

LATE OLD SYRIAN FORTIFICATIONS AND MIDDLE SYRIAN RE-OCCUPATION ON THE WESTERN RAMPART AT TELL MARDIKH-EBLA

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INTRODUCTION

Over the last eight seasons of excavation at Tell Mardikh-Ebla, the renewed investigations of the Middle Bronze defensive system (MATTHIAE 1997, 10–12; 1998, 572–588; 2000a, 580–600; 2000b, 1032–1035; 2001; 2002, 547–558; PEYRONEL 2000; in press) have identified the presence of forts and fortresses spaced at short intervals (250/300 m) on the top of the 3.5 km long earthen rampart. Some of them must have been connected to city-gates, and others were devoted to the control of sections of the city-wall.

Excavations of large tracts especially of the Western, Northern and Eastern rampart brought to light several buildings: the Western Fort, the Northern Fort, the large bastion flanking the as yet unexcavated ‘Aleppo’ Gate, the North-East city Gate (the so-called ‘Steppe Gate’), the Fortress East-North-East (Area EE). Moreover the Fortress East-South-East in Area M (discovered in 1971) was partially cleaned and re-examined; finally the restoration of the well-known South-West city-gate has involved the excavations of some rooms in the inner part of its southern bastion (Fig. 1).

The Western Fort (Fig. 2) runs along a major South-North axis for a length of 70 m and includes several units arranged around an open upper courtyard which connects the main units by means of an intricate system of staircases and ramps (PEYRONEL 2000, 1354–1357, fig. 1; MATTHIAE 2001, 44–46, fig. 8). The architectural organization of the Northern Fort seems to be quite different, with the absence of a large open courtyard with a connecting ramp: several building phases have been identified, dating from the MB IB–II, with major changes in the arrangement of the inner space during MB II, when some rooms were deliberately filled with mud bricks. Nevertheless, it is possible to point to a number of features common to the two complexes: the position of the Fortress at the north-western edge; the presence of rows of chambers along the major north axis; the

existence of terraces at different levels (MATTHIAE 2001, 46–48; 2002, 547–552).

The architectural and spatial analysis of the defensive buildings on the Eastern and Western rampart has shown that only isolated bastions (Fortress East-North-East and East-South-East) are apparently located on the eastern side of the urban Eblaic fortification (PEYRONEL in press). They were massive rectangular buildings used as arsenals/towers and they were built on the middle/upper part of the rampart inner slope, but not on the top and partially projecting outside as in the opposite western rampart. On the contrary it is now ascertained that further intricate complexes (Western and Northern Forts) in which bastions are only one of the inner architectural units were planned on the western rampart. The main city-gates (SW and NW) are defended by huge circular or square towers with chambers on the inner or outer sides; on the contrary, the evidence from the NE and SE gates (the so-called ‘Euphrates Gate’ and ‘Steppe Gate’) suggests a simpler organization without massive bastions (MATTHIAE 1989, 141–147; 2001, 34–40). In spite of these differences, forts and fortresses are certainly part of a planned urban project of the Old Syrian town, they were under the control of high officials, and therefore they were a direct expression of royal power (PINNOCK 2001; PEYRONEL in press).

This contribution deals with the evidence concerning the last phase of the Western Fort (MB IIB) and that relating to the re-occupation of the area immediately after the siege and the destruction of the Old Syrian town, namely during the Late Bronze I(A), trying to define the chronology of the area in this period through the stratified ceramic materials and other diagnostic finds. The Middle and Late Bronze sequence of Area V spans from the construction of the massive earthenwork rampart at the beginning of Middle Bronze I (Phase 1, beginning of the II Mill. BC, *c.* 2000/1950 BC), till the re-occupation of the Fort area with private dwellings created

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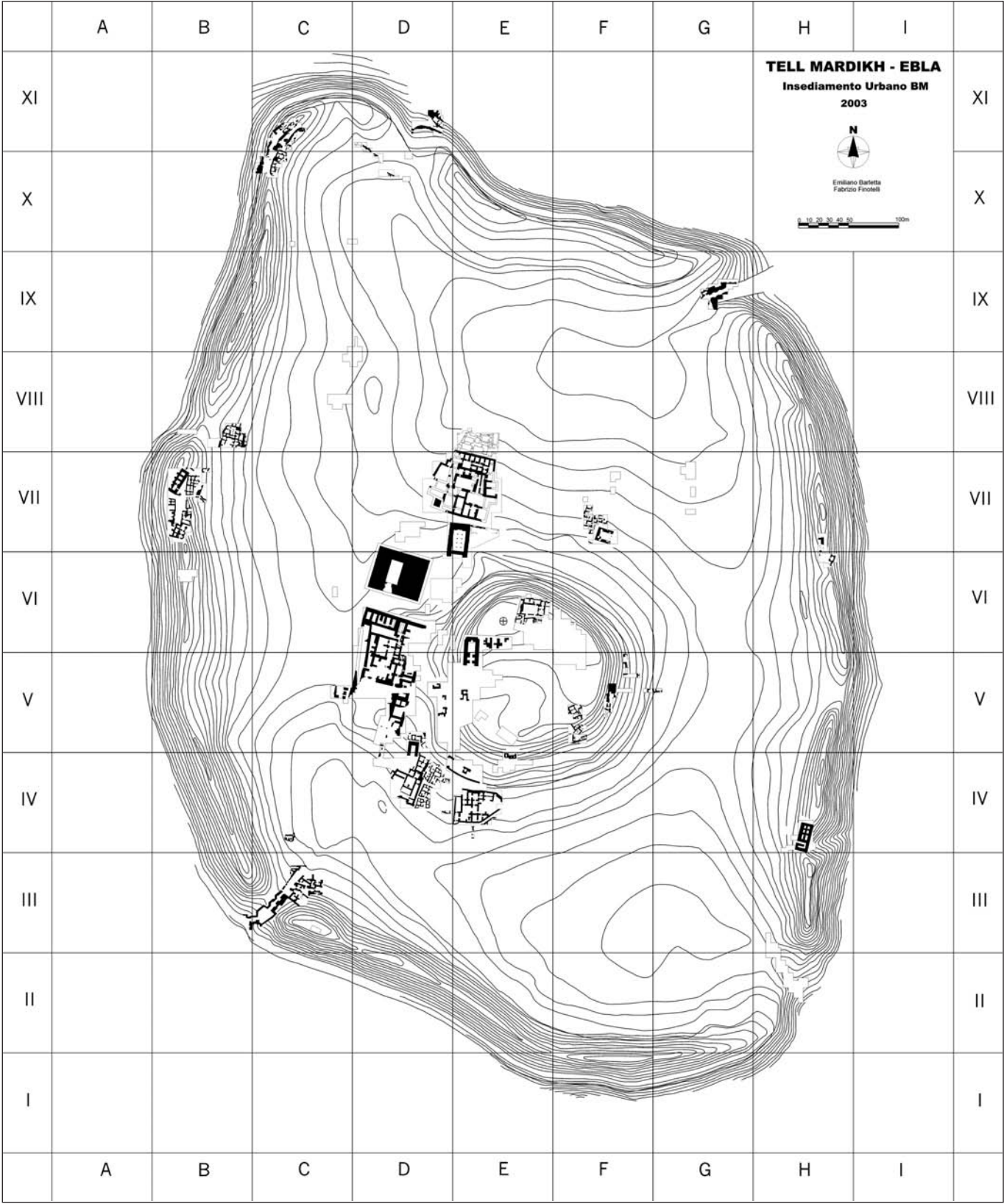


