

**S**tudies in Economic and Social  
History of the Ancient Near East  
in Memory of Péter Vargyas

| ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN  
AND MEDITERRANEAN STUDIES |  
VOLUME 2

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L'HARMATTAN, BUDAPEST

2014

Ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean Studies  
edited by Zoltán Csabai and Tibor Grüll

Volume 2

Supporters:  
The University of Pécs



The Hungarian Society for Ancient Studies.

The editorial work was supported by the European Union and the State of Hungary, co-financed by the European Social Fund in the framework of TÁMOP-4.2.4.A/ 2-11/1-2012-0001 'National Excellence Program'.

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PÉTER VARGYAS (1950 – 2009)



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# Foreword

Family, friends, colleagues and all those who knew them stood bereft of speech following the deaths of Péter Vargyas and Éva Darvas, and were trying to make sense of the personal tragedy of these two wonderful people, looking for ways to alleviate the pain their absence had caused. It was only several months later that we realized the irretrievable loss Hungarian Assyriology had suffered. Péter Vargyas had been the first and until today only Doctor of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences within the discipline, whose excellence was acknowledged by both the domestic and the international scholarly community. We had been robbed of a scientist with a number of friends in the field, with formidable international experience, and a wide range of connections in the discipline all over the world.

He was a charismatic figure of Hungarian Assyriology, who prioritized the quality and the far-reaching, valuable results of research. He always underlined the researcher's objectivity, and stressed the equality of the participants of a debate. This is the attitude that students at university, and young scholars at domestic academic programs could learn from him, and this won him recognition outside Hungary, as his numerous invitations to international events testify. He intended to use the innovative experiences gathered during his study trips abroad in Hungary as well, but these intentions were sadly not always well-received. The two decades spent at two major Hungarian universities nevertheless have left their mark. The Department of Ancient History at the University of Pécs will attempt to carry on this scholarly and spiritual legacy.

Three research topics stood out from the diverse fields that Péter Vargyas's work touched upon. These were the society and economy of Ugarit, the history of Babylonian prices, and the monetary history of the Ancient Near East. When we first contemplated producing a memorial volume in honour of his scholarly work, these were the areas

that came to mind, so we asked the authors to choose their essay topics, if possible, within the broader area of Ancient Near Eastern economic and social history. We hope we have succeeded in assembling a volume that reflects adequately on Péter Vargyas' scholarly career.

We would like to thank all the authors of the essays dedicated to the memory of Péter Vargyas, who accepted our call and enriched these volumes with their contributions. We are especially grateful for the patience they displayed during the prolonged editing process. Sadly two of our collaborators could not live to see the publication of the volumes. We learned with great sadness of the death of Itamar Singer in 2012, who repeatedly expressed his support for our efforts, and always offered us words of encouragement when we needed them most. It is also with great sorrow that we were informed of the passing of János Everling in spring 2013, who was an exceptionally talented former student of Péter Vargyas.

The participants, apart from the friends and colleagues of Péter Vargyas, also include former students who now work at various Hungarian universities: Henrietta Cseke (Kodolányi János University of Applied Sciences), András Bácskay (Pázmány Péter Catholic University), Miklós Sárközy (Károli Gáspár University of the Hungarian Reformed Church), and the editor of this volume (University of Pécs). He also supported and encouraged several young talents, beginning in the 1980s, many of whom are today internationally known academics in the field of Assyriology.

There is not enough space to thank all the supporters and helpers who facilitated our work, yet we would like to express our gratitude to Ádám Vér and Vera Benczik for their continual assistance. We would also like to extend our thanks to Bálint Tanos, who in the autumn of 2012 substantially contributed to the editorial and pre-printing work of the first volume. I would like to thank Péter Vargyas' brother, Gábor Vargyas for his patience and the support he offered for our work in the past more than two years. Finally I would like to extend my thanks to L'Harmattan Hungary Publishers for accepting the work into their Ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean Studies series, and for facilitating the publication process with offering us their infrastructure.

Z. Cs.