

The end of the Middle Bronze Age is associated with a dramatic military event in the west: c. 1600 BC, the Hittites attacked Yamkhad, destroying Aleppo and Alalakh, and then put an end to another Amorite dynasty with their extraordinary raid on Babylon. It is probable that these destructive campaigns were responsible for the burning of Ebla, never to regain its status as a major urban center. In the Jezireh, the end of the Middle Bronze has no comparable violent conclusion. Indeed, in both regions material culture exhibits a smooth transition between Middle and Late Bronze strata. But when the socio-political situation becomes clearer by c. 1500 BC, a new political – and ethnic – order is in place.

EMPIRES AND INTERNATIONALISM

In the Late Bronze Age, c. 1600–1200 BC, Syria is drawn into an ever-widening net of international connections and affiliations. Politically, Syria serves as the primary arena of confrontation for a succession of competing multiregional polities, including the Mitannian, Egyptian, Hittite, and Assyrian empires. Economically, Syria is an active participant in the international trade famously documented in the Amarna letters.

Of the diverse empires of the Near Eastern Late Bronze Age, only the Mitannian is indigenous to Syria. Its origins are ambiguous, but Mitanni can be said to exist by at least the early fifteenth century,¹ extending from Cilicia in the west to the foothills of the Zagros in the east. Although Mitanni's power base was situated in the upper Khabur plains, the capital, Washukanni, has never been located and is one of the few major cities of the ancient Near East still unidentified. The large site of Tell Fakhariyah near the headwaters of the Khabur has been proposed as ancient Washukanni, but this identification remains unconfirmed (fig. 10.1).²

The ethnicity of the inhabitants of Mitanni has been the subject of considerable discussion. Hurrian names and terms attain a peak of popularity in the texts of the Mitanni kingdom, with Hurrian personal names predominating in the documents from Alalakh in the west and Nuzi in the east. At the same time, the kings of Mitanni bore names in an Indo-European language related to Sanskrit, and the names of gods and technical terms related to the breeding and training of horses are also attested in the same language.³ Completing this "multicultural" picture, the language most commonly employed for writing remained Semitic Akkadian, and the continued importance of west Semitic is evident in the personal names in texts from Qatna and Hadidi.

Once again we confront the question of ethnicity, language, and the archaeological record. What does the spread of Hurrian names and other terms "mean"? The conventional interpretation involves a gradual, large-scale migration of ethnic Hurrians from eastern Anatolia to the upper Khabur and northern Iraq

¹ Wilhelm 1989.

² A program of chemical analyses compared the composition of clay from potential site candidates with a clay cuneiform tablet sent from Washukanni to Egypt, but no match was obtained (Dobel *et al.* 1977).

³ Wilhelm 1989.

in the late third millennium and to western Syria in the second millennium. An alternate model might posit the assumption of power by ethnic Hurrian individuals (a military elite?) over different parts of Syria in the late third and second millennia, accompanied by acculturation: the adoption of Hurrian language, naming practices, and ideologies by Semitic speakers in emulation of their superiors.

The identification of distinct Hurrian styles of art or material culture in the archaeological record has bemused many archaeologists,⁴ but their attempts have usually ended in frustration. An assumption of a one-to-one correspondence of ethnic identification with archaeological "cultures" has long been discredited, although markers of ethnicity can exist in material culture.⁵ It is likely that Mitannian art and material culture consisted of a mixture of different traditions from Syria and its neighbors, although some local peculiarities and emphases can be observed, most particularly in the development of Mitannian glyptic styles and a high-status pottery type, Nuzi Ware.

When it appears on the historical scene, Mitanni is locked in conflict with the imperialist Eighteenth Dynasty Egyptian pharaohs. For the first time, Egypt had initiated a program of repeated military campaigns and, eventually, administrative control in Palestine and Syria. The Egyptians encountered Levantine city-rulers dependent on the Mitannian king and decisively defeated them at Megiddo in northern Palestine. Although Thutmose III campaigned as far as the Euphrates, the Egyptian sphere of influence was largely limited to the Syrian coast and the region south of Qatna, while Mitanni retained northern inland Syria and northern Mesopotamia.⁶ Mitanni appears to have consisted of diverse local dynasts ultimately responsible to the Mitannian king rather than a tightly administered polity. Egypt's control of southern and coastal Syria was a similar affair in which indigenous rulers remained in power but were expected to render tribute to their overlord.

Egypt and Mitanni preserved a balance of power in Syria until the advent of Hittite imperialism in the mid-fourteenth century. Moving south and east of their power center in Anatolia, the armies of Suppiluliuma I of Hatti defeated the Mitanni and assumed control of northern Syria through a combination of local vassal rulers and Hittite viceroys based in Carchemish and Aleppo. The ensuing confrontation between Egypt and Hatti came to a head in the early thirteenth century at the battle of Qadesh (modern Nebi Mend), after which a peace treaty was signed acknowledging Syria's division into Hittite and Egyptian spheres of influence. Meanwhile, the weakened Mitanni kings were attacked from the east by their erstwhile dependents, the kings of Assur on the Tigris. These Assyrian rulers eventually put an end to the Mitanni state, establishing their own empire in the Jezireh in the thirteenth century and challenging the Hittites for control of Syria.

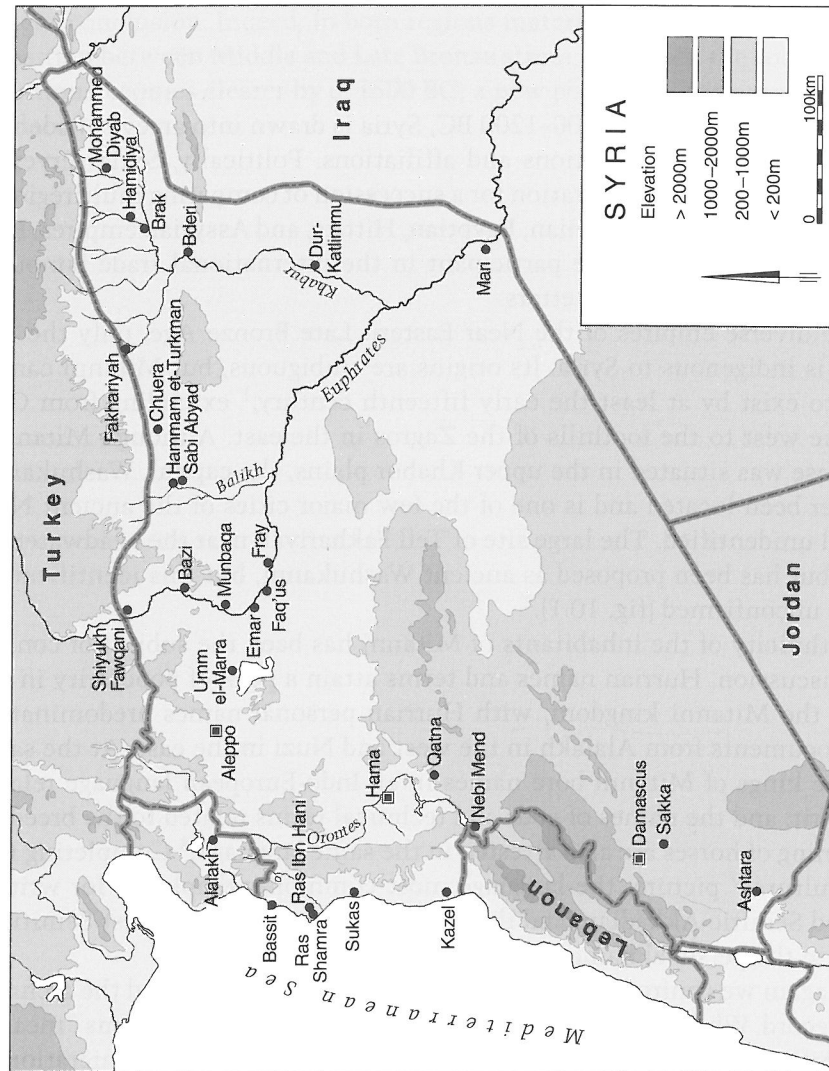


Fig. 10.1 Syria in the mid/late second millennium BC (Late Bronze Age).

⁴ E.g. Barrelet *et al.* 1977, 1984. ⁵ Hodder 1979; Emberling 1997. ⁶ Klengel 1992.

	Western Syria		Middle Euphrates	Balikh	Khabur	Northern Mesopotamia	Anatolia	Egypt
1200	Ras ibn Hani palaces	Ugarit Late Bronze destruction level	Late Bronze Emar	Sabi Abyad <i>dumnu</i>	Dur-Katlimmu Middle Assyrian occupation	Tukulti-Ninurta I Shalmaneser I	Hitite empire period	Rameses II Dynasty 19
1300		Alalakh I Alalakh II Alalakh III				Middle Assyrian period	Suppiluliuma I	Akhenaten
1400		Alalakh IV		Hammam et-Turkman VIII B	Brak Mitanni palace and temple	Mitanni kingdom		Thutmose III
1500		Alalakh V		Hammam et-Turkman VIII A				Dynasty 18
1600		Alalakh VI						

Fig. 10.2 Mid/late second-millennium BC chronology.

This era of competing great powers also saw an intensified economic contact between the different regions of the eastern Mediterranean and southwest Asia. The cuneiform documents found at Tell el-Amarna, capital of the iconoclastic Egyptian king Akhenaten, include evidence of a lively exchange of "gifts" between the rulers of the eastern Mediterranean states, and a prosperous seagoing trade is amply attested in the archaeological record.

Pottery and chronology

Despite the increased availability of written sources from archaeological contexts, the archaeological chronology of the period is incomplete (fig. 10.2). Even a congruence of abundant textual and material culture evidence as at Alalakh IV does not resolve issues of absolute and relative chronology, given the ambiguities of both types of data, and the applicability of a low, middle, or high chronology⁷ are still heatedly debated. Radiocarbon evidence from Late Bronze Syria is scarce, and the possibilities of dendrochronological analysis are only beginning to be explored.

One of the problems in Late Bronze Syrian chronology is the similarity of Late Bronze ceramics to those of the Middle Bronze Age. Rather than an abrupt break between the two periods, the pottery assemblages display a smooth transition in which many traits of the earlier period persist into the later. The employment of combed decoration on large vessels, for example, is common to both periods in western Syria. A similar smooth transition can be observed in the architectural and stratigraphic sequences at major sites like Alalakh, Hama, and Hammam et-Turkman. While Palestinian-related distinctions like LB I, IIA, and IIB are sometimes applied to Syrian data, the diagnostic criteria for each sub-period are not made explicit and the internal divisions are therefore still equivocal.