Fig. 1 Topographic plan of Tell Mardikh-Ebla



Fig. 2 Western Fort. Aerial view

partially dismantling the eastern retaining wall, and by re-using some rooms of the upper western wing (Phase 4, c. 1550–1400 BC).¹

THE MIDDLE BRONZE II – THE WESTERN FORT

As referred to above, the Western Fort is an intricate and functionally diversified complex with several quarters or units organized around the upper central courtyard (L.6315+L.6621) (Fig. 3). These units are not always on the same axis, because they follow the curve of the rampart, which was planned in order to control the foot of the fortification. The western structures of the Fort collapsed outside and the plan cannot always be integrated, especially as regards the external system of retaining walls. The South wing was divisible into two different units: the South-East is connected with the court through a staircase and pivots upon a room (L.6427), devoted to primary activities related with food processing and preparation, as revealed by several grinding facilities found *in situ* on the floors together with simple and preservation wares (Fig. 4); the South-West unit, located on the outer slope of the rampart,

is characterized by a large rectangular room, with the entrance from the court flanked by orthostatic limestone slabs, and could be considered a kind of treasury. A third south-eastern sector is characterized by two parallel rectangular courts paved with flat basalt stones, reached from the central court through a small square vestibule with a staircase on one side. In all the units mentioned, the floors were sealed by the destruction layers which yielded large amounts of pottery dating to the last phase of the MB II (Mardikh IIIB2). The central courtyard is flanked on the western side by two separate groups of chambers with the typical architectural elements of the ‘palatial’ Old Syrian architecture, which seem to indicate residential functions for the western wing. It is important to underline that, in some of these rooms, we have identified an architectural phase dating from the LB I, which testifies to the re-occupation of parts of the fort after its destruction. The East is lower-lying and includes a ramp flanked by two wings with rows of small rooms, probably a block for soldiers and storing rooms with two peculiar chambers at the corners (Figs. 5–6).² The ramp

¹ For the complete sequence of Area V see PEYRONEL 2000, 1354. The rampart was quite probably built at the very beginning of the MB IA (beginning of the II Mill. BC), between the end of the EB IVB settlement and its use as burial area during the MB I (see MATTHIAE 1989, 140–143; 2001, 30–34). Recently published by F. Baffi Guardata (2000), the burials of the Western rampart show funerary pottery assemblages well-dated to the late MB IA and MB IB horizons of North Inner Syria. Among the most peculiar vessel types are the so-called Gublite bowl and the proto-carinated bowl for the MB IA; the bowl with high carination and out folded rim and the so-called collared bowl for

the MB IB (see also NIGRO 2000; 2002b). The Fort was probably built around the end of the XIX or at the beginning of the XVIII cent. BC, and the complex was used, with smaller architectural changes, until the end of the Middle Bronze Age (Mardikh IIIB; Area V Phase 3A–B, c. 1800–1600 BC), when heavy destruction brought the building to a sudden end. For historic and cultural considerations on the destruction of the Old Syrian town at the end of the XVII cent. BC, see MATTHIAE 1989, 55–56; 2002, 572–574; in press b; see also KLENGEL 1992, 80–83.

² Cf. *infra* note 20 for an hypothesis on the function of these rooms.



Fig. 3 Western Fort. The upper courtyard and related units with the modern village of Tell Mardikh in the foreground



Fig. 4 Western Fort. South-East unit with grinding facilities *in situ*

connects the upper court to an irregular narrow court parallel to the eastern external wall of the Fort which is a huge structure more than 3 m large, with the main entrance to the fortified complex from the Lower Town (Fig. 7). This wall intersects the northern retaining wall, very badly preserved but still recognizable on the inner slope of the rampart. Finally, the north-western corner is occupied by the massive rectangular bastion named Fortress V

(Fig. 8), opening to the East into an irregular triangular court (PEYRONEL 2000, figs. 2–3). The Fortress is composed of a wide vestibule (L.6522) and of 6 non-communicating chambers 3 by 4 m large. From the vestibule the upper floor is accessible by a staircase, the understairs and the room L.6516. All of the rooms were filled with thick layers of ash and burnt bricks from the destruction of the Fort, as a consequence of the fire which spread throughout the



Fig. 5 Western Fort. L.7400



Fig. 6 Western Fort. L.7113



Fig. 7 Western Fort. The eastern external wall with the entrance



Fig. 8 Western Fort. The Fortress V



Fig. 9 Western Fort.
Burnt skeletons in front of the Fortress entrance

structure. A large amount of pottery and small finds was found in the vestibule and adjacent room. All of the materials must be attributable to the last phase of MB II (PEYRONEL 2000, 1359–1364). Also in the triangular court we have found thick layers of ash and burnt bricks and just in front of the entrance two completely burnt male skeletons were discovered lying directly on the paving, positive proof of the battle on the fortification during the siege of the Old Syrian town (Fig. 9).

A test-pit in one room of the Fortress has revealed that the construction of the building can be dated to the beginning of the MB IIA or slightly before, because of the presence of distinctive pottery types such as inturned-rim bowls related to the first floor. The same pottery horizon was recognized in the lowest level of the central courtyard of the Fort, where another probe was dug in order to test the chronological sequence.

The undisturbed archaeological deposits dating from the end of MB IIB which covered the majority of the structures, were produced by a single event, namely the destruction of the Fort during the siege of the city: due to the sudden nature of the event a large amount of pottery and small finds could be uncovered *in situ*. This enlarged the ceramic corpus of Mardikh IIIB2 (dating from the second half of the 18th century) most importantly with the addition of complete objects, as found in the destruction layers of the



Fig. 10 MB IIB pottery assemblage and grinding tools from the Fortress floor level

Western and Northern Palace, the Western Residence, the private houses in Area B and now by the Southern Palace (see MATTHIAE 1989, 216–220; NIGRO 1998, 282 and tab. 2; 2002a, 321–327; 2002b, 111–112; PINNOCK 2005).³

The quantitative evaluation of thousands of body fragments and several hundreds of rims and bases collected from undisturbed layers attributed to floors or to the debris collapsed over them is actually still in progress but it is possible to present here some general observation on the ceramic assemblage linked to the last phase of the Western Fort.

