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**Review: Shelley Wachsmann, *The Gurob Ship–Cart Model and Its Mediterranean Context*. Texas A&M University Press, Ed Rachal Foundation Nautical Archaeology Series, 2013. Pp. xxii & 321. \$75. ISBN: 978–1–60344–429–3 (Hbk).**

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In 1920, at the site of Gurob near the entrance to the Faiyum oasis in Middle Egypt, pieces of a small wooden ship model were discovered in a shallow and otherwise empty tomb (Tomb 611). Incorrectly assembled but perceptively labeled as a “Pirate Boat” by the overseer of its excavation, the famous and ubiquitous Egyptologist Flinders Petrie, the model was paired in antiquity with a *pavois* for carrying, as well as a wheeled cart, perhaps signifying its representation of a cultic object (pp. xviii, 20–21, 102, 163, 202–204). The model was largely forgotten until the turn of the millennium, when it was “rediscovered” in the Petrie Egyptological Museum and republished, in the volume presently under review (henceforth “*Gurob*”), by one of the foremost authorities on ships and seafaring in the Bronze Age Mediterranean, Shelley Wachsmann of Texas A&M University.

In *Gurob*, Wachsmann conclusively demonstrates that this ship-cart model is the first known polychromatic, three-dimensional representation of a Helladic oared galley, one of the most important vessel types in maritime history and the ancestor of the Greek *dieres* and Phoenician bireme that played such important roles in the travel, trade, and colonisation of the first century BC. However, the author goes far beyond simply providing a close description of this fragmentary object, and in short order, the reader is taken on an accompanied tour of the Eastern Mediterranean world writ large, with stops at Medinet Habu, the Theban Necropolis, and the Dakhla Oasis in Egypt; Hama in Syria; the ruins of Akrotiri, Knossos, Pylos, and Tiryns; and the Athenian Akropolis, among others. Very few archaeologists are as adept as Wachsmann at

providing so overwhelming a volume of evidence relative to their argument, and his talent for near-drowning his readers in data is on full display in *Gurob*, as written, iconographic, and physical evidence alike are marshaled from across the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean and from the Bronze Age to the Roman period and beyond in support of his study of this small object and its wider context. The result is a 321-page book which boasts over 200 photographs and 65 line drawings, and which is as comprehensive a study as one could imagine of a single artifact.

The book's first chapter, "The Gurob Ship-Cart Model" (pp. 1–32), provides the background of the object's excavation and previous publication, along with close descriptions and detailed photographs and measurements of each of the model's component parts. The remarkable polychromatic nature of the object is covered in depth in print on pp. 26-28 and in Appendix 3 (pp. 219-224), though the book unfortunately contains no color images. Other physical elements of particular note include a waterline projection at the bow, vertical stem and stempost with upturned finial, and vertical pegs along the top of the hull that the author identifies as stanchions, or load-bearing posts, which on a physical galley would have supported the superstructure and partial decking (pp. 14-16, 201, 252). The importance of each of these aspects of the model is discussed in Ch. 2, while the wheels and *pavois* are addressed in Ch. 3.

Chapter 2, "The Iconographic Evidence" (pp. 33–84), provides deep and wide-ranging comparative analysis in support of the author's assertion that the Gurob model is "*the* most detailed known [galley] representation, supplying structural details in a unique, multihued, three-dimensional manner, which contemporaneous ship depictions either ignore or, at best, illuminate in two dimensions only" (p. 33). In making his case, Wachsmann first presents the corpus of Helladic ship representations found in Egypt, including the Medinet Habu reliefs and Dakhla Oasis graffito, and on the Syro-Canaanite littoral, including potsherds from the Philistine sites of Ashkelon and Ekron, graffiti from Nahal Meerot, and a cinerary urn featuring a Helladic galley with vertical stempost and upturned finial from the Syrian site of Hama.

The Hama urn has long been interpreted by the author as evidence for an Urnfield element among the invading Sea Peoples pictured at Medinet Habu.<sup>1</sup> As will be seen in the discussion of

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. Wachsmann 1981; 1996; 1997; 1998; 2000

Ch. 4 below, the evidence from Gurob is presented as further support for this hypothesis. Whether Wachsmann's case on this point is convincing is up to the individual reader, though two related points should be noted: first, the argument for a Sea Peoples presence among prospective Central Europeans at Hama is dependent on a single urn out of 1,100 found in the relevant stratum at the site (p. 59); and second, the hypothesised connection between Urnfield culture and the Sea Peoples pictured at Medinet Habu rests entirely on the common ornamentation – bird heads at stem and stern – on the Sea Peoples' galleys and on ceremonial *Vogelbarken* ("bird boats") in Central European iconography, but the Hama urn, which is presented as a connection between the two, features a galley decorated in typical Helladic fashion, with decorated finial on the stempost only.