Especially characteristic of the Late Bronze Syrian pottery assemblages are shallow bowls with simple, interior bead or inturned rims (fig. 10.3a-c), small jars with tall straight necks (fig. 10.3l-m), a variety of jugs and juglets (fig. 10.3p), oil lamps (fig. 10.3n), sometimes with two spouts, and a general popularity of ring bases. Continuing from later Middle Bronze assemblages are beakers with low carination (fig. 10.3o), "shoulder goblets" with tall necks and globular bodies, large vessels with inverted upper bodies and everted or collared rims, sometimes with combed decoration, and large jars with tall necks and everted or ribbed rims. Later in the period, during the era of Middle Assyrian imperial control in the Jezireh, new popular types in that region include carinated flat or ring-based bowls (fig. 10.3d-e) and various shapes with nipple bases (fig. 10.3f-g).⁸

In addition to the common wares of Late Bronze assemblages, several distinct varieties of luxury wares or imported ceramics are important in the period. Nuzi

⁷ Åström 1987; Gasche *et al.* 1998. ⁸ Pfälzner 1995.

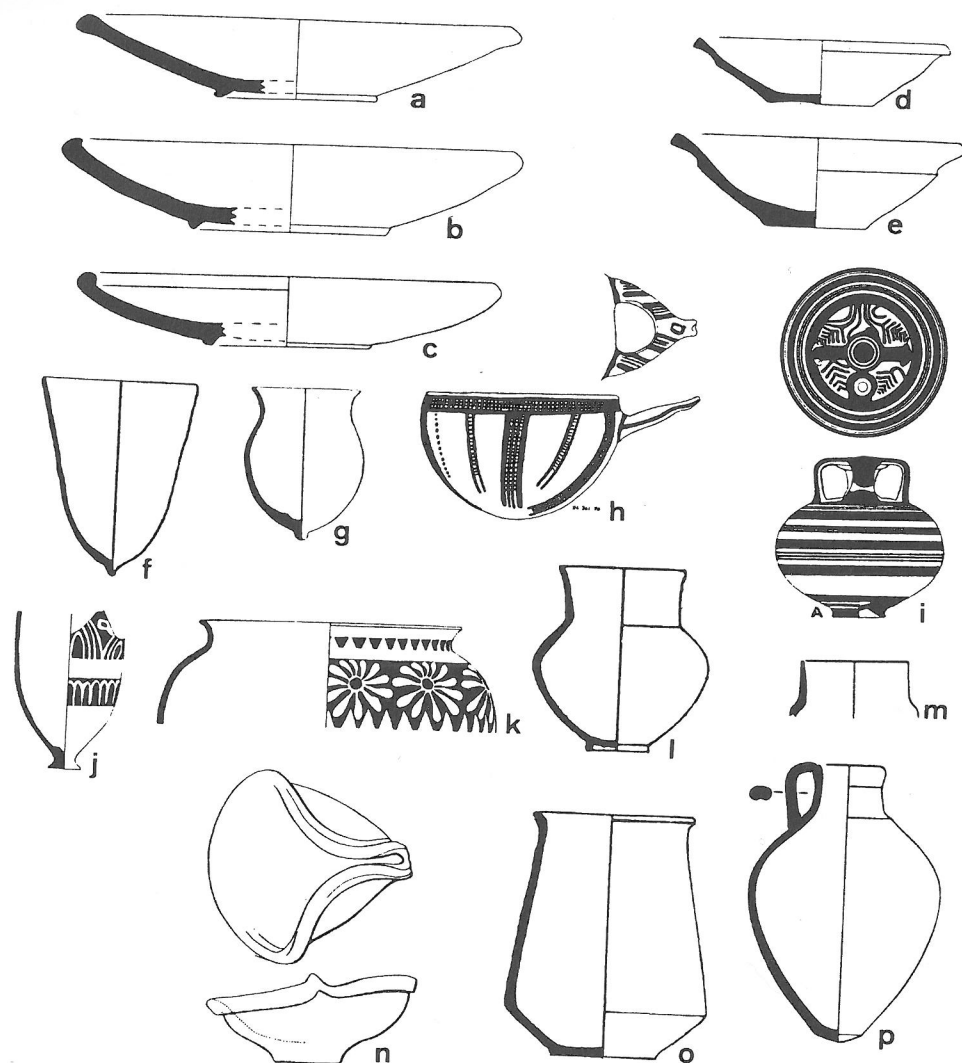


Fig. 10.3 Mid/late second-millennium BC pottery (scale 1:5 except p, 1:10).

Ware (fig. 10.3j–k), first discovered at Yorgan Tepe (ancient Nuzi) in northern Iraq, is characterized by light-colored painted motifs, either geometric or, especially in the west, floral (fig. 10.4), applied to a field of dark paint. The typical shape is a tall thin-walled open vessel with a small pedestal or button base. Found throughout the Mitannian sphere in the fifteenth to fourteenth centuries but rarely in great numbers, this handsomely decorated pottery might be interpreted as a Mitannian elite marker. In the Jezireh, the latest phases of Khabur Ware overlap with the appearance of Nuzi Ware and consist of dark-painted motifs on “shoulder goblets” with button bases.⁹

⁹ Oates *et al.* 1997.



Fig. 10.4 Nuzi Ware from Alalakh.

The inclusion of coastal Syria into an eastern Mediterranean maritime trade network is evinced by, among other things, the prevalence of Cypriot and Mycenaean ceramic imports. Given the ubiquity of imported bowls, as opposed to closed forms, these attractively painted vessels were frequently imported for their own sake and not as containers of trade goods. Especially popular, particularly in the early to middle centuries of the Late Bronze Age, were Cypriot White Slip I and II “milk bowls” (fig. 10.3h) and gray Base Ring Ware juglets, while Mycenaean pottery (fig. 10.3i) appears later in the period. Both Cypriot and Mycenaean pottery were imitated to produce local versions. The attestations of imported pottery from Cyprus or the Aegean are most profuse in sites on or near the coast, while their numbers fall off dramatically in the Syrian interior and are nearly absent in the Jezireh.

Alalakh and western Syria

If we consider the evidence of archaeological surface survey from western Syria, we encounter a general trend of decline in the number of occupied tell sites in the Late Bronze Age, although the blurring between Middle and Late Bronze pottery may obscure some of the relevant data.¹⁰ This pattern sometimes has been interpreted in terms of an increasingly exploitative urban elite whose oppressive demands forced the peasants to abandon their homes. The fleeing peasants either embraced a mobile pastoralist lifestyle or attached themselves to roving bands of refugees and outlaws like the rootless *habiru* of the Amarna

¹⁰ Yener *et al.* 2000; Schwartz *et al.* 2000a; de Maigret 1978; Thalmann 1989–90.

documents.¹¹ Another view might consider the deleterious effect of conflicts between external imperial powers and of tributary obligations to such powers.¹² An apparent exception to dwindling sedentary occupation is found in the area around Homs and Qatna, where sedentary communities are said to be numerous in both the Middle and Late Bronze periods.¹³

One of the richest sequences from Late Bronze western Syria was obtained from Alalakh, levels VI–I, although the stratigraphic uncertainties of the excavation must be kept in mind.¹⁴ After successive reconstructions of a fortress in levels VI and V, a large palace was built that yielded, in its level IV manifestation, an archive of administrative texts dating to the reigns of Idrimi, Niqmepa, and Ilmilimma, vassals of the Mitannian kings. The palace (fig. 10.5) is notable for its two-columned portico entrance, a prefiguring of the so-called *bit hilani* type that becomes common in the early first millennium BC. Its integrative use of wood and mudbrick, as well as the employment of basalt orthostats lining the bases of walls, is characteristic of Syrian Late Bronze palaces. After the burning of Alalakh level IV, presumably by the Hittite forces of Suppiluliuma, the city's reconstruction included a multi-room fortress and a series of long-room temples. Perhaps the best-known single discovery from Late Bronze Alalakh is the curiously grotesque seated statue of Idrimi with its autobiographical text (fig. 10.6, left). Found in the level IB temple vicinity, the statue is usually interpreted as an heirloom from the fifteenth century.

In the region east of Alalakh, public structures of Late Bronze date have been partially excavated at Gindaris and Afis, while only minimal evidence of occupation has been detected at Ebla, Touqan, and Abu Danne. At Umm el-Marra, a large sample of domestic architecture from the Mitannian period included central-room houses (see below) as well as luxury items like alabaster and glazed ceramic vessels.¹⁵

The importance of Qatna in the Late Bronze Age was intimated by the results of the 1920s excavations, including a palace dated to the fourteenth century and earlier and a temple of the goddess Ninegal, the latter producing cuneiform inventories of the temple treasury.¹⁶ In 2002, extraordinary results were reported from new excavations in the palace. In addition to a collection of legal and administrative documents and royal letters from the fourteenth century BC, an apparent royal sepulchre was found consisting of a set of underground chambers guarded by two seated male statues. New textual finds from the Late Bronze Age were also reported from a different elite building at the site. Data from these discoveries may well be expected to revolutionize our understanding of Late Bronze Age western Syria. West of Qatna, Nebi Mend, ancient Qadesh, was likewise an important power center, yielding a victory stele of pharaoh Seti I and some evidence of public architecture.¹⁷

¹¹ Liverani 1987. ¹² Gonen 1984. ¹³ Sapin 1978–9.

¹⁴ Woolley 1955; Gates 1981. ¹⁵ Curvers and Schwartz 1997.

¹⁶ Du Mesnil du Buisson 1935; see also al-Maqdissi *et al.* in press. ¹⁷ Bourke 1993.



Fig. 10.5 Alalakh IV Palace.

Ugarit: a great coastal emporium

There is no question that the most extensive and impressive material remains from Late Bronze Syria derive from Ras Shamra, ancient Ugarit, on the Mediterranean coast. Excavated almost continuously since 1929, the site has supplied an overwhelming body of evidence from the burned, *in situ* remains of its last



Fig. 10.6 Statue of Idrimi from Alalakh (left) and statue from Brak Mitanni palace (right).

Late Bronze occupation.¹⁸ Rather than a typical Syrian urban center, however, Ugarit was an unusually wealthy city profiting from its role as intermediary between the intensified maritime trade of the eastern Mediterranean and the resources and markets of the Asiatic interior. Although the territory controlled by the rulers of Ugarit was relatively small, it included a coastal plain with productive wheat, grape, and olive cultivation, highlands providing timber for ship-building, and marine resources like murex shells used to produce purple dye. Despite its economic significance, Ugarit was subservient to the great powers of its day, owing allegiance first to Egypt and subsequently to the Hittite kings.