The pottery shows several diagnostic shapes of the Simple, Painted Simple, Kitchen, and Preservation Wares, frequently documented by complete specimens (Fig. 10). The most diagnostic shapes in Simple Ware are represented by small bowls of different sizes with thin flaring rim thinner at the edge, pronounced shoulders and ring-base and by the deep bowls with large flat base, gentle carination and swollen rim: they are known only during the MB IIB phase in conjunction with hemispherical bowls with an outwardly grooved rim; The same attributes are also attested in the Fort together with some examples of fine and thin-walled “Palatial” Ware or White-Slip Ware, an extremely fine metal-like production of a few basic shapes.⁴

The most peculiar type of large open vessel is the deep bowl with a gentle carination and out-turned expanded rim and flat base, usually in a whitish or yellow-whitish fabric, well-represented in the pottery assemblage of the Fort with several sub-types, whereas the in-turned rim bowl, which is the hallmark of the MB IIA period, continue being used, albeit their percentage in the Fort is very low (20% of the open shapes). Particularly worthy of mention among the closed Simple Ware shapes are the medium-size jars with combed decoration on the shoulder and double or everted rim (Fig. 11 left), and the ovoid jars or jugs again with combed decoration, with thickened band rim and slightly convex base, which can be rated the final evolution of types appearing during the MB IIA (Fig. 11 right).

Two interesting vessels were found in the Fortress room L.6516: the first is a fragmentary dipper juglet in greenish clay with pointed bottom, which is a very rare shape at Ebla; it shows striking analogies with juglets very common in Palestine at the end of the MB Period (PEYRONEL 2000, fig. 10b). The second is a pear-shaped juglet with button base and vertical black burnishing (Fig. 12; PEYRONEL 2000, fig. 10a). Black-Burnished-Ware is well known at Ebla during the MB IB and MB IIA, with inner stepped-rim bottles and juglets coming exclusively from burials, whereas open

³ For a revision of the pottery assemblage chronology of Hama H which belongs to the same ceramic area of Ebla during the Middle Bronze Age, see THUESEN, RIBBE 2000 and especially NIGRO 2002b.

⁴ For this specialized production see NIGRO 2003, 359–360 (Syrian White Slip Ware).



Fig. 11 MB IIB Simple Ware jars and cooking pot



Fig. 12 Black-Burnished piriform juglet from Fortress V (TM.96.V.4183)

shapes such as bar-handle bowls have been retrieved also in cultic or religious contexts (i.e. the *favissae* in Area P South) (NIGRO 2003, 351–353). This very peculiar metallic production almost completely disappears during MB IIB, and the specimen from the Fortress could be linked to a southern tradition since piriform juglets are widely attested in Palestine and in southern and coastal Syria during MB II–III.

Kitchen Ware is widely represented in the pottery

of the Fort, with several complete specimens found on the floors, sometimes near andirons or *tannur* (Fig. 13): the open shapes include large dishes with circular burnishings and thickened horizontal rim with an outer groove, typical of the later phase of MB II, inturned rim bowls and large bowls/dishes with carination and outwarded rim, all of them with burnishing inside and out. Cooking pots are attested by round types with everted square or simple rims (Fig. 11 middle) (PEYRONEL, SPREAFICO in press).

Several large and deep pottery vats and basins, decorated with ridges or combed grooves, were found scattered around several rooms of the building; they represent the peculiar equipment for keeping fresh water. Preservation jars are represented mainly by the types of *pithoi* with swollen rim and ridge decoration on the shoulder, usually at the junction between the wheel-made neck and the spiral-coiled body, although no definite storerooms have been identified, like the ones of the Northern Palace in the Lower Town (DOLCE 1990, 126–127).

Clay figurines fit very well into the general Eblaic typology of MB IIB elaborated by N. Marchetti, who recently published the corpus of the Middle Bronze materials from the 1964–1980 campaigns (MARCHETTI 2002; see also MARCHETTI 2000 and MARCHETTI in press). Out of more than 300 specimens from the Area V excavation, one half comes from the destruction layers of the MB IIB. Generally speaking, the assemblage from the Western Fort is characterized by mass-produced specimens with a lesser use of details in the case of the MB I and MB IIA choro-plastic: female figurines (c. 50 specimens) are always characterized by the basic type with hands clutching the breast (MARCHETTI 2000, fig. 21); males (c. 50



Fig. 13 Andiron and cooking pots in the vestibule of Fortress V



Fig. 14 Sealings from L.6516: a) TM.96.V.223; b) TM.96.V.214



Fig. 15 Sealing TM.96.V.180 from L.6516

specimens) show the predominance of riders and charioteers associated (MARCHETTI 2000, figs. 34, 36, 39) with chariots and chariot wheels (*c.* 20 specimens); Animals (*c.* 15 specimens) presenting mostly ram, equids and cattle.⁵

Among more than five hundreds small finds coming from the destruction layers of the Fort, those

which have the most important chronological bearing are certainly the seals and sealings: four cylinder seals, one Hyksos scarab and three sealings with impressions of two different cylinder seals were found in the Western Fort.

The sealings come from the Fortress room L.6516. Two brown-reddish clay sealings, which must be door-

⁵ Cf. for the MB IIB materials MARCHETTI 2000, 50–59 (females), 75–82 (males), 105–114 (quadrupeds), 126–128

(chariots and wheels); for distribution of types during the different MB phases, see 138–142.

sealings, showing the impression of a peg/knob with cord latching, bear single (TM.96.V.223; Fig. 14 left) and multiple (TM.96.V.214; Fig. 14 right) albeit incomplete impressions of the same cylinder (only the lower half visible) at the back (PEYRONEL 2000, 1362, fig. 14).⁶ However, the original scene can be reconstructed: the god Hadad/Ba'al holding the mace and the reins with the bull squatting at his foot and facing right is probably followed by the goddess Khepat/cAnat (almost completely missing) wearing a long cloak, and a human figure, with one hand raised in prayer, is standing in front of the two deities.⁷ A sealing from the destruction level of Sanctuary B2 (BAFFI GUARDATA 1979) with three impressions of the same cylinder showing two worshippers, a goddess and possibly a god, points to the presence of a distinctive style at Ebla characterized by a seal-cutting technique with extensive use of drill and cutting-wheel (in the seal, evident in the rein held by the god), identified for the first time by B. BUCHANAN (1970) and thought to be peculiar to the late Old Babylonian glyptic. In Syria this 'drilled' style is also attested at Alalakh VII (COLLON 1975, nn. 132–135), Ugarit (SCHAEFFER-FORRER 1983, 41-R.S.10.029, 45-R.S.20.53), Emar (BEYER 1990; 2001, 165–172 esp. D18–22) and Terqa (GUALANDI 1997, 150–151).⁸

The second seal is rolled three times on a completely burnt sealing (Fig. 15).⁹ It shows three figures and a very damaged cuneiform inscription in which it is still possible to read without doubt *dub-sar* 'scribe', and possibly the name *Te-ir-she*.¹⁰ On the left a goddess with a large cylindrical tiara dressing a *kaunakes* skirt receives two human figures: a child and a male character, both with hands raised in prayer. The style is engraved in a modelled late Old Syrian style, and it is arguable that the seal's owner was a high-ranking official of the fort.¹¹ It is difficult to trace a close parallel for the impression, although a cursory seal of

