



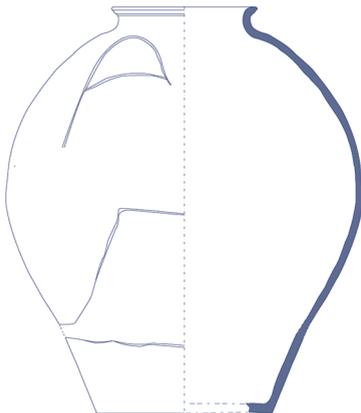
TELL TUQAN EXCAVATIONS AND REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES

CULTURAL DEVELOPMENTS IN INNER SYRIA
FROM THE EARLY BRONZE AGE
TO THE PERSIAN/HELLENISTIC PERIOD

Proceedings of the International Conference
May 15th-17th 2013
Lecce

edited by

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CONGEDO EDITORE 2014

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Tell Tuqan and the Matkh Basin in a Regional Perspective. Thoughts and Questions Raised by the International Conference

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The resumption of archaeological investigations on the site of Tell Tuqan in 2006 and the start of the European project Ebla-Chora in 2010 have made it possible to begin a general reconstruction of the settlement patterns in the Matkh region, with a series of data especially relating to the chronological, settlement and paleo-environmental aspects and the insertion of the archaeological evidence obtained from Tell Tuqan and survey carried out in the basin within a wider regional perspective.¹ A multi-disciplinary approach appeared indispensable given that other projects conducted during recent years in the northern Levant had already shown how any consideration of the dynamics of cultural development during the Bronze and Iron Ages - with alternating phases of continuity, change and crisis - undertaken through a multi-faceted approach could not be based merely on data obtained from long-term excavations in the major urban centers of the area.² In this sense - as rightly pointed out by P. Matthiae in his contribution on the nature of urbanization during the second half of the III millennium BC and on the dynamics of Amorite urban revival during the Old Syrian period - the EB IVA (c. 2500-2300 BC), EB IVB (c. 2300-2000 BC) and MB I-II (c. 2000-1600 BC) periods show specific settlement characteristics that reflect the central hegemony exercised by Ebla during its period of greatest power (2400-2300 BC), as seen in a widespread rural anthropization but also in a tenuous urbanization with “specialized” centers of varying types (cultic,

¹ The 2006-2010 campaigns have been published in two preliminary reports: Baffi (ed.) 2008; 2011; for initial results of the European Ebla-Chora project, see Matthiae - Marchetti (eds.) 2013.

² Cf. e.g. Yener (ed.) 2005 for ‘Amuq; Morandi Bonacossi (ed.) 2007 for the area of Mishrifé-Qatna; Barge *et al.* 2014 for the arid marginal regions around Rawda and Sha’irat; Philip - Bradbury 2010 for the Orontes/Homs.

funerary, seats of palatial residences also with important economic functions), agricultural centers and fortified settlements in environmentally marginal areas. This appears to be followed, in the last three centuries of the III millennium BC by a “disarticulation” of the territory which does not, however, cause a break in the material culture, in which certain settlements take on a central role (for example, Urshum as can be deduced from texts, and Tuqan in the Matkh basin, as shown by archaeological documentation) and the centers in arid marginal areas see continue to develop as in the previous phase (such as Munbatah, Rawda, Sha’irat and Khirbet el-Qasr). The passage from Early Bronze to Middle Bronze Ages, instead, sees a complete restructuring of the region on the social, economic and political levels which should be viewed within the wider context of central and northern Syria where the territorial affirmation of the reign of Yamkhad, with its capital at Aleppo, conditioned historical events up until the Hittite conquest under the kings Hattusili I and Mursili I.

The entire northern Levant and north-eastern Syria appear to undergo a crisis that threatens the economic foundations of the Early Syrian kingdoms, due to an extremely arid period that was registered between 2200 and 1900 BC and was probably responsible for the abandonment of settlements in the arid, marginal areas and a marked shift towards ecological niches (such as the Orontes valley, the ‘Amuq and the Matkh itself).

Diachronic analysis of the zoo-archaeological data relating to fauna dated to EB III, EB IVB, MB II and the Persian/Hellenistic period, presented by C. Minniti, has revealed, on the one hand, marked stability over time in the exploitation of caprids, bovines and equids and, on the other, a significant percentage of pigs (especially in the Middle Bronze Age) compared to the marginal regions, both factors which fit well with the humid environment of Lake Matkh, a protected ecological niche even in times of greater aridity.

The climatic crisis of the end of the III millennium BC resulted, instead, in a complete return to pastoralism in the steppe, fleetingly testified on the archaeological level, and an interruption of the process of integration of sedentary populations, and their mainly agricultural economies, with tribal entities who controlled goat and sheep raising in the semi-desert areas.³ When archaeological documentation enables us to make a reconstruction of the overall situation at the start of the II millennium BC, we see an almost total interruption in all aspects of the material culture and a marked change in the structure of the urban centers, all now equipped with imposing earthwork fortifications. This general recourse to defensive urban structures is, moreover, also seen in Mesopotamia during the same period, where we find

³ Porter 2012; see also Szuchman (ed.) 2009 with several articles concerning interaction nomads/sedentary peoples in the Ancient Near East.

year names relating to the construction of walls in the principal Amorite cities.⁴ Specific urban planning programs and, especially, great defensive circuits indicate a ready availability of labour for the new Amorite dynasties, within the context of a parallel and widespread urbanization by closely linked groups. Furthermore, the “dimorphic” nature of society is emphasized, favored also by the adoption of the urban model by new, dominant groups whose power base rested on close and clan-like networks of relations.⁵

In this overall context, the preliminary summary of the settlement of the Matkh during the Early Bronze and Middle Bronze Ages by L. Peyronel shows how correct investigation must take into account the interaction between the sites in the basin and the neighboring regions: the limestone plateau (where Ebla is located) and the basaltic area, the plain of the Jazr (with Tell Afis in its southern sector) and, lastly, the extensive south-eastern steppe with its arid margins. Settlement analysis has thus provided useful data for comparisons with the settlement trends seen in other regions, with a wide-ranging perspective on processes and the lengthy duration in which certain phenomena, be these specifically political (such as the conquest of Ebla at the end of the 24th century BC), socio-economic (the interaction between dry farming, second generation urbanism and semi-nomadic pastoralism) or environmental (the climatic crisis which began around 2200 BC) are to be considered in terms of the dynamics of their interaction and reciprocal feedback.