Given the immense quantity of data collected from Ras Shamra, we can only begin to outline some of the most important results of the seventy-plus years of excavation. Unfortunately, the periodization of the Late Bronze remains is often difficult, given the lack of stratigraphic control in Schaeffer's excavations (1929–70). In terms of urban layout (fig. 10.7), we can recognize an urban center of some 30 ha in which a religious complex dominates the ancient acropolis to the east, a set of sprawling royal palaces occupies the western fringes, and interspersed residential neighborhoods consist of insulae separated by narrow streets. In contrast to inland Syrian communities, Ras Shamra has almost no evidence of mudbrick architecture, employing only dressed and rough stone and

¹⁸ Yon 1997a.

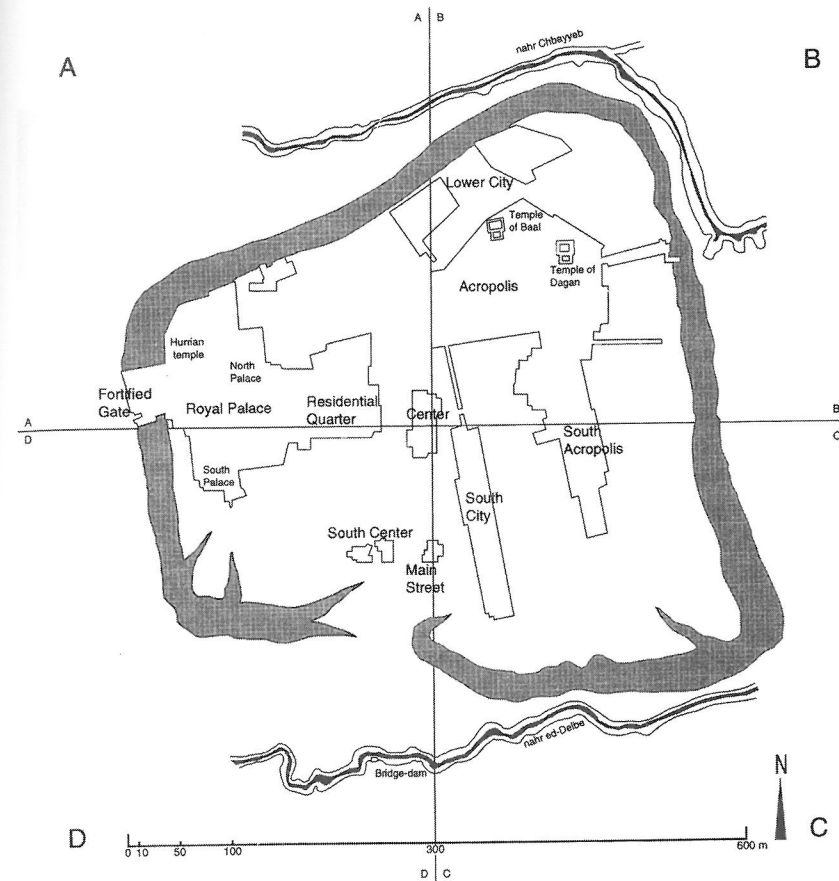


Fig. 10.7 Ugarit.

timber. Recent research has identified a main entrance to the city at the south, with a boulevard extending to the north. A dam on the Nahr ed-Delbe stream south of the site has also been identified, ostensibly used for the accumulation of water in periods when wadi flow was limited.

The Ugarit royal palace (fig. 10.8), encompassing almost 1 ha with about 100 rooms, was one of the marvels of the Late Bronze Age world. Demarcated from the rest of the city, the vast structure was amply protected by a sloping glacis of stones and a postern gate on its western exterior. Stone staircases indicate the existence of at least one upper story, if not more. A vestibule with two columns led to an official quarter, while private apartments and gardens were located to the south and east. Courtyards were distributed at intervals, including an example with a basin and piped-in water system. Under rooms to the north were the dressed-stone royal tombs, consisting of a dromos leading by steps down to a corbeled burial chamber. Other palaces have been also identified in the western

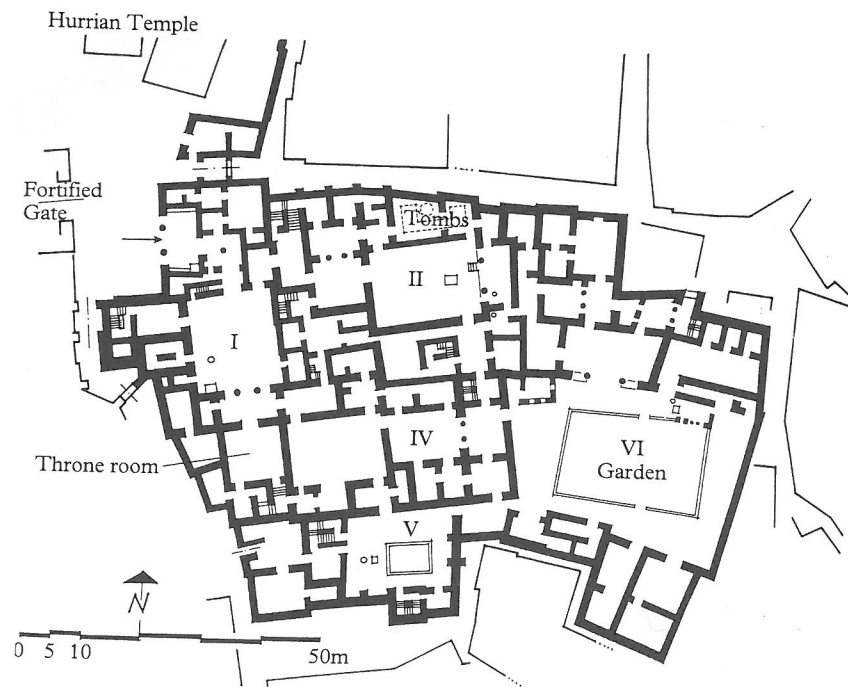


Fig. 10.8 Ugarit royal palace.

part of the city, including the orthostat-lined Northern Palace, associated with the early part of the Late Bronze period, and the Southern Palace.

While the royal palace yielded an unprecedented collection of art objects and luxury items, it also contained thousands of cuneiform texts, many of them in an alphabetic cuneiform system unique to the Syrian Late Bronze Age. In addition to the texts in alphabetic cuneiform employed to write the local Semitic language, numerous Akkadian documents were found, as well as texts in Sumerian, Hurrian, Hittite, Egyptian, and Cypro-Minoan. The tablets from the palace and from other parts of the site have provided a treasure-trove of administrative, diplomatic, economic, and religious information and form one of the most important corpora of written documents from the ancient Near East.

Despite the vast excavated exposure at Ugarit, only four temples have been identified. Crowning the acropolis and visible from a great distance were the temples of Baal and Dagan (the latter identified by inscribed stela), massive two-room structures that appear to be variations on the "classic" Syrian temple *in antis* long-room plan, with small antecella and larger cella (fig. 10.9b). Given their formidable foundations and an associated stairway, it is likely that these buildings resembled towers and had rituals performed on their roofs. Their hypothesized auxiliary function as landmarks for voyaging sailors is supported by

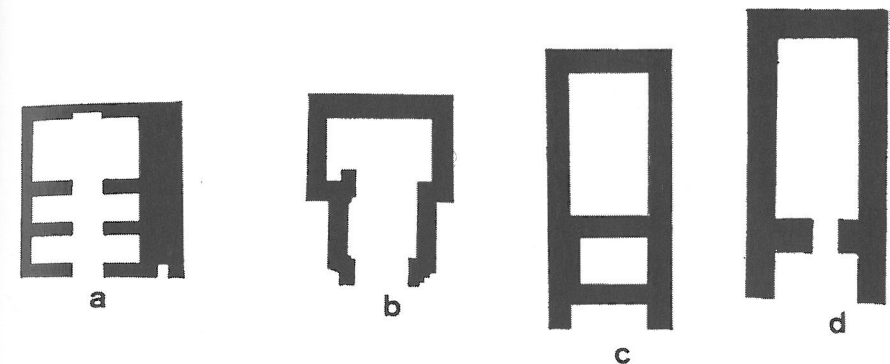


Fig. 10.9 Mid/late second-millennium west Syrian temples: (a) Alalakh, (b) Ugarit Baal Temple, (c) Munbaqa, and (d) Emar (scale 1:800).

the discovery of stone anchors in the vicinity of the Baal temple, apparently deposited as votive offerings.¹⁹ Elsewhere in the site were the small two-room "Hurrian Sanctuary," perhaps a royal temple, and the "Temple of the Rhytons," thought to represent a genre of cultic shrines integrated into local neighborhoods.

An enormous sample of residential architecture has been excavated at Ugarit, and several in-depth studies of individual houses have recently appeared.²⁰ Contrary to original interpretations, the neighborhoods evince little functional or social differentiation, with craft workshops, residential units, wealthy houses, and poorer quarters all located within the same districts. In a recent study, Schloen hypothesizes that the households of Ugarit were composed of patrimonial "joint families" within kin-related neighborhoods.²¹ A common house plan consists of numerous rooms arranged around a central courtyard, with the vaulted stone-built family tomb below one of the room floors (fig. 10.12a). Second stories, probably the loci for living/sleeping rooms, were common, while the preserved ground-floor rooms were used for storage, food preparation, and craft production. Wealthier houses sometimes sported systems of water distribution connected to bathrooms and toilets.

The wealth of Ugarit, especially of the royal establishment and associated elite, is amply demonstrated by such items as the gold bowls found near the temple of Baal (fig. 10.10), gold-plated bronze statuettes of deities, carved ivory furniture fittings, alabaster luxury vessels, and vast quantities of imported Cypriot and Mycenaean pottery, found preeminently in the royal palace but also in residential quarters, particularly in the well-furnished family tombs. This luxury and prosperity is attributable to the palace's mobilization of the rich agricultural products of Ugarit's hinterland, the city's control of trade between the Mediterranean and the interior (e.g. copper from Cyprus; wine, olive

¹⁹ Frost 1991.

²⁰ Callot 1983, 1994.

²¹ Schloen 2001.



Fig. 10.10 Gold bowl from Ugarit.

oil, and textiles from Syria), and its craft industries. Among other facilities, metallurgical workshops, olive presses,²² and an installation for dyeing textiles with crushed murex shells found at the harbor site of Minet el-Beida²³ have been discovered.