Following this, Wachsmann offers a detailed comparison of each characteristic of the Gurob model and its corresponding feature in galley iconography from the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean (pp. 65–84). This both facilitates a contextual examination of each individual aspect of the Gurob model, and treats it as a unique addition to the corpus of galley representations for the purpose of better understanding, wherever possible, the actual appearance and function of the various components that made up this important vessel type.

Chapter 3, "Wheels, Wagons, and the Transport of Ships Overland" (pp. 85–162), traces the tradition of ships on land, primarily as objects in processions. Wachsmann demonstrates that Egyptian funerary boats were sometimes depicted as being transported on wheeled wagons, and that deities were frequently transported overland in boat-shaped shrines fitted with poles attached to a *pavois*, which allowed them to be carried by porters. Thus, the Gurob ship-cart model, with its combination of wheels and *pavois*, is shown to possess both funerary and ritual elements that are Egyptian in nature. However, the author goes beyond the Egyptian evidence to find examples of ship-cart use in Greek culture, as well, with particular emphasis on representations of Dionysos in a ship-cart and on the wheeled ship used to transport the new *peplos* to Athena at each Panathenaic festival.

Chapter 4, "Foreigners at Gurob" (pp. 163–199), presents evidence for non-Egyptians at the site for the purpose of determining "the *most likely* foreign candidate for the model's owner" (p. 163;

italics in original). Foreign elements found at Gurob include Mycenaean and Cypriot pottery, Syro-Canaanite toggle pins, a spindle for “z-spun” threads, and blond hair. Perhaps the most interesting intrusive phenomenon at Gurob, though, aside from the ship-cart model itself, are the Ramesside-era “burnt groups” consisting of personal possessions (pottery, jewelry, household items, and furniture) which had been buried intramurally and then burned (p. 193). The author notes several previous theories regarding these enigmatic “burnt groups,” which are unique in Egypt, before offering his own proposal, that the burnt groups “represent physical evidence of an Urnfield element...in the midst of rapid acculturation” (p. 199) In Wachsmann’s reading of the evidence, this acculturation by a central European element at Gurob meant that they “no longer cremated their dead, having adopted Egyptian burial practices, but still kept alive a memory of their traditions by burning and burying the deceased’s personal items” (p. 199).

This interpretation of the burnt groups is presented in combination with the aforementioned Hama urn as support for Wachsmann’s theory regarding an Urnfield element within the Sea Peoples coalition. In arguing for this connection, he notes both that “[their] burial custom, resulting in vast fields of cremation urns, is one of the most typifying characteristics of the Urnfield Culture, *hence its name*” (p. 199; italics in original) and that “burial methods can adapt when foreigners arrive at a new setting [and] the particular burial customs that remain will be those that have consequential cultural meaning to the new arrivals” (p. 199). Accepting what Wachsmann calls “the most likely, and simplest, explanation for the burnt group phenomenon at Gurob” (p. 199), then, seems to require accepting that the act of burning, rather than cremation burial itself – in the cinerary urns that serve as the namesake for this culture-historical group – was the element of death-related ritual that had “consequential cultural meaning” to the prospective Central Europeans at Gurob.

Chapter 5, “Conclusions” (pp. 201–206), provides a concise and accessible synthesis, while reinforcing the author’s core argument about the Gurob ship–cart model, its cultural connections, and its potential ownership by a member of one Sea Peoples group or one of his descendants (p. 206). Following this are seven appendices (pp. 207–249), the majority of which deal with aspects of the physical model, including lines drawings, virtual reality reconstructions, radiocarbon dating, and analysis of the wood and pigments. These are followed by a useful

Glossary of Nautical Terms (pp. 251–253) and extensive endnotes (pp. 255–283). The book concludes with a comprehensive bibliography (pp. 285–312), and a very helpful and accurate index (pp. 313–321).

Additionally, Wachsmann partnered with the Institute for the Visualisation of History, Inc. to produce an excellent online resource (<http://www.vizin.org/Gurob/Gurob.html>), which provides a full-color companion to the photographs in the volume, as well as three-dimensional imaging that allows the user to manipulate both original and reconstructed versions of the Gurob model in any axis. One can only hope that this resource will not only survive online in perpetuity, but that it will also serve as inspiration to others in the field to take advantage of web-based technologies to make artifacts and interpretations more accessible than ever, to practitioners and the public alike.

Whether or not the reader agrees with all of the author's conclusions, *Gurob* is a formidable work of scholarship which goes far beyond the close study of an important object. As such, it represents a significant contribution to the existing literature not just on the development and construction of the Helladic oared galley and its Iron Age successors, but on seafaring, technological transference, and cultural interconnections in the Late Bronze–Early Iron Age transition across the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean worlds.

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