

THE URBAN LANDSCAPE OF OLD SYRIAN EBLA

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During the more than thirty years of regular excavations at Ebla by the Italian Archaeological Expedition of the University "La Sapienza" of Rome, a limited but meaningful part of the Royal Palace of Early Bronze IVA (ca. 2300 BC) was brought to light. The palace, as well as one sector of the settlement of the same period, is still in course of exploration. Thus far, these are the only known architectural/topographical features of the town of Mardikh IIB1, and thus do not provide sufficient information on the urban pattern during this paramount phase of the history of the Syrian urban center.¹ On the other hand, since the beginning of the regular seasons at Ebla in 1964, and with greater intensity since 1988, a large effort has been devoted to a thorough exploration of monuments of Middle Bronze I–II (ca. 1900–1650 BC), which had totally covered, and partially obliterated, earlier features. On the basis of this evidence,

it is now possible to reconstruct the urban pattern of Old Syrian Ebla, and to try and understand the intentionality behind the image of the town: What were they trying to achieve and what ideas did they intend to convey? What was the guiding idea behind the city plan?²

Identified Old Syrian Buildings

As is well-known, the structure of Old Syrian Ebla is quite regular, with an outer perimeter of town walls and a large ring-shaped Lower Town (fig. 1). The hill of the Acropolis lies almost in the middle, and covers a surface of approximately 56 ha. The south–north axis was nearly 1000 m long, and the east–west axis approached almost 700 m. The Acropolis covers a surface of approximately 150 × 150 m, almost 3 ha. In previous presentations, certain topographical features included in the later fortification wall were attributed to

1. The Royal Palace, in Area G, where the Royal Archives of Early Syrian Ebla were found, is a multi-faceted building which undoubtedly stretched over a large part, if not all, of the Acropolis, and contained, in addition to the royal residence, workshops, kitchens, and stores. The building recently identified in the northern Lower Town is quite unpretentious; it included sectors for food preparation, as well as workshops for the production of shell and stone inlays, and was probably related to the nearby sacred area of Ishtar, further to the north. It is impossible to cite the voluminous literature about the Ebla excavations; see the bibliographical summaries in P. Matthiae, F. Pinnock, G. Scandone Matthiae (eds), *Ebla. Alle origini della civiltà urbana*, (Milan: Electa, 1995), and in P. Matthiae, *Ebla. Un impero*

ritrovato. Dai primi scavi alle ultime scoperte (Turin: Einaudi, 1995). See, also, the recent general presentation by the same Author, "Tell Mardikh 1977–1996: vingt ans de fouilles et de découvertes. La renaissance d'Ebla amorrhéenne," *Akkadica* 101 (1997) 1–29.

2. A similar attempt was made, as concerns the town of the Age of the Archives, trying to match the few topographical data already retrieved with the evidence offered by the cuneiform documents of the Archives, by P. Matthiae and G. Pettinato, "Aspetti amministrativi e topografici di Ebla nel III millennio av.Cr.," *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 50 (1976) 1–30.