Although excavations have not been attempted at any of the villages in the Ugarit realm, several large or elite centers have been sampled, including Ras el-Bassit on Ugarit's northern border²⁴ and, in the Tartus vicinity, Daruk, Amrit, Simiryan, Sianu, and Sukas. At the latter site, deposits of small vessels in the harbor sand may indicate a seaside offering place.²⁵ Most informative have been the excavations at Ras ibn Hani, perhaps ancient Biruti, located on a cape 4 km south of Ugarit. Here was a planned community of elite residences and administrative architecture probably constructed in the reign of Ugarit's king Ammishtamru II (mid-thirteenth century). The site is particularly notable for two sizable palaces, the larger of which (the Southern Palace) encompassed over 5000 sq. m. in area. The Northern Palace, apparently built for the king's mother, had considerable evidence of craft activity such as fragments of stone and bone object manufacture as well as crucibles and other metallurgical implements.²⁶ Particularly significant among the latter was a sandstone mold

²² Callot 1987. ²³ Schaeffer 1950. ²⁴ Courbin 1986.
²⁵ Riis *et al.* 1996. ²⁶ Bounni *et al.* 1998.

for a four-handled "oxhide" copper ingot. Oxhide ingots of Cypriot copper are well known throughout the eastern Mediterranean, but the Ras ibn Hani example is the only mold yet discovered, apparently indicative of the Ugarit kingdom's role as middleman in the copper trade. South of the Ugarit kingdom was the Akkar plain, the base for Egyptian military campaigns in Syria and later the heartland of the Amurru kingdom, a buffer between the Egyptian and Hittite spheres of influence. Tell Kazel, perhaps ancient Sumur, the main center of the region, although relatively small in area (about 8 ha), has nevertheless revealed substantial evidence of a Late Bronze elite presence including several large-scale buildings and a stamp seal with an inscription in hieroglyphic Hittite.²⁷

Ekalte, Emar, and the cities of the middle Euphrates

Although the Thutmosid pharaohs claimed to have erected stelae on the banks of the Euphrates, the great bend of the river remained in Mitannian hands until the Hittite campaigns of Suppiluliuma I in the later fourteenth century. After the Hittites asserted control, the middle Euphrates served as their eastern frontier against Mitanni and, subsequently, the Assyrian empire. Archaeological evidence from this region is ample, thanks to the Tabqa and Tishrin dam salvage operations. However, as in other regions, the internal chronology of the period is uncertain because of incomplete ceramic sequences. An excellent opportunity to document a historically dated assemblage was missed when the Emar pottery was only minimally published. As a result, it is difficult to distinguish material culture differences between the period of Mitannian domination and that of the Hittites.

Thus far, our evidence consists of large and prosperous urban centers enjoying a relatively autonomous existence. In most cases, defensive architecture is emphasized, ostensibly because of the danger from outside powers as well as internal conflicts. The best-documented center is Munbaqa, ancient Ekalte, in the Tabqa dam area.²⁸ Munbaqa's broad excavated exposure, combined with the results of geomagnetic survey, provide an unusually comprehensive view of a Late Bronze city (fig. 10.11). Expanding dramatically from its Middle Bronze location on the high tell, Late Bronze Munbaqa was transformed into a center of about 15 ha consisting of an inner and outer town, each zone protected by enclosure walls of gravel and of brick above stone foundations. Three gates have been excavated, including a northeast gate with preserved mudbrick radial arch, reconstructed as a two-chamber installation with a 4 m wide interior brick "walkway." On the high western crest of the tell near the river, the stone foundations of three temples *in antis* have been excavated (fig. 10.9c).

Most extensive at Munbaqa are the exposures of domestic architecture, largely of the central-room house type,²⁹ where a large roofed hall is flanked

²⁷ Badre and Gubel 1999–2000.

²⁸ Werner 1998; Czichon and Werner 1998. ²⁹ McClellan 1997.

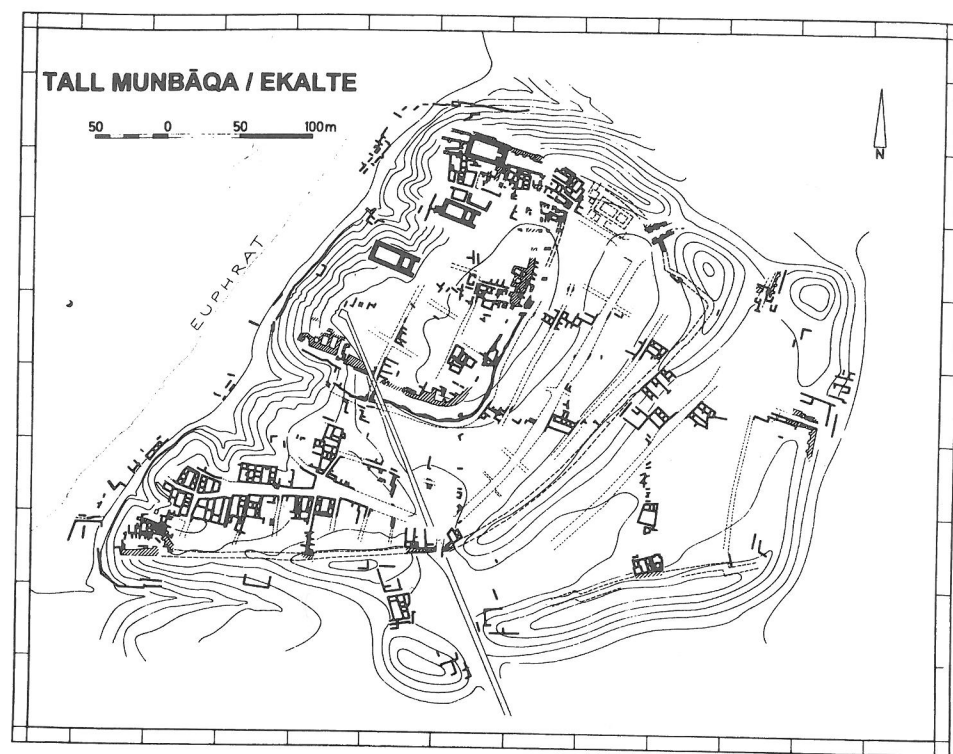


Fig. 10.11 Munbaqa.

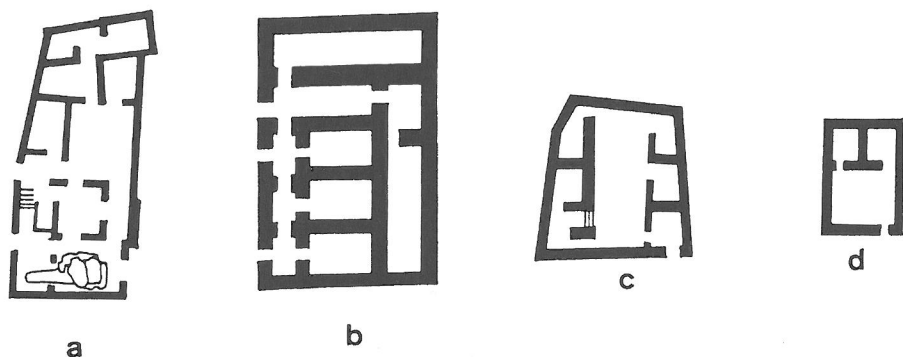


Fig. 10.12 Houses from (a) Ugarit (with tomb on lower right), (b) Alalakh, (c) Munbaqa central-room, and (d) Emar front-room (scale 1:600).

by smaller rectangular rooms (fig. 10.12c). Evidence of craft production (e.g. pottery kilns) is frequent alongside storage or domestic remains. Curiously, no palaces have been identified at Munbaqa, despite the broad horizontal exposures, a situation perhaps clarified by the cuneiform legal and business texts found in some of the houses. In these records, communal authority is embodied in elders of the city, in a group called the "Brothers," who have their own

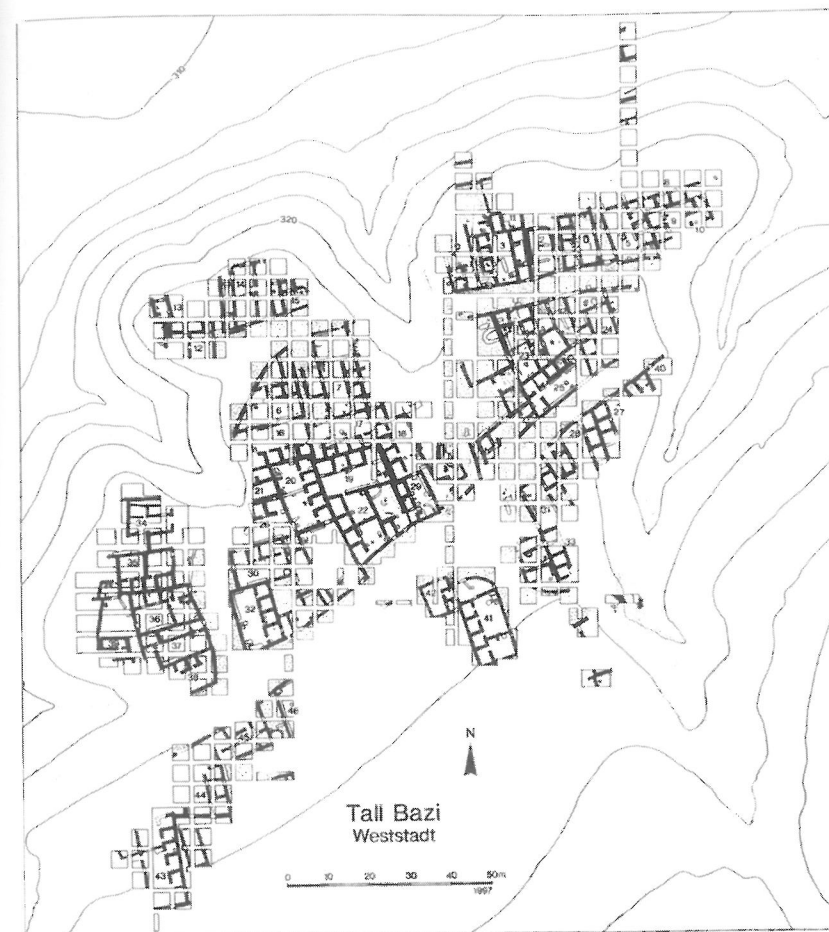


Fig. 10.13 Bazi.

official cylinder seal, and in the city god Ba'laka (= Baal), while kings are conspicuous in their absence. In general, one receives an impression of relatively homogeneous households enjoying a reasonably high standard of living. A similar picture obtains at nearby Hadidi, ancient Azu, where a central-room house yielded tablets referring to the "Brothers" and the city god Dagan, whose establishment had its own seal. Like Munbaqa, Hadidi expanded to peak size and was enclosed by defensive walls in the Late Bronze period.³⁰

Comparable to Munbaqa in its broad exposure of Late Bronze domestic architecture is Tell Bazi, upstream in the Tishrin dam region.³¹ Since the Bazi western lower town is a one-period site constructed on virgin soil, the excavators have been able to uncover half of the site, some 10,000 sq. m. The fifty excavated houses, arranged along broad streets, display a variant of the central-room

³⁰ Dornemann 1979.³¹ Einwag and Otto 1996, 1999.

plan consisting of a large main hall with a row of small square rooms along one of the longer sides (fig. 10.13). The central rooms often contained ovens and brick platforms, while the smaller rooms yielded storage jars and other implements implying a storage function. A hypothesized second story is thought to have served as living space. The excavators report that the discovery of raw materials, worked objects, and molds suggests that most households engaged in the craft production of items like bronze weapons or tools, stone weights, and jewellery. East of the Bazi lower town was a heavily fortified citadel built on the slopes of a natural hill.

