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*Organization, Representation,
and Symbols of Power
in the Ancient Near East*

Proceedings of the 54th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale
at Würzburg
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Workshop:

Collective Governance and the Role of the Palace in the Bronze Age Middle Euphrates and Beyond

Adelheid Otto

MAINZ

Introduction

The workshop focused on Near Eastern societies with strong corporate political structures. It considered one of the issues proposed by the organizers of the 54th Rencontre at Würzburg, i.e. to investigate ‘the participation of consultative bodies in political decisions of Middle and Late Bronze Age Syria’.

The excavated settlements on the one hand and the textual evidence from Emar, Ekalte, Mari, Tuttul and elsewhere on the other hand show that there existed in the ancient Near East not only models of imperial power, exemplified best by Late Bronze Age Ugarit’s palace-based society, but also forms of society which were aptly called ‘democracy’s ancient ancestors’ (Fleming 2004).

In a common effort of philologists and archaeologists, i.e., through analyzing the textual evidence and the special city structures within the area of the Middle Euphrates, the role of collective governance is discussed. Was it mainly restricted to the lower levels of the political hierarchy and only significant for towns that were subject to an external polity, or did there exist alternative models of collectively governed settlements in the Euphrates valley and beyond?