In general, a concentration of sites around Lake Matkh can be seen throughout the first half of the III millennium BC compared with a sparser settlement pattern in the surrounding regions, although the lack of stratified sequences for this period leaves the relative chronology still somewhat uncertain especially as regards EB I-II. Here, the chronologically typical pottery shows evolutionary trends without any marked breaks, up to the introduction of the so-called Caliciform Ware, with a few specific classes that can only be used to give general indications since they vary in percentages both diachronically and in terms of their distribution.

In this regard, the detailed analysis of the EB III pottery sequence from Area P South of Tell Tuqan presented by A. Vacca enables us to build up a detailed typology of the pottery, which is a first reliable assessment for the ceramic province of northern inner Syria in the crucial period of the formation of Ebla’s regional power, immediately before the Mature Early

⁴ Rey 2012.

⁵ On the Amorite question see Schwartz 2013; Burke *in press* with previous bibliography. The steppe region of Jebel Bishri, between Palmyra oasis and the Euphrates valley has been recently indicated as the best candidate for the homeland of the Amorites, although the identification is conjectural and based on few secure elements: Lönnqvist 2008; 2014; Lönnqvist - Lönnqvist (eds.) 2011.

Syrian phase, well represented by the materials found *in situ* in Royal Palace G at Ebla and recently overviewed by S. Mazzoni.⁶ The absence of analogous stratified sequences in the region prevents us from providing any firm synchronization of the settlement phases of EB III, and the chronological correlation of EB I-III in the region is based on comparison with the Euphrates valley and the 'Amuq. The material from Tuqan displays marked similarities with that retrieved from Buildings G3 and Area CC on the southern slope of the Ebla acropolis, and is earlier than the oldest phases of the floor of Palace G, uncovered in the central sector.⁷ The corpus of Tuqan IC (= EB III) may tentatively be dated to between 2750 and 2600/2550 BC (corresponding to the later 'Amuq H, Hama 4-1 and Mardikh IIA) and is distinguished by the absence of Caliciform Ware and Simple Ware with large deep or hemispherical bowls with thickened rims and the inner-ledge rounded or bevelled lips, distinct neck jar with everted and beaded rim and beaded lip as well as jars and bowls in monochrome Painted Simple Ware.

The settlement analysis of the Matkh presented by L. Peyronel has demonstrated how, in EB IVA, the number of occupied sites increases, although these are still small in size. The evidence from excavations at Tuqan appears to confirm that provided by the regional survey, since there are no significant levels for the period. A similar situation would seem to characterize the entire territory of the *Chora* of Ebla with agricultural villages and small sites with specialized functions, as indicated by the administrative accounts in the State Archives of Ebla. During the subsequent period, EB IVB, whilst settlement of the Matkh remains rather stable, within only a slight reduction in the number of sites, the main change is a marked increase in the size of the town of Tuqan, which now covers over 25 hectares, and the appearance of a settlement hierarchy and a spatial distribution coherent with effective control over the fertile region of the lake. At the same time, the steppe zones reveal the presence of strategically positioned centers in areas along the trading routes (Tell Munbatah), in the south-eastern sebkhas (Tell Sabha) and on the edges of the arid regions.

The same period witnesses, in fact, a stable occupation of the arid margins, where centers which were founded *ex-novo* during EB IVA, like come Moumassakhin, Sh'eirat, Al-Şūr, Rawda and Khirbet el-Qasr, continue to prosper. The best documented case is that of Tell al-Rawda, illustrated by C. Castel but which is was not possible to include herein.⁸ The town, complete with fortifications and covering an area of circa 12 hectares *intra muros*, was circular in shape, with radial axes intersecting with a ring-road,

⁶ Mazzoni 2013.

⁷ Vacca *in press*.

⁸ On Rawda and its region, Barge *et al.* 2014 and Castel *et al.* (éd.) *in press*.

as can be seen in the geomagnetic survey.⁹ It had at least three temple complexes, one of which has been excavated, and the presence of an administrative building (palace?) has been suggested for the central part of the site. According to Castel the urban structure of Rawda had been planned and shows strong similarities with Chuera in the Balikh, from which center the city plan may have been adapted.

The problem of the foundation of urban centers in the arid margins is crucial to any evaluation, also from the historical perspective of Ebla's expansion towards the semi-arid zones to the east and south-east. According to the most recent data, the first settlement at Rawda dates back to the start of the 25th century BC and it was abandoned in around 2200 BC. The hypothesis of a foundation desired and favoured directly by Ebla finds support above all in the context of control over wide territories exploited for grazing sheep and goats which undoubtedly represented a cornerstone of the economy of the Eblaite kingdom.¹⁰ In the same way, the so-called *Très Long Mur* (TLM), identified in the steppic zone by the *Mission de Marges Arides* for an overall length of more than 220 km, and which ran only a few kilometres east of the urban settlements, was most probably constructed in EB IVA and has been interpreted as a structure built by Ebla to mark a symbolic boundary, defining a territory controlled above all for its economic importance in terms of pasturing and the exploitation of wool.¹¹ According to others, the TLM is again a territorial "border" with no true defensive worth but was used to mark the division between the lands controlled by Ebla (to the west) and those under the dominance of Mari (to the east).¹² The "economic" and "political" hypotheses do not necessarily conflict with each other, since the entire semi-arid area was most certainly extremely fluid in terms of effective territorial control but important strategically for grazing, as shown by the Eblaite texts which mention alternating relations with the confederation of Ib'al, always in some way evident in the dispute between Mari and Ebla. Therefore, while the hypothesis which considers Rawda to have been founded by Ebla but enjoying a degree of autonomy given its distance from the capital and the particular nature of its function, appears likely, it is more difficult to match the archaeological and epigraphic evidence, unless further toponyms can be identified. The steppic region south of Ebla and west of Mari were occupied - and of this we are fairly certain - by a confederation of tribes which, in the Ebla texts, is called Ib'al

⁹ Gondet - Castel 2004.