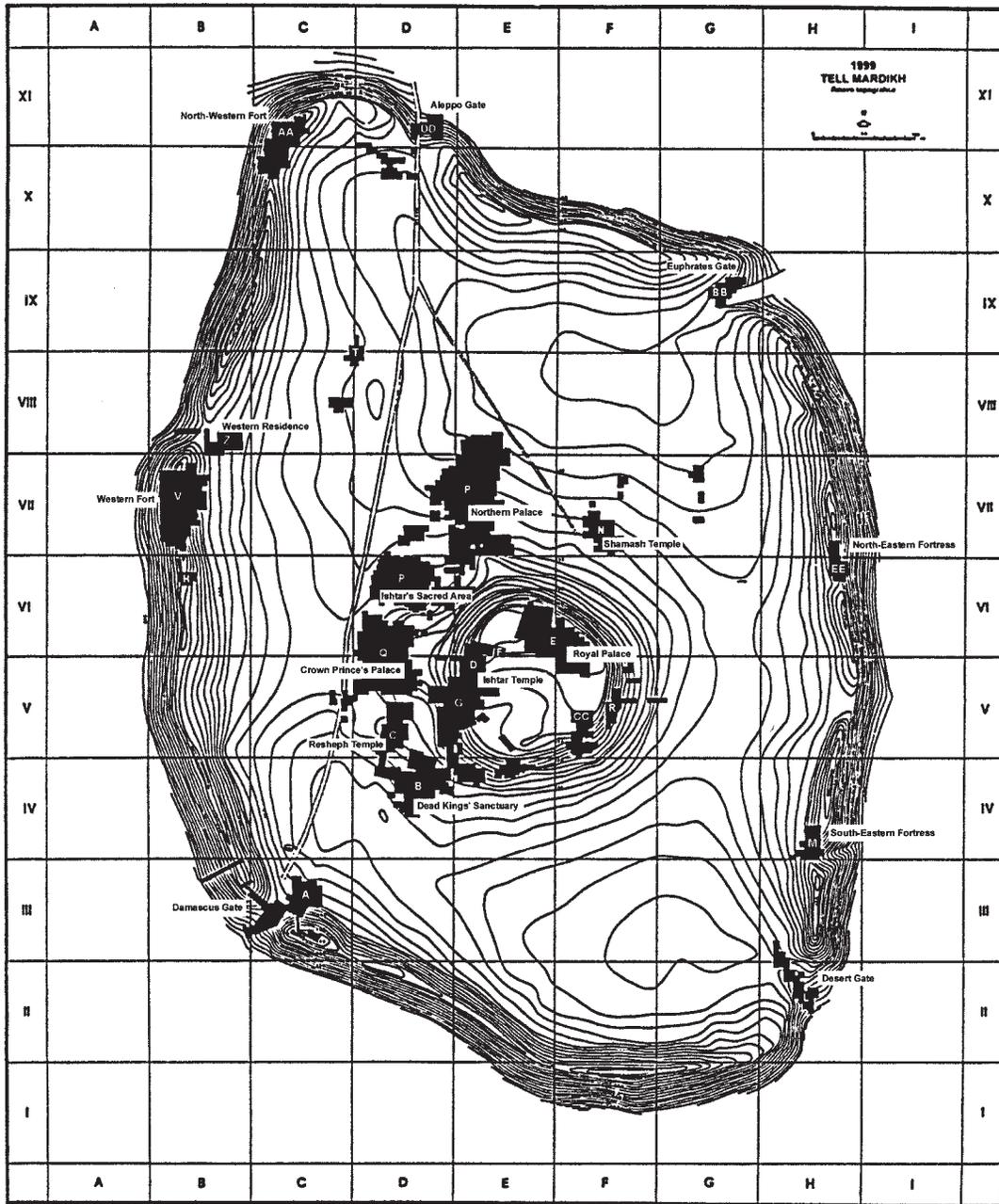


Fig. 1. General plan of Tell Mardikh-Ebla, with excavated areas marked in black.