Fortification also seems to have been the main *raison d'être* for the 6 ha site of el-Qitar (ancient Til-Abnu?), 9 km south of Bazi. Defensive walls constructed of stone blocks were erected atop a natural hill next to the river, enclosing an upper and lower settlement, with towers situated at intervals. Although a Middle Assyrian tablet whose sealing bears Hittite hieroglyphs indicates a thirteenth-century date, McClellan³² assigns the main floruit of this fortress-settlement to the fifteenth century. North of Qitar towards the Syro-Turkish border, Late Bronze evidence has recently begun to accrue from other Tishrin dam salvage sites such as Shiyukh Fawqani, Shiyukh Tahtani, and Tell Ahmar.³³ Although Carchemish, located directly on the border, was undoubtedly the main center of the middle Euphrates, very little archaeological information on the Late Bronze occupation was afforded by the early twentieth-century excavations at the site.

Controlling the southern end of the great Euphrates bend was Emar (modern Meskene), the major center of the Tabqa dam area, a region known as Ashtata in the Late Bronze Age. In contrast to Carchemish, Emar has yielded abundant Late Bronze data, thanks to salvage excavations in the 1970s.³⁴ Although textual evidence indicates that Emar was an important urban center from the mid-third millennium BC on, only the occupation in the period of Hittite control in the Late Bronze Age has been sampled extensively.

Because of the information supplied by tablets found in the excavated site, we can date Emar's Late Bronze occupation from c. 1330 to its destruction in 1187. According to Margueron, Late Bronze Emar (c. 70 ha) was built on top of a huge artificial terrace of gravel and clay; because of this unusual preference for a hilltop location and the vast expense required to construct it, Margueron has proposed that the entire project was sponsored by the Hittite authorities.³⁵ Alternatively, McClellan suggests that Late Bronze Emar was built on an artificial height by the inhabitants of the original city in order to avert the threat of flooding. In a new development, Finkbeiner's recent excavations have revealed *in situ* Early and Middle Bronze materials below the Late Bronze structures, necessitating a revision of previous interpretations.³⁶

³² McClellan 1987. ³³ Del Olmo Lete and Montero Fenollós 1999.

³⁴ Margueron 1995, 1997; Beyer 1982. ³⁵ Margueron 1980.

³⁶ McClellan 1997; Finkbeiner 1999–2000.

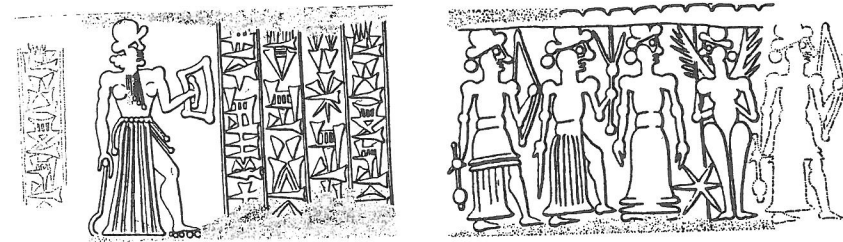


Fig. 10.14 Communal seal (left) and royal seal (right) from Emar.

On the highest point, two twin temples *in antis* were excavated (fig. 10.9d), and a third was identified in a more central location. East of the twin temples, a residential neighborhood contained houses of a uniform front-room variety (fig. 10.12d), consisting of a large rectangular room flanking the street with two rooms behind, the latter probably bearing a second story for living and sleeping space. A building to the east of the houses, while sometimes identified as a temple, may instead have been the house of a diviner. The hundreds of Akkadian tablets found here and from other contexts at Emar provide the most important source of documentary evidence from Late Bronze Syria after Ugarit.

A large building in the northwestern part of the site has been identified as the palace of the local king built in *bit hilani* style (see chapter 11), although its fragmentary preservation leaves such interpretations hypothetical. Indeed, the extent of the king's economic or political power at Emar has been questioned in the face of frequent references to communal authorities represented by elders, the city god NIN.URTA, and occasionally the "Brothers."³⁷ In a study of the seal impressions on Emar tablets, Yamada³⁸ has recently shown that the royal establishment and the communal authorities had distinct cylinder seals, indicating separate (and competing?) bases of power (fig. 10.14). The economic importance of communal, non-royal authorities at Emar as well as Hadidi and Munbaqa may suggest a middle Euphrates tradition of strong communal authorities alongside of or in competition with royal establishments.

At the same time, the Emar texts indicate a clear subservience to the Hittite authorities at Carchemish and at the imperial capital of Hattusha. Margueron has attributed major construction projects to the Hittites, both in the establishment of Late Bronze Emar and in the building of a citadel at Tell Faq'us 10 km downstream from Emar, tested in a short 1978 excavation.³⁹ Downstream from Faq'us at Tell Fray, the "little palace" of level IV was identified as the possible residence of a Hittite governor. This structure, consisting of rooms flanking two sides of a large courtyard, contained hieroglyphic Hittite inscriptions on jars and a bulla, and Matthiae⁴⁰ likens the building to examples of public architecture at the Hittite capital of Hattusha. While attributions of these constructions to the Hittite authorities may or may not be tenable, it

³⁷ Fleming 1992. ³⁸ Yamada 1994. ³⁹ Margueron 1982b. ⁴⁰ Matthiae 1980.

is nevertheless clear that the material culture of the middle Euphrates sites is primarily local in character, and the Emar texts reveal a Semitic-speaking population with indigenous social, economic, and religious characteristics.

Generally, the Late Bronze middle Euphrates centers evince a prosperity based on local agricultural and pastoral resources. Despite Emar's position at the juncture of Mesopotamian and west Syrian trade routes, there is strangely little reference to commercial activities in the texts and next to no evidence of western contacts in the material culture.

The Syrian Jezireh in the sixteenth to fourteenth centuries: heartland of Mitanni

Although the Jezireh was the heartland of the Mitannian state, survey results from this region (west Jezireh, Balikh, Bi'a vicinity, upper and lower Khabur) resemble those from western Syria in the decreasing number of tell occupations.⁴¹ Along with reduced urbanization, Wilkinson's work in the Balikh notes a trend towards rural settlement in small, short-lived hamlets. Curvers⁴² suggests that this ruralization was accompanied by the appearance of elite manor houses (Akkadian *dimtu*) controlling agricultural production in the Mitannian hinterlands, as mentioned in the texts from Nuzi.

Excavations at major tells with Mitannian period occupation exhibit a pattern of large-scale elite buildings on mound summits with little evidence of occupation elsewhere on site. An example of a high-status residence installed at a largely depopulated major tell has been exposed at Hammam et-Turkman VIII B.⁴³ Constructed above the Middle Bronze period administrative complex, this building was organized in two wings on either side of a large cobbled courtyard. In the west, "official" wing, the mudbrick architecture was embellished with limestone orthostats and wooden accoutrements. The eastern, residential wing included a bathroom with a baked-clay tub and a kitchen with cooking installations, both served by water drainage systems of stone and terracotta.

In the Khabur valley, the core area of the Mitannian state, the most abundant evidence is derived from Tell Brak, ancient Nawar, where a palace and temple were constructed atop the highest point of the tell (fig. 10.15).⁴⁴ The Brak palace is a square complex with a central courtyard paved with baked bricks, around which are smaller rooms including a file of chambers on the east, one of which had a baked-brick floor, ovens, and drain. Two stairways indicate the presence of a second floor, where, once again, living and sleeping rooms are hypothesized. Adjacent to the palace is a temple with a square broad-room cella characterized by the use of engaged mudbrick half-columns. The small finds from the Brak palace furnish an exemplary sample of Mitannian

⁴¹ Einwag 1993; Wilkinson 1998; Kohlmeyer 1984; Meijer 1986; Röllig and Kühne 1983.
⁴² Curvers 1991. ⁴³ Van Loon 1988. ⁴⁴ Oates *et al.* 1997.

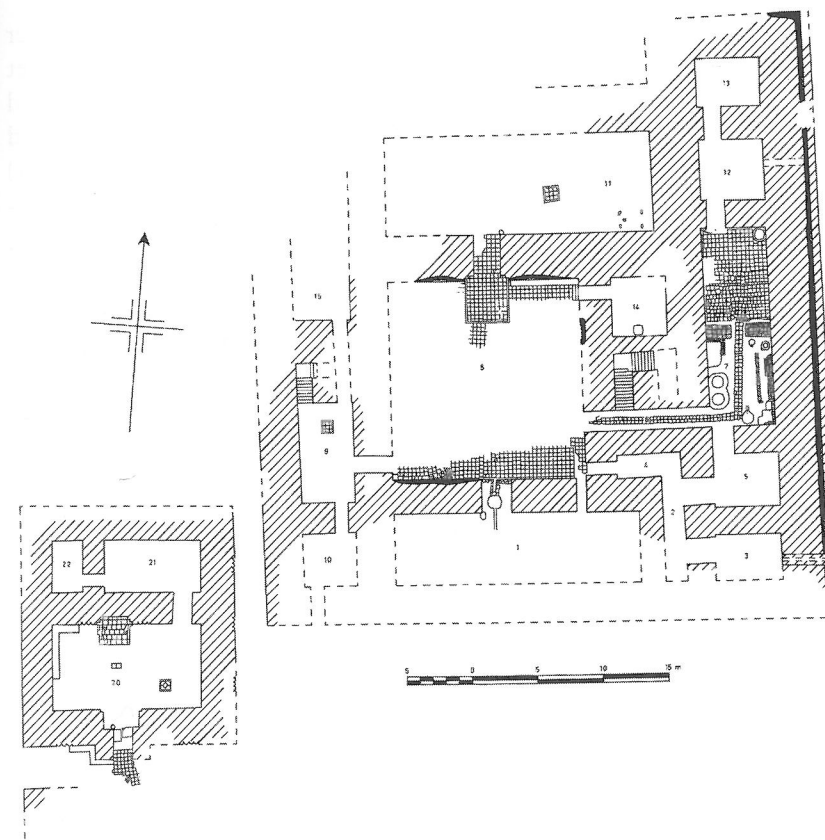


Fig. 10.15 Brak Mitanni palace (upper right) and temple (lower left).

period luxury items, including glass vessels and beads, alabaster jars, and ivory and wood furniture components. Also notable is a small limestone statue of a seated male (fig. 10.6, right); while the piece is crude and its face destroyed, it provides a rare example of sculpture in the round from the Mitannian sphere. A sample of tablets includes legal cases heard by the Mitannian kings Artashumara and Tushratta sealed with a dynastic cylinder seal bearing the name of their predecessor Saustatar (fig. 10.19c).⁴⁵

Upstream from Brak on the Jaghjagh is Tell al-Hamidiya, probably ancient Taide, one of the Mitannian political centers. Excavated since 1983, this 20 ha tell has a sequence of palaces constructed on its summit estimated at a formidable 250 × 250 m in area and 14 m high.⁴⁶ The earliest palace phase ostensibly dates to the Mitannian period, but little relevant evidence has been provided thus far. Further east, the only Mitannian period evidence thus far

⁴⁵ A tablet from Umm el-Marra in western Syria had the same sealing and was dated to the reign of Saustatar's descendant Shuttarna.
⁴⁶ Eichler and Wäfler 1989–90.

at Leilan consists of wealthy burials discovered on different parts of the lower town; a Mitannian elite building crowning the highest point of the site may yet be encountered. Such a state of affairs seems to apply at nearby Mohammed Diyab, where Mitannian period occupation is restricted to the tell summit and includes a thick-walled large-scale building of unclear function (Operation 1) and an area with domestic architecture and a small one-room temple (Operation 3, level 7).⁴⁷ A small temple has also been reported from Tell Chuera, constructed atop the abandoned third-millennium ruin. In contrast, Mitannian occupations on low, secondary sites adjacent to major third-millennium tells have been identified at Beydar and Arbid.