¹⁰ On the contrary, B. Lyonnet (2009) has suggested that Rawda, like the "round cities" of north-eastern Syria (for example, Chuera and Beydar) be considered foundations created by tribal groups who lived most of the time in the surrounding steppe.

¹¹ Barge *et al.* 2014: 181-183.

¹² Lafont 2010: 84-87.

and which, at the time of the State Archives, had varying relations with the dominant center of the region. In particular, the Ebla texts record that, during the reign of Ish'ar Damu, repeated military action was taken by Ebla, over the space of four years, against the confederation which, after being defeated, appears in the list of Eblaite allies during the great military campaign against Mari. It would remain on peaceful terms with Ebla until the kingdom's definitive collapse.¹³

For the period immediately following this a question which must be investigated in greater depth is that concerning relations between the region of the Matkh, where Tuqan takes on a primary role and possibly becomes a hegemonic center, and Rawda and the other towns of the arid margins which continue to be occupied uninterruptedly during EB IVB. The stratified sequences available do not, in fact, indicate any occupational gap at the end of EB IVA, as is made clear in the presentation by G. Mouamar of the soundings carried out at Tell Al-Şūr. The site provides evidence of a marked continuity between phase VII (EB IVA) and VI (EB IVB) as well as the usual passage from Caliciform pottery to painted Caliciform Ware.

A new phase of intense occupation of the territory, with a notable hierarchy of sites, begins at the start of the II millennium BC, both in the Matkh and on the limestone plateau of Ebla, whilst the sedentary settlements on the arid margins and the eastern steppe withdraw from the former outer limits. It is likely that, in this zone, there were groups of semi-nomadic shepherds although this is difficult to document archaeologically as has been shown quite clearly during recent surveys in the area of the Jebel Bishri. This presence is, however, partially revealed in the Mari archives, which document marked links between the tribal element and the Amorite kingdom.¹⁴ This new settlement situation is accompanied by far-reaching changes also on the urban level, in funerary practices and, in general, in various aspects of the material culture in a process which A. Burke has recently termed the Amorite *koiné*, applying to the Middle Bronze Age the processual model of "entanglement" developed by M. Dietrich for southern France between the Iron Age and the early Roman period.¹⁵

This change is evident in all of the principal Syrian centers at the end of the Early Bronze and beginning of the Middle Bronze Ages, and is particularly notable in the pottery production which witnesses a complete renewal of the repertoire at the start of MB I. This is reflected in the pottery horizons at Ebla (Mardikh IIIA1), Tell Afis (Afis V initial) and Tell Tuqan (Tuqan IIIA1), Hama (H5), as also at Qatna (Mishrifé V A) and, to a lesser

¹³ Biga 2014; Catagnoti *in press*.

¹⁴ Lafont 2001.

¹⁵ Burke *in press*.

degree, at Alalakh (Levels XVII-XIV) and Ugarit (Ras Shamra II.1) on the northern Levantine coast, and Umm el-Marra (IIIId) in the Jabbul.¹⁶ In northern inner Syria, the divisions of the Middle Bronze Age are given by the pottery sequences that can be reconstructed through the finds from primary contexts at Ebla, which can be tied to fixed point in the historical chronology as shown by the contribution by F. Pinnock. The documentation from initial MB I (Mardikh IIIA1, corresponding to phase II of the *kārum* of Kültepe) dates the Archaic Palace (Phases II-III) and the large refuse midden on the eastern rampart (Area EE), the abundant paleobotanical material from which is discussed by G. Fiorentino and V. Caracuta, whilst Mardikh IIIA2 (MB IB, corresponding to Alalakh X), is represented by finds from the Intermediate Palace, from the *favissae* in the Square of the Cistern and from the Tomb of the Princess. The first part of MB II (Mardikh IIIB1) is dated by the funerary equipment from the Tomb of the Lord of the Goats, and, in particular, can be correlated with the date of the mace with cartouche of the pharaoh Hotepibra Hornejerjatef whose accession to the throne (1770 BC) provides a fundamental *terminus post quem*. Lastly, the fixed chronology for MB IIB at Ebla (Mardikh IIIB2) is defined by the fall of the city and the abundance of pottery found in the destruction levels of almost all the architectonic structures so far brought enables us to reconstruct the pottery horizon in detail.¹⁷

The situation is not so clear-cut at Tell Tuqan and life in the settlement developed slightly differently. In the center of the Matkh basin, the abandoning of the Lower Town, at least, definitely predates the destruction of Ebla, as documented by the finds from the domestic dwellings in Areas H, L and P.¹⁸ In particular, the construction of building H1 dates to early MB II (Tuqan IIIB1), whilst the rebuilding of modest domestic houses and their subsequent abandonment occurred during late MB II, although the pottery suggests a horizon earlier than that of Mardikh IIIA2 (MB IIB).

Already at the beginning of MB I we witness extensive renewal of the structure of centers such as Ebla, Qatna, Tell Tuqan and Tell Al-Şūr, in terms both of the towns' perimeters and size. During the period of the Tell Tuqan's greatest size (Tuqan IIIA-B) the defensive system is the most notable aspect of the reconstructed topography of the town. The creation of fortifications throughout the Matkh, both in major centers (Tell Tuqan, Tell Hader) and in smaller but strategically located towns (e.g. Tell Dlamah) can probably be explained by the new system of territorial control exercised by the Amorite dynasties with its emphasis on preventing possible conflicts both within the region and with the semi-nomadic tribes which controlled the steppe towards

¹⁶ On the passage from EB IVB to MB I, see Pinnock 2009.

¹⁷ Matthiae 2009.

¹⁸ See L. Peyronel and F. Baffi in this volume.

the Euphrates. The combination of public buildings and city defenses indicates that labour was readily available but also a desire to demonstrate the centralized power also to the extra-urban world, be it agricultural or pastoral. The imposing earthworks now represent a clear separation, and one that was visible from a great distance. Thus the impressive appearance of the town's defenses might be considered as a result of a process of public interventions for the construction of monumental public buildings carried out in the northern Levant and well-documented in the immediate vicinity, especially at Ebla, and in central Syria, at Qatna.