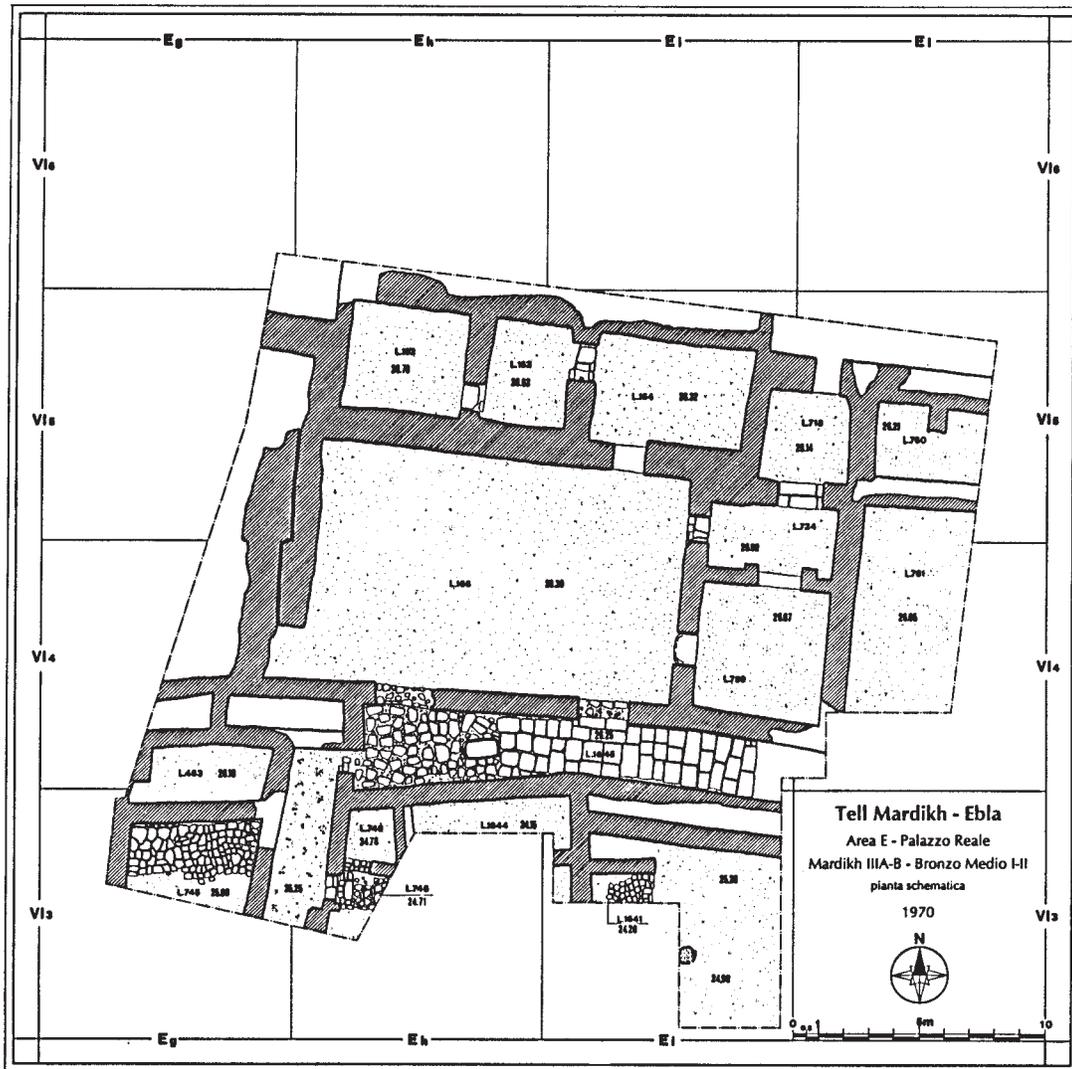


Fig. 2. The Royal Palace E on the Acropolis, Middle Bronze I-II.

natural features,³ but eventually we ascertained that they were part of the original plan of Middle Bronze Ebla.⁴

3. In fact, the perimeter of Ebla is quite a regular oval, but, particularly to the North and West, the line of the fortification presents marked deviations.

4. It is possible that Early Syrian Ebla was at least as large as the Old Syrian town, as is proved by the presence, below

Through systematic excavation and surface surveys, the following monuments have thus far been identified and in large part excavated:

most of the Middle Bronze buildings, of Early Bronze structures which were sometimes included in part in later constructions. Recently, relevant sectors of the Early Bronze IVB fortification wall in mudbrick were detected within the struc-