In the middle Khabur valley, where Middle Bronze Age occupation is virtually unknown, a substantial Mitannian period occupation was installed atop the third-millennium tell at Bderi.⁴⁸ Here, residential architecture erected on a mudbrick terrace included an elite house with a large circular storage structure, a type replicated in soundings elsewhere at the site. A nearby rural settlement has been attested at Umm Qseir, while another small Mitanni period village has been briefly sounded at Tell Hwesh north of Hasseke in the southern Khabur triangle.⁴⁹

The Middle Assyrian imperial system

In the late fourteenth and thirteenth centuries, the kings of Assur on the Tigris in present-day northern Iraq took advantage of Mitannian weakness and established their own empire in the Jezireh. The conjunction of archaeological and textual evidence has recently furnished abundant data on the Middle Assyrian empire in the Jezireh and on the transformation of the region under Assyrian rule.⁵⁰ In the reign of Shalmaneser I (mid-thirteenth century), a provincial system was established with its headquarters on the lower Khabur at Dur-Katlimmu, modern Sheikh Hamad, connected to Assur via a direct east-west route across the dry steppe. The Middle Assyrian evidence recovered at Dur-Katlimmu includes the fragmentary remains of a large building with vaulted doorways and mudbrick floors, probably the governor's palace, and an archive of some 500 administrative texts fallen from a second story.⁵¹ According to the Dur-Katlimmu tablets, a tight control was exercised by the Assyrian administrative system, which was supervised by a local governor and a royal official who visited the site at intervals. The archaeological reflection of this new administrative system is provided by the emergence, for the first time, of a three-tiered settlement pattern in the lower Khabur valley; Middle Assyrian

⁴⁷ Sauvage 1997. ⁴⁸ Pfälzner 1990. ⁴⁹ Tsuneki and Miyake 1998; Berthier 1990.

⁵⁰ Assyrian history is divided into three periods, Old Assyrian c. 2000–1750 BC, Middle Assyrian, c. 1400–1000 BC, and Neo-Assyrian, c. 1000–609 BC.

⁵¹ Kühne 1983–4.

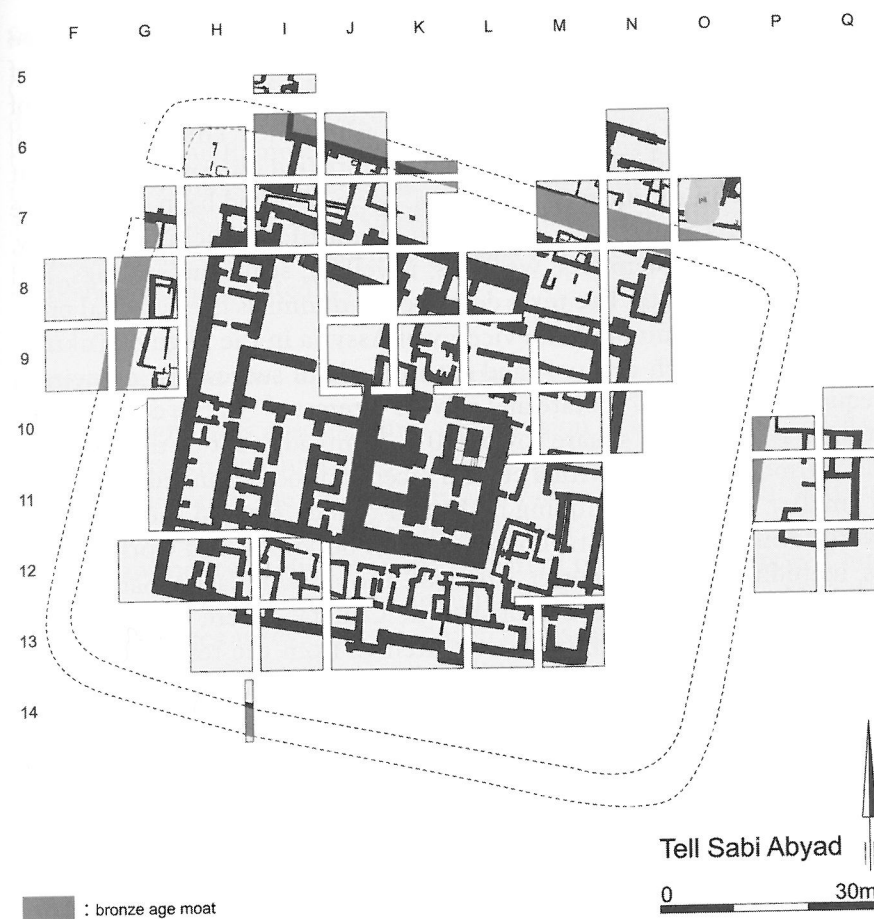


Fig. 10.16 The fortified Middle Assyrian outpost at Sabi Abyad.

control points along the route to Assur have likewise been identified by surface survey in the Wadi 'Ajj east of Dur-Katlimmu.⁵² Assyrian imperial control is also evinced by the centralized production of a standard pottery repertoire throughout the Jezireh (see fig. 10.3d–g).⁵³

The choice of Dur-Katlimmu in the dry lower Khabur as capital of the Jezireh may reflect its central location, relative proximity to Assur, and distance from traditional local centers of power. Noting the dry climate of the region, the excavators have inferred the importance of irrigation agriculture, and they assign the traces of a canal running parallel to the east bank of the Khabur to the Middle Assyrian period, although the dating of canal systems is often problematic.

⁵² Bernbeck 1993. ⁵³ Pfälzner 1997b.

Lower-level nodes of Middle Assyrian imperial control have also been identified elsewhere in the Jezireh. In the Balikh valley at the western frontier of the empire, an administrative center was installed atop the Neolithic tell of Sabi Abyad, not far from a farmstead at Khirbet esh-Shenef. The small (2–3 ha) community was centered around a 60 m square fortified outpost (*dunnu*) that has been excavated in its entirety (fig. 10.16). Because it had been burned, the occupation yielded a remarkable array of *in situ* artifacts including pottery, grinding tools, bone implements, weapons, jewellery, seals and sealings, and over 300 cuneiform tablets. The texts describe the *dunnu* as the personal property of Ili-ipadda, chief minister and viceroy of Assyria in the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I (late thirteenth century) and his immediate successors, evincing a not infrequent intersection of state and private interests.⁵⁴ In the center of the installation was a massive square tower (20 × 23 m) adjacent to the palace of Ili-ipadda, a tripartite edifice with a central reception room flanked on its long sides by smaller chambers including baths and toilets. Around the tower and palace were administrative units, houses, storage buildings, and workshops of all kinds, including those of a potter, a brewer, and a baker. East of Sabi Abyad, another Assyrian outpost was established at Chuera, where a large public building also contained an administrative archive from the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I. The texts call the place Harbu ("ruin"), referring to the immense Early Bronze tell it was built on top of; the settlement functioned primarily as a station along the road from the Khabur to the Balikh.⁵⁵

In the upper Khabur, traces of Middle Assyrian occupation have been detected at Tell Amouda, Mohammed Diyab, Barri, and Hamidiya. A palace must have existed at the latter site, given the evidence of fragmentary foundation inscriptions found there. At Tell Fakhariyah near the sources of the Khabur, the brief 1940 excavation uncovered a thirteenth-century building on the acropolis consisting of small rooms around a pebbled courtyard, including a bathroom with baked-brick floor and toilet inserted into a niche in the wall, indicative of a prosperous household.⁵⁶ Carved ivory fragments found below the Iron Age palace seem to date to this occupation as well.

An unusual discovery revealed possible evidence of Middle Assyrian occupation at Mari in the ruins of the Zimrilim palace. Here, some 150 graves were excavated by Parrot on or below the floors of the palace courtyards or smaller rooms, including individuals interred inside two jars placed mouth to mouth. The three richest burials included frit vessels and masks, gold jewelry, and Egyptian New Kingdom scarabs. While Parrot associated these graves with an Assyrian garrison stationed at Mari, this interpretation remains to be substantiated.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Akkermans and Rossmesl 1990; Akkermans *et al.* 1993; Akkermans and Wiggermann 1999; Lyon 2000; Wiggermann 2000.

⁵⁵ Orthmann 1995:185–222. ⁵⁶ McEwan 1958.

⁵⁷ Parrot 1938:81–4; Margueron *et al.* 1993:15–19.

Southern Syria

Contemporaneous texts indicate that southern Syria was in the Egyptian orbit during most of the Late Bronze Age, a situation corroborated by stela of Seti I from Qadesh and Rameses II from Keswe near Damascus.⁵⁸ The first historical mention of Damascus occurs in the texts of Thutmose III, and excavations at nearby Tell Sakka have exposed Late Bronze Age pillared houses. At Tell Ashtara in the western Hawran, perhaps ancient Ashtaroth, a metallurgical workshop was excavated.⁵⁹

General trends in Late Bronze Age Syria

Although Syria was absorbed into a succession of empires in the Late Bronze Age, local traditions remained very much in force. For example, northwest Syria's inclusion in the Hittite political system is evident from Hittite bullae, stamp seals, and other inscribed material at Fray, Emar, Ugarit, and Alalakh, with the influence of Hittite art also apparent in the Emar glyptic,⁶⁰ but Syrian material culture traditions are otherwise predominant. The Mitannian and Egyptian empires are even less visible in terms of administrative control, with a cultural and economic autonomy evident at sites like Munbaqa and Ugarit, although elite styles such as Nuzi Ware were peculiar to the Mitannian sphere and some architectural novelties are discernible in the plans of the Alalakh IV and Brak Mitanni palaces. In contrast, the Middle Assyrian imperial system was orientated towards direct control, with a reorganization of settlement patterns and infusion of new material culture types.