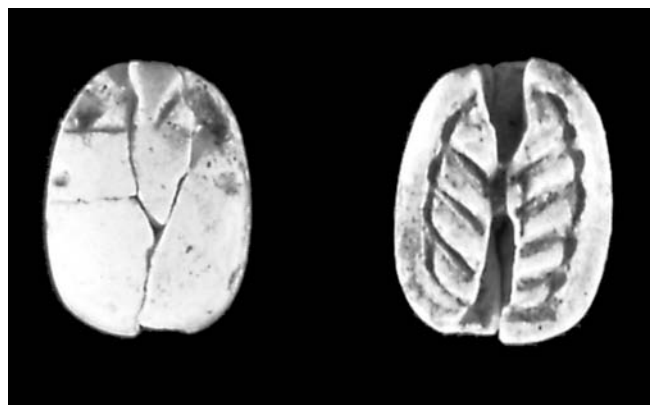


Fig. 16 Faience scarab TM.98.V.520



Fig. 17 Cylinder seal TM.97.V.160 (modern impression)



Fig. 18 Cylinder seal TM.97.V.240 (modern impression)

unknown provenance now in the Aleppo Museum (HAMMADE 1987, n. 151) shows two figures facing each other, the left one with a welcoming gesture and the other with one hand raised in greeting; between

⁶ TM.96.V.223: 3,3 × 3,5 cm, thick: 1,8 cm; TM.96.V.214: 2,6 × 2,4 cm, thick: 1,5. Both were found in L.6516 near the door.

⁷ The iconographies are peculiar to the Classic or Mature Old Syrian glyptic. The two gods are known at Ebla from the famous cylinder seal impression on jars, which probably belonged to the Crown Prince, son of King Imdilingur (MATTHIAE 1969; 1980, 114–117, fig. 14; 2000, 607–608, figs. 31–32; MATTHIAE *et al.* 1995, n. 242). For the shift to a Hadad predominance in the iconographic repertoire at Ebla during the MB II, see MATTHIAE 2003.

⁸ The use of a tubular drill in Syria seems to precede its introduction in Southern Mesopotamia and therefore cannot rule out the possibility of a Syrian influence on the late Old Babylonian production: see BEYER 2001, 171 and BAFFI GUARDATA in press.

⁹ TM.96.V.180; 3,2 × 2,9 cm, thick: 1,2 cm. The sealing was found on the floor near a group of small bronze and stone objects together with wooden burnt remains; therefore it was probably used to seal a wooden box, since the back shows also wooden impressions.

¹⁰ The read of the inscription was done by M.G. Biga whom I sincerely thank.

¹¹ If the read of the name Teirshe is correct, we could have an important clue to the presence of an official involved in the administration not only of the Western Fort, but of the defensive system in general, since a bronze spear-head inscribed with the same name and title was found in the Fortress East-South-East (Area M) on the eastern rampart: see DE MAIGRET 1976, 34; PEYRONEL in press, fig. 4.

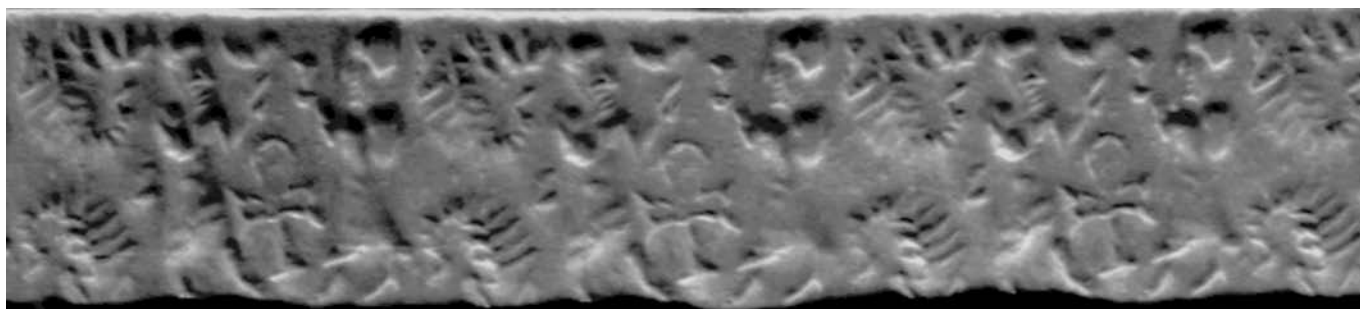


Fig. 19 Cylinder seal TM.98.V.70 (modern impression)

the characters, a third small figure is depicted facing right, and with one arm lifted (differing from this impression, where the child is turned towards the goddess and raises one hand in the same gesture of the worshipper).¹²

One Hyksos scarab in faience with whitish glaze dating from the Second Intermediate Period (Fig. 16) was found in one room (L.7405) of the eastern units south of the ramp.¹³ The back is of a simple type with lunate head and no lines dividing the elytra. It shows a fish-bone design, attested in a group scarabs from Palestine.¹⁴ It is probably attributable to the XIII–XV dynasties, although it is difficult to use it for a more precise chronological correlation.¹⁵

A steatite cylinder seal coming from the same room (Fig. 17; BAFFI GUARDATA in press, n. 3)¹⁶ can be easily ascribed to the Syro-Anatolian ‘common style’: it shows two figures facing left, a ball-and-staff symbol and a caprid. Several seals from Mardikh III belong to this glyptic style: they were previously dated by S. Mazzoni (1975; 1979; 1980) to the MB I (Mardikh IIIA, c. 2000–1800 BC),¹⁷ but recent findings from secure Mardikh IIIB contexts (such as the

case of our specimen) seem to point to a long-time span of use, until the end of the Old Syrian period (cf. BAFFI GUARDATA in press).

Another steatite seal from L.7108, a room of the eastern unit north of the ramp (Fig. 18; BAFFI GUARDATA in press, n. 6)¹⁸ is engraved in a cursory style with a banquet scene, which resembles the Syro-Anatolian ‘common glyptic’: a seated and a standing figure are placed on both sides of a schematic table bearing loaves and a globe; on the left, a double register divided by a simple line with a squatting sphinx and a goat below is seen. Symposia scenes are often represented especially in the archaic Old Syrian period and the double register frieze with animals and fantastic creatures (mainly sphinx or griffin) combined together frequently appears, usually during the mature and late periods (c. 1850–1600 BC).¹⁹

From L.7400, a small square room joined at the south-eastern corner of the eastern unit south of the ramp, comes a dark green steatite cylinder seal (Fig. 19).²⁰ It is a well-executed Old Syrian seal with two figures between a large *ankh* symbol and a crescent above.²¹ The left figure raises one hand in wor-

¹² We must bear in mind that the insertion of a small figure between two main figures is a scheme well known in a group of Old Syrian seals: see i.e. TEISSIER 1994, nn. 526–527, 529–530, 533, 540, 543.

