

Swamps as Burial Places for Babylonian Kings – Fragment B of the Dynastic Chronicle provides us with information on the burial places of some Babylonian rulers of the Post-Kassite period (cf. Grayson, *TCS* v, pp. 139-144, Chronicle 18). We thus know, at least nominally for none of the places involved have as yet been identified, the location of the tombs of the rulers of the Second Dynasty of the Sealand (c. 1025-1005 B.C.), of the two among the three rulers of the Dynasty of Bazi (c. 1004-985), and of the sole member of the so-called « Elamite » Dynasty (c. 984-979). The place of burial mentioned by the Chronicle is as a rule a palace : the palace of Sargon (presumably Sargon of Akkad) in most cases, and in one instance the palace of Kār-Marduk, a little known locality. The second ruler of the Second Dynasty of the Sealand, however, Ea-mukīn-zēri, is an exception : the Chronicle informs us that he was buried in the « swamp of Bit-Ḥašmar » (B.V.6. *ina raq-qa-ti šá É¹Ḥaš-mar qí-bir*). We know that Ea-mukīn-zēri, to whom the native Babylonian historical tradition ascribes a reign of either three months (Dynastic Chronicle), or five months (King List A), was in fact a usurper (Dynastic Chronicle B.V.5. ¹É-a-mu-kin-*NUMUN LUGAL IM.GI DUMU¹Ḥaš-mar ITI 3 IN.AK* « Ea-mukīn-zēri, the usurper, son of Ḥašmar, ruled for three months »). Accordingly, Grayson posited in his commentary that the author of the Dynastic Chronicle may have had in mind to stress the relationship between the legitimacy of a king and the place of his burial, since a swamp is certainly an ignominious place for anyone to be buried (*TCS* v, p. 41) : only rightful rulers would have been given the honors of a palace as a final resting place. According to Brinkman, these palaces may have contained mausoleums designed to receive the funerary remains of legitimate kings (*AnOr* 43, pp. 155-56 and 296). As for Ea-mukīn-zēri, his body would have been returned to his native region, the Bit-Ḥašmar. He evidently belonged to that Kassite clan of the Ḥašmar (= « falcon » in the Kassite language according to Balkan, *Kassitenstudien*, p. 151), of which he is the sole member so far attested in the cuneiform documentation (*AnOr* 43, p. 252 s.v. Ḥašmar). In his treatment of the burial places of the kings of the Third Dynasty of Ur, Moorey, following Grayson, also contends that the goal of the Chronicle is to stress the difference between the palace as a burial site befitting a rightful monarch, and the swamp as a burial for usurper (*Iraq* 46, 1984, pp. 14-15).

All this seems fine, but one may still wonder if the author of the Chronicle really had such a distinction in mind. In fact, our interpretation of the text is based on the a priori idea that swamps were necessarily viewed as dishonorable burial places, while palaces were not. The reality may have been quite different. Indeed, in a recent discussion of a Neo-Assyrian text describing a royal funeral, J. McGinnis has briefly pointed to two more references to burials in swamps in Babylonia (*State Archives of Assyria*. Bulletin 1, 1987, p. 8, n. 8). One occurs in the « Reform Texts » of Urukagina, which contain two sections referring to the burial practices which were prevalent in Lagash at the time of Urukagina's accession to the throne (see M. Lambert in *RA* 50, 1956, pp. 172-173) : section 6 mentions the practice of interment (*adda ki.maḫ.šè túm* « as a deceased was taken to his final resting ground »), and section 7 the other kind of burial, that which took place in the « reed thicket of Enki » (*gi.^den.ki.ka.ka adda ù.túm* « as a deceased was taken to the reed thicket of Enki »). According to M. Lambert (ibid. p. 172, note to section 7) it is possible that people liked to be buried in the reed thickets which surrounded the chapel of Enki, and this perhaps for religious reasons. The conclusion to be gleaned from the « Reform Texts » is that burial in the marshes was considered in the IIIrd millenium a normal funerary practice on an equal footing with interment. The other occurrence referred to by McGinnis is recorded by Strabo (Geography XVI.1.11 and not 2.11 as misprinted in McGinnis' article), who reports as follows on Alexander the Great's inspection of the canals in the region of Babylon :