As explained in detail in the contribution by D. Morandi Bonacossi, a strong cultural identity is documented in both centers, which was expressed through shared cults like that of the ancestors, on the part of the Amorites, or the form of ritual, known also in Palestine, which saw dogs buried in the temple area. Again on the subject of the analysis of shared rituals, we have the article by M. Al-Maqdissi which presents the data relating to the so-called *Coupole de Loth* at Qatna, an artificial mound containing materials dating to various period, from EB III to IA II. It might, however, have been a commemorative funerary monument of the Middle Bronze Age linked, give its position near the eastern town gate, to rituals relating to the cult of ancestors. Recent soundings carried out by C. Nicolle have, in fact, shown that the *Coupole de Loth* is an artificial tumulus containing a number of inhumations with an unusual structure inside which fragments of a statue were found that can be dated to the Old Syrian period. Al-Maqdissi, moreover, considers the structure, which is in a dominant position overlooking the steppe and the caravan routes from Palmyra and the central valleys of the Euphrates, to be an expression of tribal Amorite tradition.

The urban model created at Tell Tuqan at the start of the Middle Bronze Age is discussed by F. Baffi within the larger regional context of northern Syria, where it can be compared, firstly, with nearby Ebla, but also with Alalakh on the plain of Antioch and, in central Syria, with Qatna and Tell Al-Şūr. The development of the settlement's structure follows a line shared by various Syro-Palestinian towns and, apart from showing the evolution of architectonic techniques, it also enables us to investigate the socio-economic and political context which determined its appearance. On the technical level, the earlier situation conditioned the general defensive plan and also its additional elements: thus, at Tell Tuqan the shape of the Middle Bronze Age ramparts determined the construction of section of wall that accompany the curved line, interrupted by circular towers, whereas at Ebla the trapezoidal shape meant that forts with a rectangular ground-plan were erected.¹⁹ The

¹⁹ The fortifications at Ebla, with external circular earthworks, and another, inner ring protecting the central acropolis, is integrated by a rampart built outside the city on its eastern

inhabited spaces, with the division of Lower and Upper Town, the latter also ringed with walls, follow a shared model attested in both large and smaller towns. Therefore, at the end of MB II (Tuqan IIIB) the towns of the Matkh region, like Ebla, were especially well-defended by an imposing and integrated system of ramparts, walls, towers and monumental gateways. Various building phases can be seen in the defensive system, with a change between MB I - early MB II and full MB II. In the latter period, in fact, the basic defensive system is further strengthened with the addition of square towers at intervals of both the inner and outer ramparts. This poses the question of the role played by the various elements in such a complex system, of how they were related and, even more, why the original plan was altered.²⁰

A similar process, although in different manner, occurred in other towns, and especially at Ebla. It must reflect changing defensive requirements and, possibly, altering power balances within the city, with political power playing an increasingly important role. The decision, as attested at Tell Tuqan and, with variations, also at Umm Al-Marra, Ebla, Afis and Qatna, to defend the Upper Town and separate it from the Lower Town by means of a space lacking any domestic buildings that reached as far as the foot of the inner slopes of the rampart, suggests a desire for a demarcation that was not merely physical. Debate still continues on the function of the ramparts and their planned construction and building technique. At Tell Tuqan, for example, the proximity of the lake on the southern and eastern edges of the city resulted in certain choices being made, such as the construction of the Water Gate in Area F, whilst at Ebla the integration as early as BM I of an Outer Town lying south and east of the city led to specific decisions being taken regarding the integration of the defenses during MB II.²¹

We still do not have homogenous documentation on the inner topography of Middle Bronze Age settlements in the region. Whilst there is no doubt that there were dwellings in the Lower Town at Tuqan, as well as on the inner slopes of the rampart, the large size of the Upper Town at Tell Tuqan suggests that it may have included private houses together with public buildings, although we do not as yet have any evidence for structures dating from the Old Syrian period. At the bottom of the deep sounding in Area D located in the peripheral northern part of the Upper Town the bedrock was covered by a thick accumulation of multiple layers of earth in which a large quantity of pottery related to the MB I-II ceramic horizon has been found. Two AMS dates from that filling are included in the list of radiocarbon

and southern flanks, presumably to protect the outer town dated, with certainty, to MB I-IIA, as indicated by a survey conducted in 2010: Peyronel *in press*.

²⁰ Baffi 2010.

²¹ Peyronel *in press*.

dating from Tuqan and Ebla published in article by L. Calcagnile, G. Quarta and M. D'Elia. They confirm the chronology indicated by pottery types, with calibrated ages (95.4% probability) of 1935-1682 BC and 2135-1885 BC.

A chronological indication to the Middle Bronze Age phases of the settlement comes from a series of burials found in the area that developed on the inner slope of the western rampart (Area N), a general overview of which is given by E. Ascalone within the regional context during the Old Syrian period. The reconstruction of the stratigraphy of the area indicates that the phases of a small necropolis which partially cuts through MB IA-B dwellings is to be dated to MB IB, whilst MB II domestic dwellings with burials below floors lie above this necropolis. The Area N graveyard clearly shows that, alongside traditional burials below floors within the city walls, mainly used for infants and youths, there were also cemetery areas *intra muros* located in peripheral parts of the town and used exclusively for funerary purposes. Similarly, at Ebla during MB I (Mardikh IIIA) the northern and western part of the ramparts were used, with spaces for individual or double burials of both adults and infants in jars and pits dug into the upper layers of the earthworks.²² The funerary assemblages, consisting almost exclusively of pottery, suggest that these came immediately after the creation of the ramparts but that the burials are earlier than the construction of the BM II forts (Mardikh IIIB), when the slopes no longer seemed to be used for burial purposes, or far less frequently.