¹³ TM.98.V.520; 1,7 × 1,3 cm, thick: 0,8 cm.

¹⁴ See i.e. the scarabs from the Jericho and Far‘ah South tombs: TUFNELL 1984, pl. I: 1007–1011; cf. KEEL 1995, 164.

¹⁵ On the chronology of the ‘Hyksos’ scarabs, see O’CONNOR 1985. For other MB scarabs found at Ebla, see MATTHIAE 1995, 678; SCANDONE MATTHIAE 1976; in press; for a general outline of the interrelations between Ebla and Egypt, see SCANDONE MATTHIAE 1997.

¹⁶ TM.97.V.160; h. 1,9 cm, d.: 0,8 cm.

¹⁷ Some seals were also published by H. Hammade (1994, nn. 378–387) and wrongly dated to 1700–1600 BC.

¹⁸ TM.97.V.240; h. 2,5 cm, d.: 0,9 cm.

¹⁹ Cf. i.e. BUCHANAN 1981, nn. 1222 (sphinx? and ibex), 1227

(griffin and antelope); TEISSIER 1984, nn. 447 (sphinx and ibex), 456 (sphinx and antelope); the frieze is usually divided by a scroll, but simple lines are also attested to.

²⁰ TM.98.V.70; h. 1,6 cm, d.: 0,6 cm. This room (see Fig. 5) has no entrance and was filled by an ash layer with crushed MB IIB pottery and small objects. It is a later addition as the specular room at the opposite north-eastern side of the ramp (L.7113). The latter room (Fig. 6) is characterized by a niche on the western wall with a round basalt stone at the bottom and could have acted as a shrine or chapel of the fort (cf. MATTHIAE 2001, 46). If this is the case we can postulate that L. 7400 is related to the chapel as a place where offerings were performed or remains of some ritual acts involving burning activities were kept.

²¹ For the presence of *ankh* in Syrian glyptic, see TEISSIER 1996, 158; OTTO 2000, 264–265.



Fig. 20 Cylinder seal TM.96.V.276 (modern impression)

ship and the right one holds a cup. A pair of scorpions with curved tails and segmented bodies flanking the human figures is depicted in a tête-bêche composition with a fork-like motif above.²² This seal belongs to the same mature Old Syrian group of the sealing TM.96.V.160 and should be dated to the XVII cent. BC; the scene with two standing men, one holding a cup and the second in a gesture of devotion, can be compared with a seal from Cyprus dating to MB IIA–B (c. 1850–1750 BC), where two characters and an *ankh* are depicted (SCHAEFFER-FORRER 1983, 64 Cyprus A13), and with a MB specimen found at Hattusa with a standing man and a seated figure holding a cup with a *ankh* below (OTTO 2000, n. 407). The scorpions, which – when the seal was rolled – flank the figures on both sides, and the large *ankh* symbol in the centre of the composition are clear reference to the fertility and ‘life’ themes and point to an interpretation of the scene as an homage to the king.

The most remarkable seal from the Fort is certainly the hematite small cylinder (MATTHIAE 1997, 11–12; PINNOCK 2000, 1400, fig. 3b) from the central quarter of the Fort from an MB level of bricks collapsed over the courtyard L.6621 (Fig. 20).²³ It is intact, with some abrasions and small chippings, and shows a scene with three characters and a vertical frieze divided by simple lines and by a rope motif into three parts. The main scene is represented by

three figures: the first on the left, wearing a long robe, is standing with one leg uncovered and stretched out whilst raising the left hand towards the second seated character, facing right, holding a small globular jar with neck and outturned horizontally expanded rim, dressed with a *kaunakes* skirt; the third figure, nude or with a short girdle, stands behind the seated man raising an unidentified vertical object. The scene is interpretable as an homage (by the first figure on the left) to a (deified?) king (the seated figure) with an attendant or servant to the back. Behind the presumed worshipper is a standard with schematic double human heads fastened to a pole (see OTTO 2000, 266–267), considered by H. SERVIG (1960) to the forerunner of the *semeion* described by Lucian of Samosata in *De Dea Syria* and now strongly linked to the North Inner Syrian milieu and Ebla, as P. Matthiae has recently pointed out (MATTHIAE 1994 and in press a).²⁴ The vertical frieze is divided into three superimposed parts, the upper with two unidentified symbols or objects, the middle with a figure of a crouching lion facing right and the lower with two human heads. The seal is dated to the late MB IB period or to the beginning of MB IIA, around the end of the XIX–beginning of the XVIII cent. BC. and it was probably kept in the Fort for its high symbolic value.²⁵

Summing up, the glyptic evidence from the Western Fort can be dated to the XVIII–XVII century BC and show different contemporary styles, from the Syro-Anatolian and schematic seals, to the drilled style specimen on the sealings, to the mature Old Syrian examples. This variety reflects the co-existence of different workshops at Ebla during the MB II, probably linked to a difference in the social position of the owners, as well as some possible chronological staggering. The production originated during the MB I and continued being used in the following phase side-by-side with new glyptic styles which can be rated peculiar to the last Old Syrian sphragistic (such as the very distinctive drilled style). However, the still limited group of seals from Mardikh IIIB prevent a

²² Pairs of scorpions frequently appear in Old Syrian glyptic (see i.e. COLLON 1975, nn. 97–101 for Alalakh; OTTO 2000, 256, nn. 207 (British Museum), 241 (Hatay Museum), 283, 285 (Marcopoli Coll.), albeit never in the specular representation with curved tail.

²³ TM.96.V.276; h. 1,7 cm. d.: 0,9 cm.

²⁴ See also MARCHETTI 2003 for a tablet from Sippar dating to the time of Hammurabi, bearing an Old Syrian cylinder seal impression showing the two-headed standard (fig. 1) and for a meaningful seal from Hammam et-Turkman

showing the king with peaked cap in front of a god with the pole with human heads at the back worshipped by a male figure (fig. 6). The ruler with the peaked cap (see TEISSIER 1993) was convincingly interpreted by P. MATTHIAE (1994) as the representation of the Eblaite king during the Old Syrian Period.

²⁵ The other seal with double head's standard was found in *favissa* F.5238, located on the Cisterns Square of the Ishtar's Sacred Area: MATTHIAE 1993, 659–660, fig. 25; MARCHETTI, NIGRO 1997, 32, fig. 19; MATTHIAE *et al.* 1995, n. 275.

definitive typological classification of the Eblaic material, with the exception of the Syro-Anatolian common style group. Finally, the presence of sealings in the Fortress points at the administrative control of the building, also indicated by several balancing weights found scattered over different rooms of the Fort (ASCALONE, PEYRONEL 2000).

