city, Akkad, which is the first example of a new capital created by a political act, in addition to Nippur as the center of the league of Sumerian cities.

Although Foster prioritizes a descriptive analysis, he is not immune to the debate of the ancient economy. In the chapters in which Foster investigates agricultural production, trade, manufacturing workshops, laborers, exchanges, markets, transport and imported products, he characterizes the Akkadian Empire as tax nature in opposition to the redistributive model, defended by substantivist Assyriologists, as it is the case of Johannes Renger. Foster believes that the redistributive model is nearest to the previous period, Sumerian one, marked by the redistribution of the surplus by the public sector for the population and by absence of markets. His arguments are close by the formalist approach that characterizes the Akkadian economy in the third millennium. The silver, used as “modern” money, the presence of markets for commercial transactions and the role of the merchant, a mediating element with those who wanted to acquire silver and goods of prestige, are *sine qua non* conditions for the development of new cultural, political and commercial horizons that sharpened and enabled the expansion of private interests. All this was made possible by a well-defined state policy of agriculture, in which the agricultural surplus of Sumer was more than enough to sustain the politics of redistribution of the State, especially for the army, and not only based on the redistribution of ration for the whole population, who found other means of subsistence. However, the use of free labor for the construction of public works is still a practice that remains in the previous period.

The management and maintenance of the Akkadian Empire could not be sustained only by economic and social actions. Foster focuses on the ideological aspects of support and legitimation of Akkadian power, pointing at the birth of a religious tradition in relation to the previous period. Although the Dynastic Period was not characterized by the political unification of Mesopotamian city-states, the religious aspect contributes to the construction of a common identity among citizens of the region in Mesopotamia. Thus, the Akkadian kingship was going to consolidate the Mesopotamian Pantheon in its advantage. Foster highlights the role of this construction as a means by affirming the kingship’s political unit, being the inclusion of the Akkadian king within the Pantheon, as a god, a novelty in Mesopotamian religiosity. The Akkadian kings sought to integrate the Sumerian religious traditions to the North Mesopotamian ones, through a syncretism that aimed to reaffirm the political domain along the cultural system of societies conquested. Foster detached Enheduanna, daughter of Sargon, priestess of the temple of the god’s moon in Ur and author of several Sumerian hymns, which focus on the return of the various Sumerian gods of city-states to their shrines, after the victorious campaigns of Sargon. However, Foster does not highlight the subversive character of the actions of Sargon, which held the king of Uruk, Lugalzagesi, chained to the doors of the temple of Enlil, praised his conquest and his role of saver, for the gods’ abandonment to the king and the city elite. Sargon reorganizes and works the Sumerian ideology to their advantage, inasmuch as it shows the need to intervention and restoration of a new order, the product of a divine will.

The tradition, created by the Akkadian kings who had no rivals and propagandized in monuments and written texts, persisted for a long time in the Mesopotamian culture. The Akkadian empire was remembered for long and it has become a model of kingship for future kings, who praised the Akkadian Empire as a new beginning and admired the material and warlike success, expressed in various legends, epics, omens and chronicles, copied and retransmitted by more than 1,200 years. Mario Liverani (1993), within the debate on the historical core of documents about the Akkadian period, prefers to raise the hypothesis that the texts, dealing with the Akkadian kings, suggest political problems that were discussed at the time when they were written. The set of commemorative and anti-commemorative materials, produced by the scribes from the Ancient Babylon, with a phraseological repertoire, besides generic narratives of victories and achievements, reflects the political debates of Ancient and Late Babylon on the different opinions about decision-making, engaged in circles close to the kingship. Foster contributes to Liverani’s thesis by locating the origins of the omens, some chronicles and legends about Akkadian kings. In the case of Sargon, Foster shows us that the omens and the royal inscriptions are not contemporary of its time and they refer to historical contexts subsequent to the monarch’s life. The comparison of the omens written and royal inscriptions presents some inconsistencies about the king and his sons. Epithets attributed to Sargon, king without rival, for example, seem to be characteristic of later periods. Sargon’s campaigns indicate have been carried out by Rimush, but they were associated to Sargon for convenience. In addition, the *Chronicle of Early Kings* emphasizes the role of the city of Babylon before the conquests of Sargon and the importance of Marduk, who has punished Sargon by having created a replica of Babylon, Akkad. In fact, the chronicle appreciates the city of Babylon, the most important city of Mesopotamia, at the time that the chronicle was written.

Finally, Foster concludes the book with an opportune and excellent analysis on the modern historiography of the Akkadian period. He divides the historiographical production in five phases, from 1861 to the present day, characterizing each period from the discoveries of sources, interpretative emphases and historiographical tendencies. The first phase (1814-1914) is dominated by a broad agenda about the nature of the kingship with the discovery of an extensive textual documentation, but few archeological one, marked by a large number of documents of periods subsequent to the Akkadian one, raising doubts about the credibility of these documents. The second phase, from 1914 to 1947, is marked by the expansion of textual evidence, which enabled to compare and contrast omens with the discovery of new literary works. The third phase, 1947 to 1971, is marked by important historical summaries of the Akkadian period. Foster uses works by little-known authors and schools, as in the case of Tyumenev and Diaknov, from the Russian school, elucidating the precious contributions of these authors, in particular the exploration of a series of administrative documents that illuminate important aspects of Akkadian society, few explored until then. In addition to these authors, Liverani, Gadd and Botero also appear here, with important innovations in relation to the previous period. The fourth phase (1971-1993) was characterized by a growing interest in economic and social history, with substantial archeological contribution and with detailed studies of administrative documents of Nippur, Umma, Chance, Himrin basin and other places. The fifth phase, from 1993 to the present day, was dominated by a large quantity of new archeological sources, from plunder of archeological sites in Iraq, started with the Gulf War in 1991. After reading this chapter, the feeling is that this could have appeared at the beginning of the work, because it would indicate the reader how Foster placed himself in relation to some of the themes of the historiographical debate.

The book of Foster fills an important gap in the historiography of Mesopotamia, because the knowledge and the management of this historiographical production, with a rich bibliography about the theme, provide us with a rich vision of a society and time, which it roused strong interests of contemporaries in the ancient world. Therefore, a work that deserves an urgent translation for the Portuguese language.

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