The burials at Tell Tuqan, however, shows how, within the Old Syrian period, there is an unusual alternation of dwellings and funerary use. A similar situation is seen on the south-western slope of the acropolis of Ebla where at least twenty burials have been identified in a cemetery area, dated to between MB IB and MB IIA, that impinges on the underlying walls of Royal Palace G and which is then succeeded by a domestic use for the same area, with dwellings containing burials below the floors.²³

Amongst the materials dating to the Middle Bronze Age we have the clay figurines, which find its closest comparisons in those manufactured at Ebla.²⁴ The choroplastic discussed by E. Felluca, confirm the unified cultural tradition of inner Syria, both in the late Early Syrian period (despite very few examples having been found) and in the better-documented Old Syrian period. Analysis of this class of objects confirms, once again, that there was marked homogeneity in forms of cultural expression in the region and comparison with the examples from Ebla reveals close similarities in their

²² Baffi 2000.

²³ Baffi 1988.

²⁴ Marchetti 2001.

subjects, manufacturing techniques and evolution over a period of time stretching from EB IVA to the end of MB IIB, with significant innovations in both subjects and manufacture during EB IVB, as can clearly be observed in the exemplars from temple Area HH at Ebla.²⁵

Developments in pottery and other classes of objects divide the phases of MB I and MB II into sub-phases. In this overall context, delineated thanks to the evidence obtained above all from the major urban centers, we do however need to examine in greater depth the processual dynamics of developments within the period, although this is hindered by insufficient details in the data obtained from surveys. In fact, the preliminary analysis of the pottery from surveys carried out in the Matkh in the 1970's and the rather generic chronological definitions of many sites dated to the Middle Bronze Age, also in the surrounding regions, prevent us from distinguishing clearly between the various phases of the Middle Bronze Age. Consequently, the settlement pattern also remains too generic. This is a far from minor problem, since the start of the Middle Bronze Age, its central phase and the final period are linked to extremely important historical, political and economic processes in the region: the emergence of the Amorite dynasties, the organization of hierarchical relations in the kingdom of Aleppo/Yamkhad, the economic and demographic crisis that preceded the Hittite military campaigns and the collapse of the system which marked the passage to the Late Bronze Age. These aspects cannot, therefore, be "visualized" in terms of a quantitative distribution of the sites or their comparative sizes, thus depriving us of an essential analytical tool.

In central Syria, the periodization of the Middle Bronze and Late Bronze Ages is not characterized by any clear break as is, instead, the case at Ebla, and the final Middle Bronze Age phase seems to continue for much of the 16th century BC, as indicated by the combined stratified sequences of Qatna (Operations J, K and T) and the material from Hama G. It has, therefore, been suggested that a sequence of three phases be introduced for MB II: MB IIA (c. 1800-1700 B.C.), MB IIB (c. 1700-1600 B.C.) and MB III (c. 1600-1500 B.C.).²⁶ D. Morandi Bonacossi, in his contribution, describes the urban development of Qatna where, in the period between the end of the Middle Bronze Age and the start of the Late Bronze Age, we witness an urban reorganization as the loss of the city's role as supra-regional capital is accompanied by a concentration of power by the ruling dynasty, with official

²⁵ Peyronel 2014.

²⁶ Iamoni 2012: 161-188; 2014. The pottery horizon attested in the destruction level at Ebla could also be correlated to Iamoni's MB III, although this hypothesis cannot be tested as we lack continuous sequences for MB-LB in other centers of the region.

buildings being constructed in both the upper and lower towns. During LB I, in fact, new palaces are erected, the Lower City Palace and the Southern Palace, positioned around the New Royal Palace, the residence of the ruling dynasty. At the same time, the Eastern Palace, which had been abandoned and used as a cemetery during the Middle Bronze Age, is partially reused. The palace model which emerges is one of marked decentralization of the buildings used for various political and economic functions.²⁷

The sporadic presence at Tell Tuqan of elements that can be dated to LB I and II, and the imprecise picture we have of settlement in the Matkh, implies that we can only give preliminary considerations on this area.

For example, it is not possible to provide any diachronic depth to the settlement pattern during the Late Bronze Age, which was undoubtedly greatly reduced compared to that of MB II, whilst the presence of a cemetery area on the eastern side of the Lower Town at Tuqan, dated to LB II, suggests that the site was occupied but we are unable to determine its character or size.²⁸

Tell Afis and Ebla are the sites providing the most documentation in the region. At Ebla the Lower Town is largely abandoned and occupation is concentrated on the Acropolis where recent work brought to light part of the MB II Citadel complex which was reused and modified during LB I-II.²⁹

The most exhaustive data regarding this period are from Tell Afis, and are presented here by F. Venturi. Excavations in Area E, on the western slope of the Tell Afis acropolis, have documented a stratigraphic sequence that covers the entire Late Bronze period (Phases VIII-Vb). In relation to Phase VII, most of a building (F) has been brought to light which was undoubtedly a well-built and prestigious construction, the role of which has been indicated by the discovery of nine cuneiform tablets, three being letters written in Hittite script and six administrative documents.³⁰ The epigraphic evidence relates to the middle of the 13th century BC, a date also confirmed by the few examples of pottery found on the floors of rooms showing no signs of destruction. The building was, in fact, abandoned voluntarily and, once the

²⁷ The urban planning of Old Syrian Ebla revealed a similar organization, with several official buildings located in the Lower Town around the Royal Citadel: the Northern Palace probably related to ceremonial activities, the Western Palace, which was the residence of the crown's prince, the Southern Palace, which can be related to a high official of the town: Pinnock 2001.

²⁸ de Maigret 1978: 90-92, fig. 14; Peyronel 2006: 185-192; Ascalone 2006: 244.

²⁹ Matthiae 2011. The quite abundant pottery materials from the Late Bronze Age architectonic phases are currently being studied: for an initial consideration of the pottery horizon of the period, see Colantoni 2010.