THE LATE BRONZE I – THE DWELLINGS INSIDE THE RUINS OF THE WESTERN FORT

As previously remarked, after the destruction of the Fort, the Late Bronze I period (Mardikh IVA) is represented by two different kinds of stratigraphic and architectural evidence.

In the lower north-eastern part of the Fort, along the massive external wall, a dwelling unit was built by dismantling and re-using the stones of this wall. A room of this house (L.6352) was partially excavated and inside it, a fair amount of pottery and some objects were found *in situ* (Fig. 21). A large pit to the North and the surface to the East prevented the conservation of the structures; however, two doors opening to the South and to the West lead us to reconstruct the existence of other two rooms.

An andiron full of ash with three cooking pots near it was found in the South-Western corner (T.6353); other vessels were located along the Southern wall and a complete jar was found to the North (Fig. 22). It is very probable that the fill with a layer of red clay with limestone crumbs, which level up the area immediately to the West of the external wall, might be ascribed to the same period, when the entrance of the Fort was also blocked. Conversely, no Late Bronze evidence comes from the ramp where the last floor is firmly dated to the MB IIB.

The second context of this phase was located on the western top of the Fort. Here the northern rooms of the Western unit were re-used and partially re-adapted for a dwelling. Four rooms were obtained with partition walls and the large room L.6318 was probably re-used as a court. The stratigraphy shows that no MB destruction layers are present in these rooms (Fig. 23). The presence of two different architectural phases of this LB occupation seems to be attested by the final block of the doors which may indicate a progressive abandonment of part of the house.

The pottery collected at the LB levels is all local

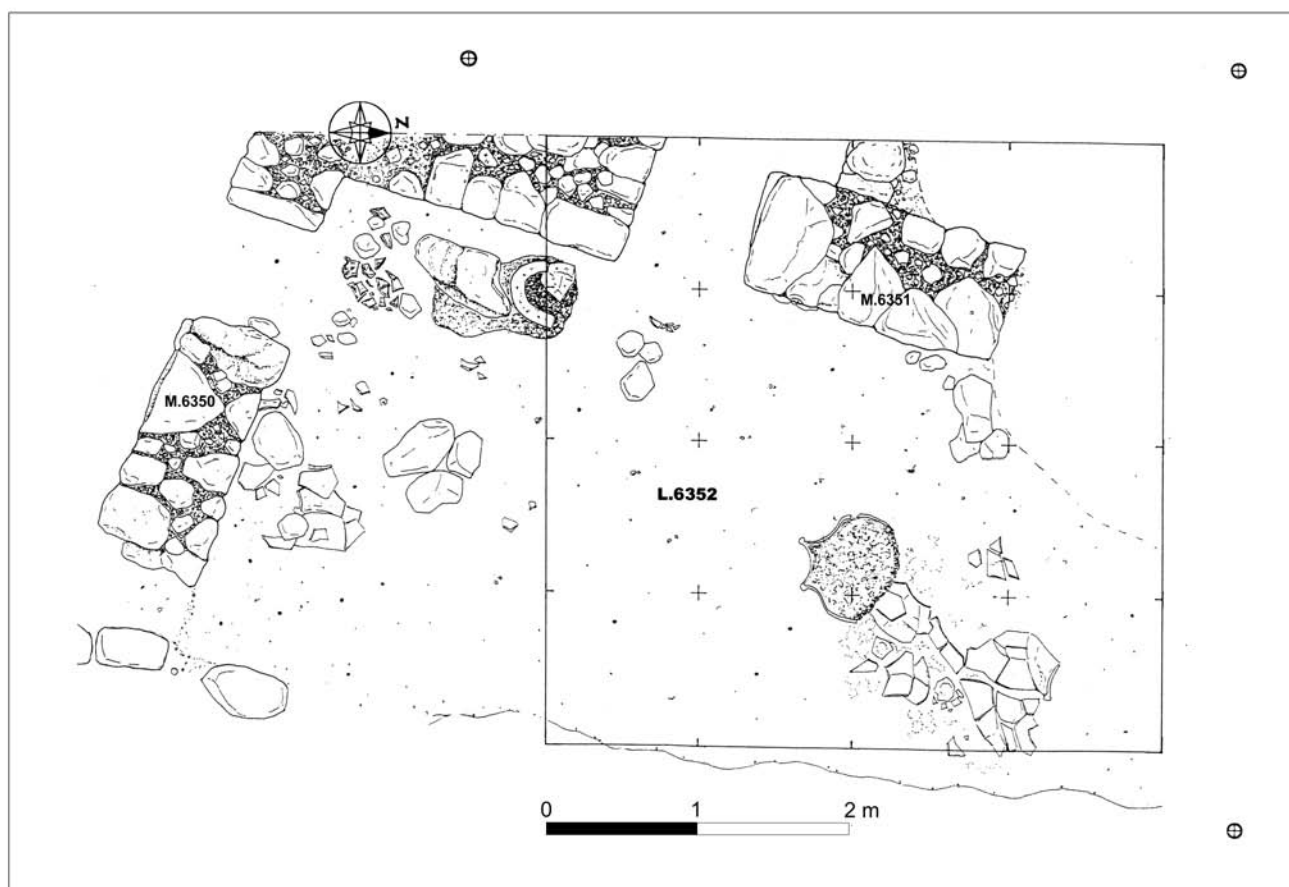


Fig. 21 Plan of the LB I dwelling from Area V (L.6352)



Fig. 22 L.6352 floor level with materials *in situ*

manufacture with a predominance of pale grey/whitish or pale brown/pinkish fabrics with mineral inclusions. The materials seem to link to an early LB horizon and permit to underline the following general observations, which demonstrate that MB/LB cultural changes were a gradual and complex phenomenon in North Inner Syria (Figs. 24–26).²⁶ First of all, there is a clear persistence of shapes and types attested during the last phase of the MB IIB, such as the inturned rim bowls, the hemispherical bowl, the deep krater and bowl with horizontally expanded and grooved rim (Fig. 24:4–5), the medium-sized jars and jug with banded rim. The trend towards a widespread diffusion of the ring-base, which can be observed since the MB IIB, is also sign of a continuity of ceramic traditions. However, this general typological continuity corresponds to a change in the clays and fabrics. Secondly, new shapes make their appearance, like the dish/bowl with triangular or rounded rim and straight sides (Fig. 24:6–8) and the



Fig. 23 Northern rooms of the Western unit re-used for a LB I dwelling

beaker with carination and simple out-folded or outward rim, which can be considered as the final transformation of the classic late MB IIB bowl with globular body and flaring rim (Fig. 24:1–2).²⁷ Among open shapes a distinguished large krater of pinkish clay with high carination and outturned rim is attested by a complete specimen from the upper dwelling (Fig. 25:1). Finally, a drastic reduction of the MB tradition of kitchen ware can be observed. The horizontal burnishing almost completely disappears. Cooking pots now usually appear with short neck, more or less evident shoulder and outturned rim or everted stepped rim (Fig. 25:3–5). Preservation ware, here illustrated by the complete medium-size storage jar

²⁶ This still little-known pottery horizon is likely to be contemporary with Hama G3 and Grave XIII (FUGMANN 1958, 117–134, figs. 143, 153.), Alalakh VI–V (WOOLLEY 1955, 316–317; GATES 1981), Tell Afis VIA - Lev. 14 in Area E1 (MAZZONI 1998) and is comparable with Hadidi LB IA on the Euphrates (DORNEMANN 1981). For a recent evaluation of the Late Bronze I pottery productions of North Inner Syria, see MAZZONI 2002; note, however, that she considers

Hama G3–1 as a whole and correlates it with Alalakh IV and Hadidi LB IB.