« Accordingly, he adds (apud Aristobulus), Alexander busied himself thus with the canals, and also inspected thoroughly the tombs of the kings and potentates, most of which are situated among the lakes. »

The passage is rather interesting and is in fact corroborated by a third source which to my knowledge has never been mentioned in this connection. This source is the History of Alexander by the Greek historian Arrian, who thus reports on one of the ill omens which foreboded the death of Alexander the Great (Arrian, History of Alexander VII.22.2) :

« The greater number of the tombs of the Assyrian kings were built in the lakes and mar-

shlands, and the story goes that Alexander, while his vessel with himself at the helm was going through, was wearing a sun hat, bound with the diadem or band, signifying royalty. Suddenly a strong gust of wind blew the hat off, which fell into the water, but the light band went flying away and caught on a reed-bed near one of the ancient royal tombs. This in itself was a presage, but there was more to come : one of the sailors swam off after the hat-band and, finding when he had taken it off the reed that he could not bring it back in his hands without wetting it as he swam, he bound it round his head. »

Both Strabo and Arrian use a common source, Aristobulus, who wrote a now lost History of Alexander the Great. The two passages report on the preparations made by the king for a military expedition against the Arabs which never took place because of his untimely death. These preparations included an inspection of the canal system in the region of Babylon where, as we are told, Alexander and his companions visited the tombs of the Babylonian kings and princes. Arrian's narrative agrees particularly well with the Dynastic Chronicle and the « Reform Texts » of Urukagina : whether the word employed to describe the burial place is *raqqatu*, or *GI*, or a Greek equivalent, and whether we translate these words by « swamp », or « lake », or « reed thicket », there is no doubt that the environment referred to is always the marshy areas which are so highly characteristic of the landscape of southern Babylonia. One can draw a rather vivid picture of burial places in the marshlands from the report of Arrian, who describes these tombs as partly or entirely submerged in water with growths of reeds on and around them.

That type of burial is therefore attested over a period of more than two millennia and was perhaps much more widespread than the relative paucity of cuneiform sources concerning it would lead us to believe. The Greek authors testify that « most » of the tombs of Babylonian kings and princes were built in the marshes, and the « Reform Texts » of Urukagina seem to consider it quite usual. The fact that it is not mentioned more often can easily be accounted for by the general rarity of cuneiform sources relating to funerary practices. As for the place of origin of this type of burial, all the evidence points to the southernmost part of Babylonia, where it was in all probability a firmly entrenched cultural practice. Indeed, the « Reform Texts » seem to link it to the cult of Enki, and the very name of king Ea-mukīn-zēri suggests that he came from the area known as the

Sealand, not to mention that, although a usurper, he belonged to a dynasty precisely named after that region. The location of his native place, the Bīt-Ḫašmar, is uncertain. Levine, following Speiser, places it in the Diyala region, along the Darband-i-Han, where this river crosses the Bazian mountains (*RLA* IV, p. 134 s.v. Ḫašmar). According to Brinkman the location of Ḫašmar should rather be sought in southern Babylonia (*AnOr* 43, p. 156, n. 941). His opinion is shared by the Répertoire Géographique des Textes Cunéiformes (*RGTC* 5, p. 59 s.v. Bīt-Ḫašmar). There existed in the Neo-Babylonian period a town in the vicinity of Nippur called Bīt-Ḫaššamur (^{umu} É^IḪa-áš-šá-mur, *PBS* 2/1 16, 5 ; cf. *RGTC* 8, p. 91, s.v. Bīt-Ḫaššamur), but identity with Bīt-Ḫašmar cannot be ascertained. One fact is nevertheless certain ; Ea-mukīn-zēri may have been denied a mausoleum in the « Palace of Sargon » because he was a usurper and taken instead to the Bīt-Ḫašmar to be buried in the marshes, but certainly not as a mark of disdain, nor because that kind of burial was reserved for unrightful monarchs. The obvious explanation is simply that Ea-mukīn-zēri was sent to the burial ground of his ancestors, and that this burial ground lay among the marshes, as probably did those of many other Babylonian kings, princes, chieftains, and even prominent individuals. In the first millenium this funerary practice may still have been motivated by the same religious reasons which prevailed in the time of Urukagina of Lagash. The popularity of the cults of Ea-Enki and Oannes (U₄-an-na)-Adapa in the late periods might in some degree account for the persistence of that funerary practice.

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