³⁰ Archi - Venturi 2013: 216-219.

floors had been sealed with earth, the area was used for handicraft activities (Phase VI) with various fire installations. A sounding dug in the southern part of the Phase VII building revealed evidence of an earlier phase (Phase VIII), with three sub-phases, resting immediately above the Middle Bronze Age remains. The pottery indicates somewhat conservative horizon compared to MB IIB, with frequent presence of open shapes with inturning rims, chronologically relating to LB I. Of particular interest is the presence of shapes foreign to the regional horizon, fusiform and krater jars morphologically similar to vases from central-northern Anatolia. This can be explained by the relations mentioned in the tablets of Hittite diplomatic correspondence. From the historical point of view, the quality of the epigraphic documentation indicates how active the center was during LB II and confirms, together with the pottery, the insertion of this unquestionably urban center in the chronological framework of the 15th-14th centuries BC, as also indicated by the presence of Mitanni seals in the Common Style.

Later (Phase Vb, at the end of 13th century BC), the area is absorbed into the new urban layout, with new roads and three residences (A, B, E), the southernmost of which (Residence B) had a room with pillars (B1).

The three phases of LB IIB (VII-Vb) follow each other in quick succession and the related pottery is characterized by a marked standardization of both shapes and clays. This trend reaches its peak at the end of the 13th century BC (Phase Vb) when the pottery horizon is defined by a few open and closed shapes. Amongst these the most common is the medium-sized krater used for storage, with parallels to be found at Tell Fray and Tell Kazel but also widely used in central Anatolia during the late period of the Hittite kingdom.³¹ The Phase Vb residence undergo violent destruction during the first half of the 12th century BC, more or less at the same time as the fall of the great Hittite kingdom, and the return to life of the town occurs during Phase IV, the start of the Iron Age.

Therefore, during a phase of recession and reduction in size of the great Middle Bronze Age centers, Tell Afis, now a very large urban center, plays a principal role in the region and continues to do so throughout the Iron Age.

An interesting comparison with the Levant is given by J. Bretschneider, G. Jans and A.-S. Van Vyve who present the data gathered over 10 years of excavations at Tell Tweini, which is useful in reconstructing the stratigraphic sequence of the Iron Age levels as well as the continuous occupation of the town from EB IV up until IA III. The paper deals with the initial phase of the Iron Age and, in particular, on the two centuries following the collapse of the Late Bronze Age in the region. The levels brought to lights date the period of IA I (1200-1000 BC), and architecture, pottery and artifacts can be compared

³¹ Pfälzner 1995: taf. 183a; Capet 2003: 113.

more generally with the production of other coastal sites during the same period.

Tell Tweini was destroyed at the end of LB IIB (Level 7A), a period characterized by the appearance of the handmade cooking pot and, above this level, was superimposed an occupational phase (Level 6GH) with private dwellings built directly on the destruction level of Late Bronze Age. The inhabitants of these houses still used the handmade cooking pot, indicating the continuity of deep-rooted local traditions. Subsequently (Level 6EF), in the final phase of IA I, the settlement grew in size, with the construction of domestic and residential buildings and the foundation of a large building that would then, in IA II, become monumental Building A. The site, therefore, presents a great deal of documentation relating to coastal IA I, a period scarcely attested in north-western inner Syria, except at Tell Afis.

S. Mazzoni's contribution focuses precisely on the Iron Age levels at Tell Afis, with data useful for a general definition of the region in this period. The site, to be identified with the city of Hazrek mentioned on the stele of Zakkur, occupied a politically important position in northern Syria.

Generally speaking, the evidence from the Upper and Lower Town show that, over the course of IA II-III there was a change in the urban layout, especially on the acropolis, passing from a dense agglomeration of private dwellings to isolated public buildings, such as the enigmatic square building with ceremonial functions in Area G and the temple in Area A; for the latter, an initial phase of use followed by a complete rebuilding have been identified. The combination of all the evidence brought to light allows the identification of three principal building phases, which follow that phase of IA I with the construction of public buildings above private dwellings.

Taken all together, the pottery materials from numerous stratified contexts enable allow a better definition of the pottery tradition of IA II-III with standardization of common and preservation wares, cooking pots, as also for burnished and red-slip pottery. So, we have a picture of great homogeneity in production relating to the different architectonic phases, but it is not always easy to link a given sequence to an absolute chronology. In the northern sector of the Lower Town three occupational phases have been identified; the earliest with quite well built domestic dwellings, the second characterized by the construction of the casement fortification walls with abutting houses and a third with isolated domestic units built on top of the fortifications. In the southern Lower Town we find the same sequence. These three phases, from the standpoint of the material culture, demonstrate a marked homogeneity and continuity. In the absence of accurately determined elements to which absolute dates can be assigned, the proposed periodization of Afis is based mainly on varying sources and external comparisons.

The first phase, IA IIA, is the shortest and the related chronologies³² can vary considerably from a regional point of view, but it appears reasonable to date it to the 9th century BC, possibly starting a few decades earlier. The second phase, with the construction of new areas, public buildings and fortification walls is to be dated to the period corresponding to IA IIB. In this phase contacts are attested with the coastal regions as well as with Cyprus and the representative floruit of the kingdom of Hazrek can therefore be dated to the first half of the 8th century B.C. The spread of Red Slip can be roughly correlated with this phase, and is part of the general reopening of inter-regional relations. The end of the period is not marked by any substantial changes in the pottery, but by the destruction which afflicted the region following the Assyrian expansion. However, at Tell Afis, there are no gaps in the occupation of the site as seen, instead at Hama, nor any notable changes to the urban layout (as, for example, witnessed at Karkemish).

The third and most recent phase relates to the period of Assyrian control over the region and the loss of autonomy by the Luwian-Aramaic cities which led to the creation of the Assyrian province of Hatarikka in 738 BC. The Assyrian presence in northern inner Syria was capillary in nature, involving what had by then become small agricultural centers, such as Ebla and Tell Tuqan, which lay on the east-west caravan routes. Tell Tuqan, in particular, benefitted from its position on the edges of the shores of the Lake Matkh basin which ensured that it enjoyed a favorable climate in an area otherwise arid or semi-arid.

From the wealth of data collected it is clear that Afis played an important role compared to the neighboring sites of Tell Madikh and Tell Tuqan. Throughout the entire Iron Age, in fact, it played a central role, with the settlement covering the entire surface of the tell, roughly 32 hectares, whilst at both Ebla and Tell Tuqan private dwellings were found almost exclusively in the Upper Town.