²⁷ This kind of beaker was also in widespread use during the LB II, is attested only by few pieces in the LB phase in Area V, whereas it is now well-defined by several specimens from the *favissa* P.5213 in the Cisterns Square (NIGRO, MARCHETTI in press) and from large LB I refuse pits in Area B East.

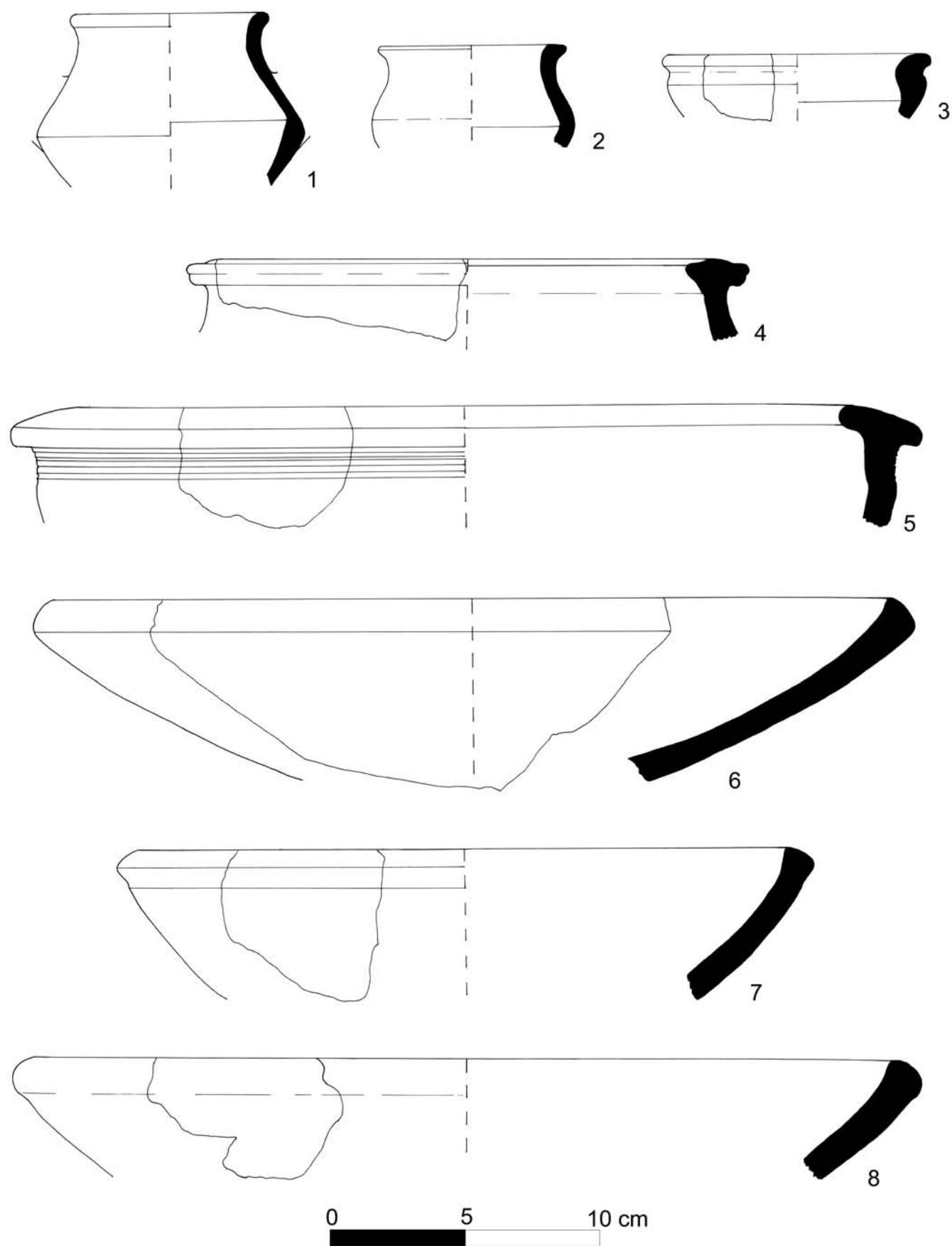


Fig. 24 LB I pottery from Area V: 1) TM.95.V.404/1; 2) TM.95.V.419/6; 3) TM.95.V.419/5; 4) TM.95.V.419/4; 5) TM.95.V.419/3; 6) TM.95.V.418/1; 7) TM.95.V.418/2; 8) TM.95.V.419/1