Citing the Alalakh IV and Ugarit documents, Mario Liverani⁶¹ has emphasized the extensive power and exploitative character of large royal establishments in the Late Bronze period, a power corroborated by the opulence of the large palatial complexes found at Alalakh, Ugarit, and Ras ibn Hani. Yon⁶² has suggested that the increasing urban density of Late Bronze Ugarit can be attributed to an influx of rural populations intent on benefiting economically from proximity to the royal establishment. She interprets the distribution of luxury items such as ivories and alabaster jars in the private houses at Ugarit in a similar vein, positing that the urban dwellers profited from their association with royal prosperity. However, McClellan⁶³ has observed that such evidence is largely restricted to the Syrian coast, while sites in the interior rarely evince archaeological evidence of an extensive palatial establishment. In the middle

⁵⁸ Taraqqi 1999.

⁵⁹ Abou Assaf 1968. Note also the fortification wall detected at Salihyeh near Damascus (von der Osten 1956).

⁶⁰ Beyer 2001. ⁶¹ Liverani 1975, 1987.

⁶² Yon 1992. Note that the partitioning of houses cited by Yon might instead be interpreted as the division of familial property (Schloen 2001).

⁶³ McClellan 1992.

Euphrates, for example, the importance of non-royal communal authorities is apparent from both the material culture and the textual evidence.

Evidence of socio-economic organization is available, not only from palaces, but from excavated domestic contexts. Distinct house types can be observed,⁶⁴ such as multi-room courtyard houses at Ugarit (fig. 10.12a), large houses with corridor rooms along one side at Alalakh (fig. 10.12b), central-room houses organized around a large roofed chamber, especially common at Munbaqa (fig. 10.12c), and front-room houses, particularly common at Emar (fig. 10.12d). Given the scale and associated finds, McClellan has tentatively suggested an association of the front-room type with households whose members were in the employ of larger institutions, as opposed to larger house types associated with households with greater economic autonomy. Certainly the central-room houses of Munbaqa and Bazi often exhibit evidence of craft production on the household level. It is striking that courtyards are usually absent in Late Bronze Syrian houses, except for Ugarit, suggesting that open-air activities (e.g. cooking) took place outside the house in a communal setting, a reversal of the previous trend towards privacy and the insulation of household activities.

As in earlier periods, the long-room temple *in antis* is common in western Syria (fig. 10.9), with diverse variations on the theme, while temple architecture in the Jezireh has "Mesopotamian" traits such as the engaged brick half-columns at Brak. Defensive architecture is sometimes absent (e.g. Emar, Abu Danne, Umm el-Marra, Hammam et-Turkman), but fortifications are well attested at Ugarit, Ras ibn Hani, Alalakh, and numerous middle Euphrates sites. A further trend in the architecture of Late Bronze Syria is the integration of wood into the usual mudbrick or stone constructions, especially in elite contexts. Walls are often reinforced by wooden beams or are augmented with wooden panels, and wooden thresholds, door frames, and columns are also well attested.

With respect to economy, we find coastal Syria extensively involved in the maritime trade of the Late Bronze eastern Mediterranean, manifested by the extensive quantities of Cypriot and Mycenaean pottery and other exotic items found in the coastal sites. Cyprus, probably ancient Alashiya, saw the emergence of complex, urban societies by the mid-second millennium and became actively involved in the export of copper, pottery, and other products.⁶⁵ Other eastern Mediterranean complex societies in Egypt, Palestine, and the Aegean were also tied into this prosperous network of exchange. The shipwrecks excavated off the coast of Turkey at Uluburun and Cape Gelidonya provide graphic examples of the raw and finished goods changing hands across the eastern Mediterranean. In the extraordinarily rich cargo of the Uluburun wreck, datable to the late fourteenth century, were copper, tin and glass ingots, elephant tusks, hippopotamus teeth, and stacked Cypriot pottery.⁶⁶ The excellent state of preservation afforded by these underwater sites, as well as the recovery of

⁶⁴ McClellan 1997. ⁶⁵ Knapp 1992. ⁶⁶ Bass 1989.

commercial cargoes *in situ*, provides an invaluable contribution to our understanding of Late Bronze economy and trade.

The material and textual evidence demonstrate that Syrian involvement in the eastern Mediterranean sea trade was mainly restricted to the coastal regions. In the middle Euphrates, for example, the material culture is largely autonomous, with few traces of western ceramics or other objects, and the local texts are similarly insular in character. Nevertheless, a concentration on commerce, if only on a local scale, is evident from the proliferation of stone weights at both coastal and interior Late Bronze sites, typically biconical or cylindrical in shape.

The basic subsistence patterns observed in the Early and Middle Bronze eras remain in place in Late Bronze Syria, including the predominance of sheep/goat pastoralism and barley/wheat cultivation.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, changes in faunal assemblages can be noted. Humped zebu cattle, imported from India, are a novelty on the Syrian scene,⁶⁸ and increasing numbers of equid remains have been associated with donkey caravans used for overland trade.⁶⁹ Horses, first evident in the third-millennium Near East, also grew in importance with the popularity of the light two-wheeled horse-drawn chariot, a major innovation in the military technology of the period.⁷⁰ Although the introduction of the chariot has sometimes been attributed to Indo-Aryan immigrants to the Near East, more recent research suggests an indigenous origin.⁷¹ Associated with elite groups such as the *maryanni* class of the Mitannian kingdom, chariots used in the hunt or in war are depicted in the aristocratic art of the period such as the gold bowls from Ugarit (fig. 10.10) or an engraved goat horn from Emar.

Specialist studies of stone implements from the recent excavations at Ugarit have provided a rare source of data on everyday household and craft activities in a flourishing Late Bronze city. Elliott's study of the ground stone⁷² provides a typology and functional analysis of implements such as pestles, pounders, spindle whorls, loom weights, and mortars. The Syrian Late Bronze ground-stone industry shows considerable homogeneity in form and function, and the basalt tripod mortar is a particularly common type throughout the Levant in the second and early first millennium BC. Elliott's petrographic and mineral analyses have also demonstrated that basalt implements were exported from Syria to Cyprus. In his study of lithics from Ugarit, Coqueugniot⁷³ notes the abundant distribution of flint sickles and other tools in each house, indicating a continued use of flint long after the introduction of metal, as well as the participation of urban households in agricultural labor. Sickles in the second millennium tended to be of the Large Geometric variety,⁷⁴ consisting of individual blades inserted into a crescentic handle.

⁶⁷ Van Zeist and Bakker-Heeres 1985.

⁶⁸ Clason and Buitenhuis 1997; Matthews 1995:98. ⁶⁹ Boessneck and von den Driesch 1986.

⁷⁰ See Holland 1993-4 and Vila 1998 on evidence for the early appearance of the horse in Syria.

⁷¹ Littauer and Crowell 1979. ⁷² Elliott 1991.

⁷³ Coqueugniot 1991. ⁷⁴ Rosen 1997.

Elite art, especially profuse at the opulent coastal center of Ugarit, demonstrates a pronounced internationalism in this period, corresponding to the intensified exchange of goods, personnel, and information throughout the eastern Mediterranean. Aegean and Egyptian elements are widespread, as well as Anatolian and Mesopotamian artistic motifs.⁷⁵ Among the celebrated examples of elite art are the gold bowls from Ugarit depicting hunting scenes (fig. 10.10), while other gold objects more widely distributed include "Astarte" pendants portraying a nude female figure, sometimes with a curled Hathor hairstyle, and star, rosette, and circular disc pendants. Ivory furniture components from Ugarit have elaborate carved scenes of deities, kings, animals, and mythological creatures, and other ivory pieces such as duck-shaped boxes have been retrieved from Alalakh, Brak, Beydar, and Fakhariyah. Caubet and Poplin⁷⁶ have shown that hippopotamus ivory was used for many Syrian Middle and Late Bronze objects, but elephant ivory was reserved for larger and more elaborate pieces. It is likely that hippopotamus and elephant populations still survived in Syria – the Egyptian pharaoh Thutmose III boasts of hunting elephants in the land of Niya, probably the Ghab depression, and archaeological sites have yielded elephant remains.⁷⁷

Monumental art in Late Bronze Syria is again best represented at Ugarit, where stone stelae representing deities have been recovered in considerable number,⁷⁸ primarily from the acropolis temple area. The representations of a standing god bearing weapons, and in one case a spear with sprouting vegetation, are traditionally identified with the young warrior deity Baal (fig. 10.17), while a venerable seated figure revered on another stele is thought to be the old god El. Egyptian elements and stances are often integrated into the stelae, such as the posture of the smiting god with upraised arm and the Egyptian *was*- and *hiq*-scepters. The smiting god wearing a short kilt is also attested in a well-documented class of small bronze statues from Ugarit and other Levantine sites (fig. 10.18), often covered in gold or silver leaf and frequently wearing the tall Egyptian "white crown." In contrast, stone sculpture in the round is relatively rare and typically crude in manufacture (e.g. the Idrimi statue of Alalakh, the Brak Mitanni palace statue, and statues with extremely simplified features from a diversity of sites; a rare exception derives from Ugarit⁷⁹).

A significant technological and artistic innovation of the Late Bronze Age was the production of glass vessels and other glazed objects.⁸⁰ The technique of core forming was introduced, involving the application of molten glass around a disposable clay core, and multi-colored mosaic glass was produced through the employment of different metal colorants. It appears that this important development occurred first in the Mitannian kingdom, with a range of examples from Alalakh and Brak in Syria, where glass ingots were also discovered, as well

⁷⁵ Smith 1965; Feldman 2002. ⁷⁶ Caubet and Poplin 1987.

⁷⁷ Clason and Buitenhuis 1997. ⁷⁸ Yon 1991.

⁷⁹ Yon 1995:25, fig. 5. ⁸⁰ Moorey 1994.



Fig. 10.17 Stele of "Baal" from Ugarit.

as Tell al-Rimah and Nuzi in northern Iraq. The production of faience, a fired silicate product like glass but non-vitreous, also intensified in this period, and the first glazed pottery is attested at sites like Alalakh, Ugarit, Umm el-Marra, Brak and Nuzi.⁸¹

The use of faience, or more properly sintered quartz, was particularly apparent in the production of cylinder seals in the Mitannian period. Brightly colored glazed seals of the Mitannian "common style," easily carved from an inexpensive material, were produced in great numbers and probably employed as much for personal ornamentation as for sealing documents.⁸² These seals are typified by the undisguised use of the drill, with repeating patterns of

⁸¹ Matoian and Bouquillon 1999. ⁸² Salje 1990.

