

PREFACE

This book represents a substantial and systematic rework of my dissertation defended in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations at Harvard University in November 2008. During the year 2010-2011, a Noble Group Fellowship at the W. F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research (AIAR) in Jerusalem granted me an extended period of time free from any obligation, so that I was able to focus on and complete the bulk of the book manuscript. Subsequent editing and revision were completed between 2011 fall and 2013 spring. My heartfelt thanks go to both the Noble Group Company based in Hong Kong (which funds the first fellowships ever for Chinese students and scholars studying the ancient Near East) and the AIAR.

I owe most to my family for the publication of this book. Many of my family members made extraordinary efforts for me to take the Noble Group fellowship at AIAR. My husband, Feng, supported my decision to go there and stayed behind in New York City to take care of our baby girl while working full time. My mother and step-father flew in from China again to help us out, after returning to China only three months before. My mother-in-law, despite being in her late seventies, also traveled to NYC to help after my parents had finished their stint. My daughter, Inanna, always greeted me with smiles and hugs every time I flew back to NYC to visit my family during the fellowship year. She was a nine-and-a-half-month-old crawling baby when I first left for Jerusalem, but grew into a toddler who loved to run and babble after my fellowship ended. At the age of one and half, she started to understand the meaning of work and could restrain herself from disturbing me when I worked on the book manuscript. I feel extremely blessed to have their love and support, which always motivate me to work better and harder.

My former adviser, Professor Piotr Steinkeller at Harvard University, did me an enormous favor by reading the entire manuscript, offering many critical yet constructive comments, and seeing me through the painstaking revision process. I cannot thank him enough for all this help. Professor Beate Pongratz-Leisten at the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, New York University, shared with me her ideas of the overall structure of this book and the strategies to make it appeal to a broader audience. Professor Norman Yoffee at the University of Michigan and Professor Tonia Sharlach at Oklahoma State University provided me with plenty of advice on the publication process, which I have benefitted greatly. Professor Johannes Renger at Free University of Berlin kindly sent me copies of his articles difficult to obtain in Jerusalem or the USA, which I deeply appreciate.

My stay at the AIAR has been one of the best and most productive years in my life. The room and half board provided on site, the dedicated staff, the daily company of other fellows, the accidental but interesting conversations with visitors to the Albright, and the library accessible 24/7 in combination made it the best place on earth to carry out research and wrap up projects. Both the substance and format of this book have benefitted tremendously from conversations and discussions with the scholars I met during the year, particularly Dr. Sy Gitin (Dorot Director and Professor of Archaeology, AIAR), Dr. Andrea Berlin (NEH fellow and James R. Wiseman Professor of classical archaeology at Boston University), and Dr. Wu Xin (Noble Group Fellow). Whenever I had any kind of problem, they always embraced me with their wide-open arms, inexhaustible patience, cheering encouragements, and insightful advice. It has been a huge pleasure to know and become acquaintance with all the fellows for that year, which turned out to be more significant than the completion of my book manuscript.

Two other institutes in Jerusalem, the École Biblique et Archéologique Française and the Institute of Archaeology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, generously granted me access to

their libraries, whose extraordinary collections on Assyriology and Near Eastern Studies saved me tons of time in looking up references.

I feel very grateful towards Dr. Manuel Molina, who accepted this book for publication in the *Biblioteca del Próximo Oriente Antiguo* series and shepherded me through the publication process. He is the best editor one could ask for and never minds extra work for a green hand like me in the publication business. I would like also to thank the reviewers, whose comments called my attention to neglected references, enhanced the accuracy of my writing, and made me think twice about some of the points made in this book. Any mistake, error, or omission, though, remains my sole responsibility.

Whenever I reach a milestone in my life, I cannot help thinking about my father, who died of liver cancer on October 25, 1998, shortly after I graduated from college. As someone who did not even finish high school because of the turmoil caused by the Cultural Revolution in China (1966-1976), he dreamed of a better education for me and my sister. I always try to picture how exhilarated and fulfilled he would have felt should he know how far my sister and I have advanced beyond college. I miss you, dad!