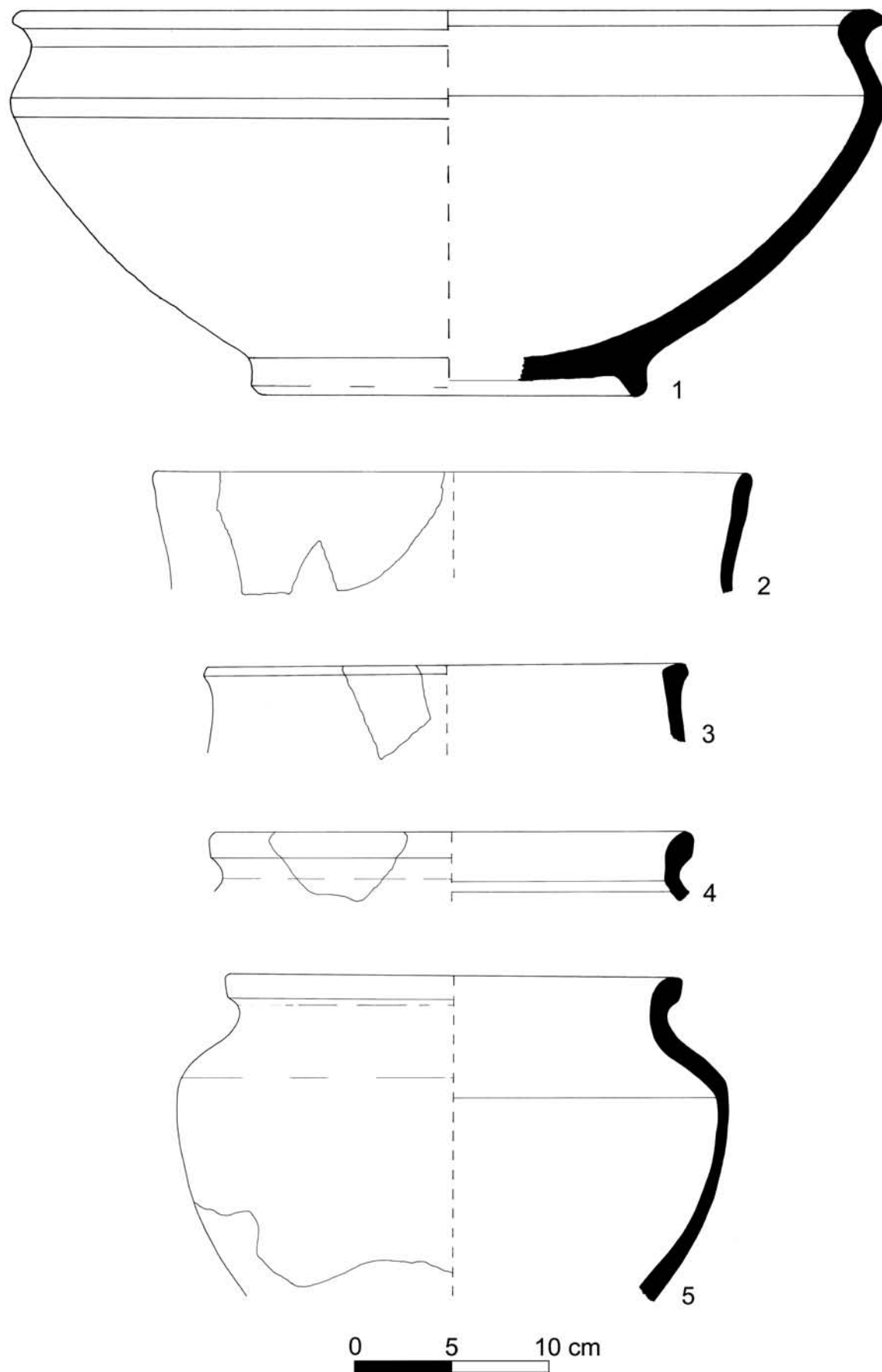


Fig. 25 LB I pottery from Area V: 1) TM.95.V.419/11; 2) TM.95.V.418/4; 3) TM.95.V.418/3; 4) TM.95.V.410/1; 5) TM.95.V.419/9

found in the south-eastern house (Fig. 26), also demonstrates the link with the MB II tradition with the jar with oblique shoulders, ovoid body marked by rope-ridges and expanded square rim.²⁸

THE LATE BRONZE I AT EBLA – THE MISSING LINK?

This preliminary analysis of the final MB II and LB I periods in Area V, leads us to point to the actual evidence of Late Bronze I at Tell Mardikh-Ebla. Thanks to the recent discoveries in the Western rampart and in Areas P South, B East and FF, an increasing volume of documentation of this ephemeral period at Tell Mardikh-Ebla is now available. After the destruction of the Western and Northern Forts private houses were built testifying to an occupation of the rampart probably during the XVI and XV century BC, revealing a similar situation recorded at the Acropolis, where an LB building was found above the ruins of Royal Palace E at the beginning of the excavations at Tell Mardikh. Moreover, a continuity of use in the dynastic temple of Ishtar in Area D and a rearrangement of the nearby shrine G3, show a survival of the cult of the Eblaic goddess shortly after the destruction of Mardikh IIIB2.

In the Square of the Cisterns of the Sacred Area of Ishtar where two *favissae* were cogent signs of evidence of the cultic and ritual activities at Ebla during MB I and II (MARCHETTI, NIGRO 1997; 2000), a third votive pit (cistern P.5213) has revealed a level filled with offerings and materials dating from an early LB period (MARCHETTI, NIGRO in press). This important item of evidence attests without doubt the continuity of the Old Syrian religious tradition. Moreover, the presence at the bottom of the cistern of a level with materials from the MB IIB demonstrates that the *favissa* was re-used shortly after the destruction of the town. Finally, the presence of large refuse pits full of pottery sherds in Areas B East and FF, over large private houses of MB IIB and over part of the Southern Palace, seem to indicate that an important building or a concentration of houses of LB I could be located in the nearby area.

In conclusion, what at the beginning of the archaeological exploration of Tell Mardikh had originally been considered as an ephemeral occupation of LB I–II, linked to few dwellings on the Acropolis which spanned four centuries (MATTHIAE 1989, 56), can now be regarded as an occupation, certainly dispersed at

the Tell, but probably linked to a re-occupation of the site during the XVI and XV century and which is deserving of closer analysis, in order to verify and investigate not only the transition of the material culture at the midpoint of the Millennium, but also the more general cultural and socio-economic aspects in the crucial historical passage between the Old Syrian and Middle Syrian periods in North Inner Syria.

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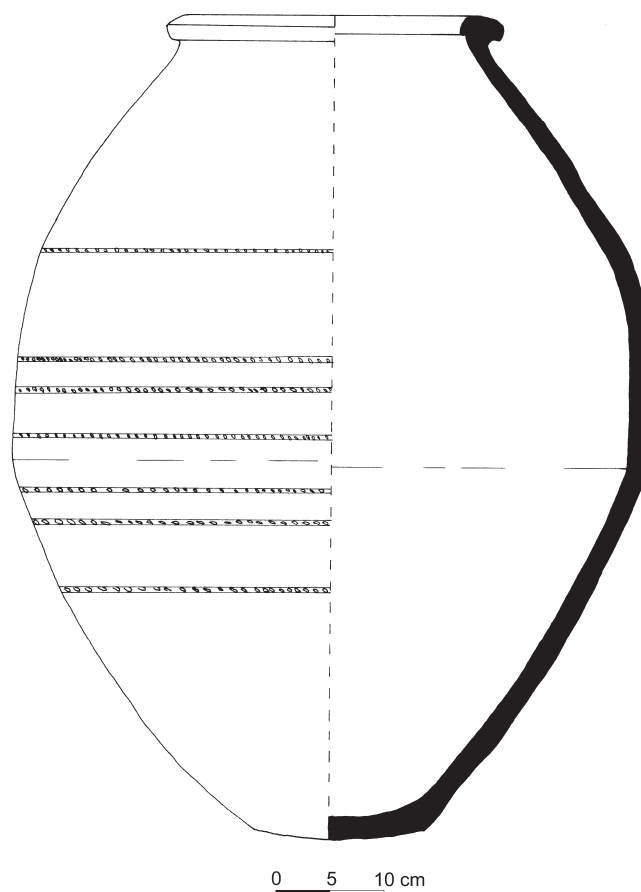


Fig. 26 LB I storage jar from L.6352 (TM.95.V.419/10)

²⁸ This preservation jar finds good parallels at Hama G (FUGMANN 1958, fig. 143 R1) and Mishrifé – Palace phase G7 (NOVAK, PFÄLZNER 2002, pl. 27).

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