The reduction in size compared to the Middle Bronze Age is particularly evident at Tell Tuqan, whilst we are unable to evaluate the settlement situation during the Late Bronze Age. Only the Upper Town was densely occupied during IA II-III and only the south-east gate was used, constructed partly above the Middle Bronze Age gate in line with the usual typologies of the period.³³

No public or cult buildings have been found dating to IA II-III but only private dwellings, probably related to people of different socio-economic levels, as suggested by the quality of the building techniques, urban location, amount of inner space available.

³² See, above all, Lehmann 1998.

³³ Baffi 2006b: 154-155.

In particular, the Iron Age settlement in the town, as noted in the paper by R. Fiorentino, involved different zones: marginal like Area D and more central, Area Q, or higher up along the slope of the acropolis, Area T. The quality of the various private dwellings reflects the different social strata of the population, with the highest ranks living in the central sector which made regular ground-plans possible. The presence of dwellings in the Lower Town is only rarely attested.

The preliminary results on the archaeometric study of mud-brick and plaster samples (dating to EB III, MB I and IA II-III) presented by G. Quarta, C. Marchiori, D. Melica show that mud-brick composition changed during Iron Age giving interesting indication related to building technique and clay sources.

The sounding in Area D identified, in close succession, a stratigraphic sequence of seven levels with modest dwellings, the materials from which are to be dated to the second part of IA II and the first part of IA III (mid-8th to mid-7th centuries BC) and find parallels in the pottery production of Tell Mardikh.³⁴ The passage from IA II to III is without any break, with the same walls often being used and the pottery testifying to a gradual development of shapes. Urban planning activity can be seen in the massive exportation of earth containing materials from MB II in the northernmost part of the Upper Town, possibly to make way for new and less modest constructions.

The sounding carried on the southern edge of the acropolis with an E-W trench made it possible to identify an area of poor dwellings built on the MB II level, contemporary with the use of the south-eastern gate (Gate F), whilst the domestic quarter of Area Q shows that inner spaces were also devoted to household handicraft activity.

In line with the regional documentation, the pottery from IA II and III is distinguished by the color of the clay (pink) and the surface treatment (burnishing, slip), characteristics that continue down to the time of the Persian presence reflecting a strong attachment to local traditions. During IA II-III, there is clear standardization of common ware as well as of burnished and red slip, whilst, especially during the period of Assyrian domination (IA III - Tuqan Vc) certain eastern shapes were imported or reproduced locally. Amongst the imitations we most commonly find the carinated cup with flaring sides which is present in all parts of the Upper Town at Tell Tuqan, as in other sites in the region, including Tell Afis. During this period, comparison with the regional production reveals the marked cultural homogenizing impact of the Assyrians, which replaced the Aramaic culture as far as urban and decorative models are concerned, whereas Aramaic elements continued to influence the material culture, in a tradition that

³⁴ Mazzoni 1992: 107-110; Baffi 2006a: 48.

continued even during the period of Persian domination.³⁵ The absence of any interruption in the various occupational phases of the Iron Age continues also in the levels immediate following. In fact, the Upper Town of Tell Tuqan, immediately following the end of IA III, continued as a settlement in what is chronologically the so-called Persian period.

Settlements relating to the Achaemenid period have been identified in the region at Tell Mardikh, Tell Mastuma and Tell Deinit.³⁶ The occupation of the site of Tell Tuqan during the time of Persian domination, as illustrated by F. Baffi, is documented in a manner in line with the characteristics already observed for other settlements in the Syrian region. Finds, generally sporadic and out of context, of pottery and clay figurines dating to the 6th-4th centuries BC are accompanied by more complete evidence found in Areas Q, Z and T of the Upper Town.

In particular, the monumental Building T1, has been partially brought to light on the southern summit of the Upper Town.³⁷ This building, which extension is ascertained for roughly 15 meters north-south and 25 meters west-east, can be assigned to a known typology of residences or rural palaces, as witnessed above all by the small palace uncovered on the acropolis of Tell Mardikh. The structure at Tell Tuqan, however, differs from the others known in Syria and Palestine, characterized by a large central room, in its use of a long room, L.1069 which delimits the northern side that overlooked the city. The building developed over time from its original nucleus, north of which further rooms were added towards the interior of the town. Inside the rooms pottery has been found that can be defined as “Persian”, which is characterized by particularly pure and well-baked clays and has numerous parallels in contemporary sites in the area under Achaemenid control.

The evidence concerning finds relating to the last architectonic phase (Phase 2a) is quite abundant, with the prevalent typologies represented by large cups with triangular lip, amphorae with flattened rims and sloping shoulders that can be associated with “torpedo” bases.³⁸ For the intermediate phase in the life of the small palace (Phase 2b), the most frequent pottery shapes are jars with flattened or triangular rim and amphorae with tall, almost vertical necks, small handles on the shoulder and “torpedo” base. These find their closest parallels at Mardikh VIA 2-3, in the level that can be dated to the 5th century BC.³⁹ The pottery evidence relating to the earliest of

³⁵ Baffi 2011: 258-284.

³⁶ Mazzoni 1984; Wada 2003; Rossi 2007; 2011.

³⁷ Baffi 2011: 243-255.

³⁸ Baffi 2011: 257, fig. 36.9-17.

³⁹ Mazzoni 1984: 109, fig. C.7.

the phases (Phase 2c), though scarce, with only a few fragments of well-baked and pure clays and including a small jar decorated with a wide horizontal band and drop line that recalls Assemblages 6 and 7 defined by Lehmann, dating to 540-440 BC, testify to a change with respect to the previous production.⁴⁰

The material culture, therefore, confirms that Tell Tuqan came into the Achaemenid area of control and, more precisely, that of the V Satrapy. Further information is, however, to be added to that examined so far.