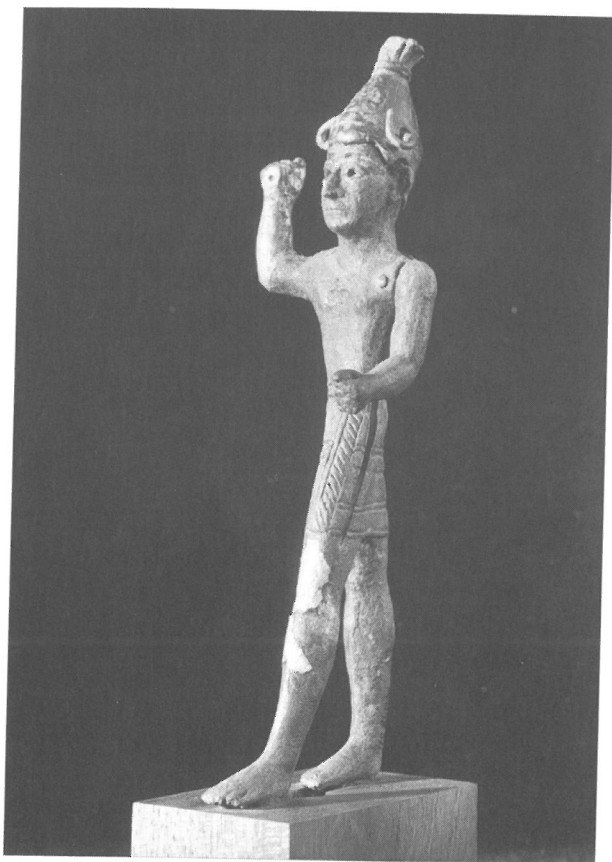


Fig. 10.18 Bronze statuette of smiting god from Ugarit.

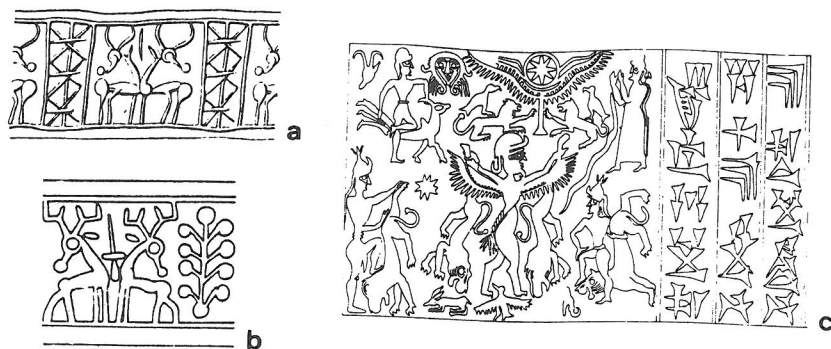


Fig. 10.19 Common (a-b) and elaborate style (c) Mitannian cylinder seals.

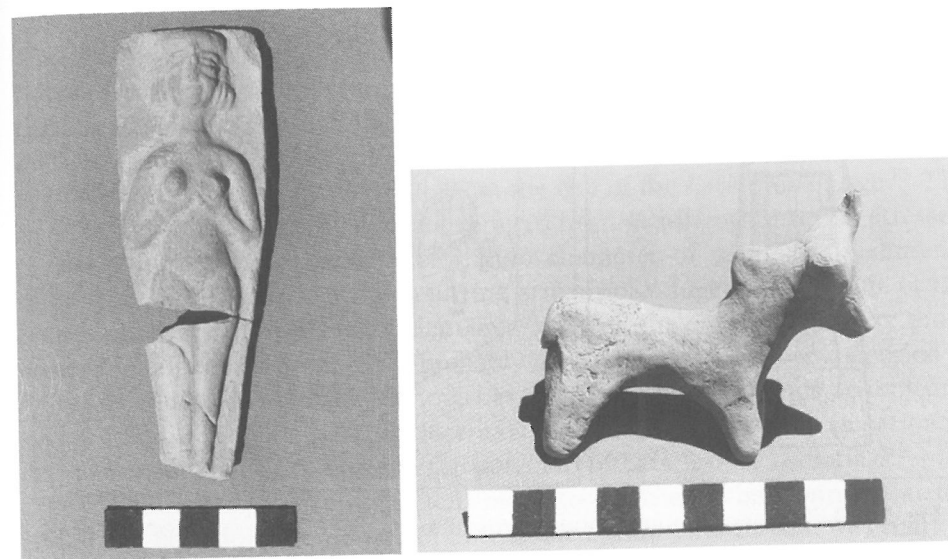


Fig. 10.20 Anthropomorphic female and humped bull figurine from Umm el-Marra.

humans and animals including frequent ritual scenes involving a stylized tree (fig. 10.19a-b). Some designs are distinctive enough to ascribe to specific workshops, as at Alalakh, Nuzi, Beth Shan in northern Palestine, and Ugarit, where an atelier was excavated. The Mitannian "elaborate"-style cylinder seals associated with elite individuals were made of stone and included more complex and carefully executed designs, often with exotic iconographic elements (fig. 10.19c). In this period, rulers often utilized the seals of earlier kings as "dynastic seals," ostensibly a legitimizing tactic emphasizing the rulers' illustrious ancestry.

After the Mitannian period, seals of Middle Assyrian style predominate in the Jezireh, characterized by balanced compositions with fantastic creatures, while Hittite stamp seals are found in the middle Euphrates and in western Syria. Scarab stamp seals, first introduced into the Levant in the Middle Bronze Age, remain popular into the first millennium. They were rarely employed for sealing and were probably used primarily for personal ornament.

More prosaic types of art provide evidence of popular ritual and belief, as opposed to the official ideologies reflected in monumental art and temple accoutrements. Clay mold-made figurines or plaques depicting nude females holding their breasts are common, as are clay bovid figurines, often of humped zebu (fig. 10.20). Terracotta models of houses and towers were retrieved in some numbers from domestic contexts at Emar (fig. 10.21);⁸³ the house models seem to conform to the typical Emar house, consisting of a rectangular set of rooms

⁸³ Muller 1998.

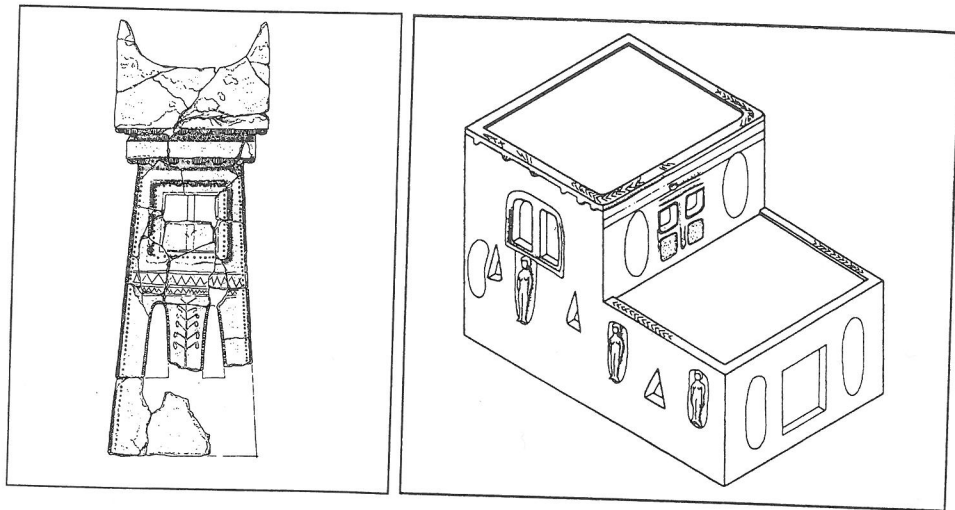


Fig. 10.21 Tower and house models from Emar.

surmounted by a smaller second story. Emar also yielded numerous incised miniature tables with burned residues, perhaps incense burners. As is often the case, the functional or symbolic interpretation of these types of objects remains ambiguous. Better understood are the clay models of sheep livers found at Ugarit, Alalakh, and sites in the middle Euphrates, used for divining the future in accordance with the traditional Mesopotamian practice of extispicy.

The great collapse

Around 1200 BC, the great urban centers and political systems of the eastern Mediterranean world experienced a period of crisis and collapse.⁸⁴ This episode, bringing the Late Bronze Age to its end, provides us with our second major case of socio-political disintegration in ancient Syrian complex societies. The great Late Bronze urban centers of Ugarit and Emar were destroyed, never to be reoccupied, and other regional centers like Alalakh, Hammam et-Turkman, and Brak were abandoned by the period's end. Further, the "great powers" of the era saw their power reduced or completely obliterated: the Hittite capital Hattusha was burned and the Hittite state eradicated, Egypt's imperial involvement in Asia was curtailed, and the centers in Mycenaean Greece and Cyprus suffered decline and destruction. Although the Middle Assyrian rulers held on to their empire in Syria for some time, they too found their dominions and power significantly reduced by the mid-eleventh century. Given this instability, the extensive maritime trade conducted between the rulers of the eastern Mediterranean came to an end.

⁸⁴ Ward and Joukowsky 1992.

Traditionally, this series of events has been attributed to an invasion of the "Sea Peoples" migrating from diverse parts of the Mediterranean towards the Levant. Although tablets from Ugarit allude to impending danger, the role of the Sea Peoples in the downfall of Late Bronze urban systems has been much debated, and it now seems likely that foreign invasion was only one of many variables contributing to the troubles at the end of the Late Bronze Age.⁸⁵ The Late Bronze socio-political systems suffered from significant internal stresses, particularly the increasingly exploitative character of royal establishments in centers like Ugarit and the resulting stream of refugees opting out of the oppressive system. Agricultural demands made on the environment like those posited for the Early Bronze Age probably applied here as well, and a period of dry years could have wreaked serious havoc on an already strained agricultural system. Some scholars have, in fact, made a case for climatic desiccation in this period and its central role in the downfall of Late Bronze societies.⁸⁶

Lest we overemphasize the extent of destruction and abandonment at the end of the period, it should be noted that the Syrian Late Bronze was marked by numerous destructions throughout its history, with sites like Munbaqa, Hama, Alalakh, Mohammed Diyab, and others burned repeatedly. Further, the burning of urban centers at the end of the Late Bronze Age did not preclude their subsequent partial reoccupation, as in the case of Ras ibn Hani or Ras el-Bassit near Ugarit. Nevertheless, the socio-political configuration, material culture, and linguistic makeup of Syria changed significantly in the period that followed.

⁸⁵ Oren 2000. ⁸⁶ Neumann and Parpola 1987; Brentjes 1982.

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