In the terraces below the point where Building T1, in its turn terraced, there are modest private dwellings and the pottery found there has given interesting chronological information useful also in reconstructing the social life during the period of Persian domination. The most frequently attested pottery is Simple Orange Ware, characteristic of the Iron Age in general, but a particularly interesting aspect is the presence of some amphorae from the Levantine coast. These vases are a variation on the “torpedo jar” and have a rounded, out-turned rim and small handles attached to the sloping shoulders. The typology of the jars from Tell Tuqan VC is similar to those found at Tell Sukas, Tell Kazel and elsewhere.⁴¹ The proposed chronology for these amphorae with carinated shoulder used for transporting goods is a late phase of the 5th century BC, thus, in the period of Persian domination, and the area of production coastal Syria.⁴² Associated with vessels used for transport, an abundance of pottery has been collected which is homogeneous not only from the chronological standpoint but also in terms of morphology, which fits perfectly with the preceding IA II-III tradition and maintains its characteristics. The clays are local, but we also have large imported bowls, finding parallels in Lehmann’s Assemblages 3-4 from sites on the Syro-Lebanese coast.⁴³

The data presented helps reconstruct the territorial organization of the V Satrapy. The finds are in line with those brought to light at Ebla and testify to the complex Persian presence within a territory that had already been impoverished by Assyrian power from IA II on: marked reduction in the size of settlements, by now rural centers acting as outposts along the caravan routes but, nevertheless, with continued trading contacts also by the local population with the regions of the Levant. The pottery bears witness to the use of Persian typologies by the ruling élite and the continued use of local shapes and clays on the part of the local population.

⁴⁰ Lehmann 1998: 23-25.

⁴¹ Buhl 1983: fig. 4.48; Gubel 1990.

⁴² Lehmann 1998: 23, fig. 10.2; Stern 1982: 105-107.

⁴³ Lehmann 1998: 15, fig. 6.1, 7, 11-12.

The buildings from the Persian era were in part reused during the Hellenistic period. In the Matkh region we find the same process witnessed at Tell Mardikh, with a partial use of the residence, on the acropolis, and a concentration of living quarters on the highest part of the site dominating the abandoned Lower Town which now served to separate the town from the agricultural area. In particular, it can be seen that the Hellenistic period followed immediately upon the Persian over the entire surface of the Upper City that has been examined so far. There is, in fact, ample evidence for the presence of residential buildings of a regular plan in the eastern sector of the acropolis where extremely high-quality pottery has been found, discussed in this volume by M.G. Semeraro, along with the mould-made bowls and Eastern Sigillata.⁴⁴

Analysis of the Hellenistic pottery provides an opportunity for chronological, economic and social consideration. The materials include Eastern Sigillata A (ESA) and, to a lesser degree, Black Slipped Predecessor (BSP), the latter dating to the second half of the 2nd century BC.⁴⁵ The characteristics noted in the ESA materials from Tell Tuqan, with shapes that can be dated to the first century BC, help us to assign the production to a site on the north Syrian coast, not far from the site and, thus, suggesting short-distance trade.

The imported pottery, and its high quality, not only attest to a lively series of commercial exchanges but also the presence at Tell Tuqan, during the Hellenistic-Roman period, of a social class with the economic means and a standard of living that enabled them to appreciate such artifacts, in apparent contrast with the idea of life in a purely rural center. Most of the fragments are from Building T1 which, during the Persian period, was home to the ruling élite and which was then partially re-occupied by the users of the ESA pottery mentioned above.

In general, therefore, there is a substantial degree of continuity in the settlement of the region, from the Early Bronze Age to the Hellenistic period, undoubtedly favored by a particularly favorable and humid environment, although specific preferences can be noted along with the partial abandonment of certain sites and varying hierarchies as well as an evolution of the roles played by the different towns with often glaring changes over the various historical phases. When, in modern times, what had become a *tell* only saw the nomadic presence of herders, villages of varying size grew up in the immediate vicinity which now characterize the Syrian landscape and whose inhabitants today consider themselves to be the custodians of a cultural heritage that involves not only the defense and

⁴⁴ Lund 1993: 27-45.

⁴⁵ Hayes 1985; Gunneweg *et al.* 1983; Schneider 1995; Slane 1997: 255-272.

protection of material remains but also an awareness of what they have inherited from the past.⁴⁶

The International Conference at Lecce concluded with a presentation by E. Janulardo who retraced the route taken by Alberto Moravia who, on his first journey in the region in 1953, visited the cities of Syria: Damascus, Aleppo, Homs and the site of Palmyra. He would return many years later, in 1985. His fascinating recollections of these journeys were published in a series of articles in *Il Corriere della Sera*. Syria, and Damascus in particular, appeared as a crossroads of diverse cultures which in turned shaped the city itself, a city whose history has passed down through the centuries as seen in its souks and great mosques but which, today, all too often are witnesses to wounds and possibly irreparable damage.

The serious crisis affecting most of the Near East, with increasingly violent conflicts is not only causing an appalling loss of lives, including an unprecedented number of civilians, but is also leading to an escalation of destructive attacks on our cultural heritage. Apart from the damage suffered by ancient and modern sites during the conflict and the continuous pillaging of unprotected excavation areas, there is also now the destructive fury which, by erasing all tangible signs of the past, aims to destroy also our memory. The scientific community, and others, has reacted and given the alarm, and the exhibition held in Rome at Palazzo Venezia from the 19th June to 31st August 2014, “*Siria. Splendore e Dramma*”, had the aim of drawing the western world’s attention to the awful dangers involved in losing our cultural heritage and eliminating even our memories of the past, preventing future generations from having an awareness of their own cultural roots: without the past, there can be no future.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ To this end, the Archaeological Expedition at Tell Tuqan has always tried to actively involve the villages during excavation campaigns. On the communications level, following the interruption of fieldwork in 2010, a website was established (www.telltuqan.it) to let a wider public know not only about the scientific results obtained but also about the local context in which the work was carried out. This was presented during the conference by D. Bursich (ArcheoFrame Lab, IULM University) who designed the mission’s logo and website.

⁴⁷ The exhibition was organized by Soprintendenza Speciale di Roma together with Fondazione Priorità Cultura and MAIS, *Missione Archeologica Italiana in Siria*, under the patronage of UNESCO: AA.VV. 2014.

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