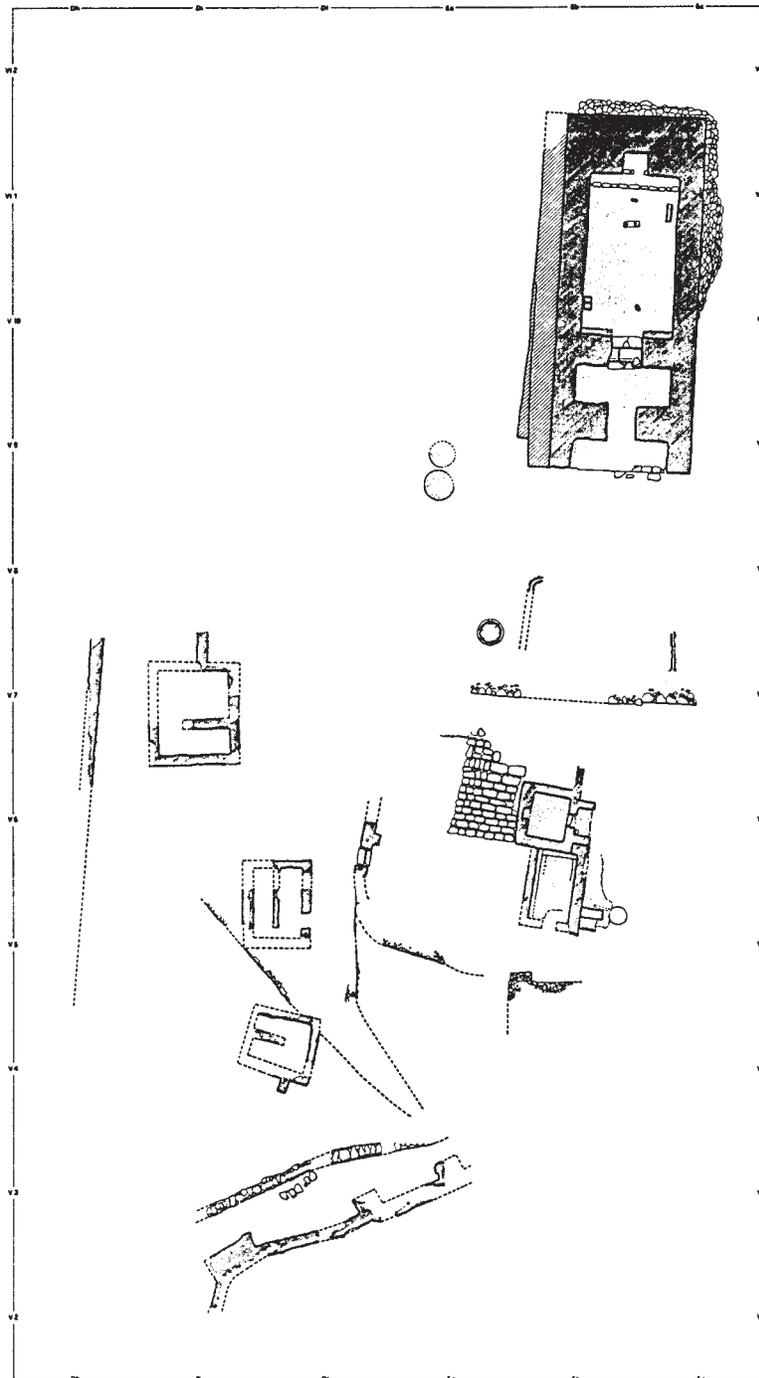


Fig. 3. The sacred area of Ishtar on the Acropolis, Area D, Middle Bronze I-II.

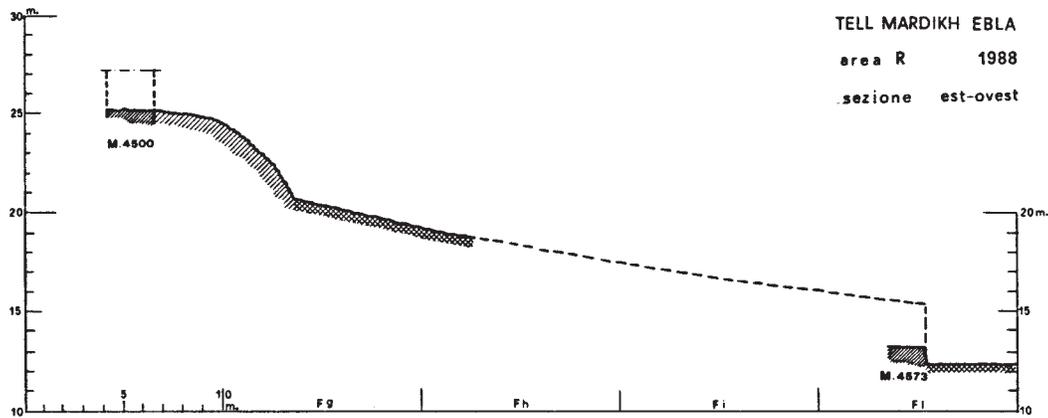


Fig. 4. Cross section of the fortification of the Acropolis in Area R, Middle Bronze I–II.

- On the Acropolis, to the north, lies a large part of the Royal Palace (fig. 2).⁵ At the western edge, stretching approximately from north to south, we have uncovered the temple of Ishtar (Temple D), with its sacred area (fig. 3), and a part of the access ramp. To the south, one sector of the massive stone wall of the Acropolis fortifications lies at the bottom of the hill, while on the top, there was a small region of private houses and burials, possibly somehow related to the palace and temple. To the east, there is a well-preserved sector of the mudbrick structures and rampart of the fortifications (fig. 4). To the southeast there is a part of an earthen rampart, and to the south a part of the massive stone wall that protected the base of the rampart.
- In the Lower Town, to the northeast lies a temple and a small sacred area, possibly dedicated to

Shamash (fig. 5). To the northwest we have uncovered the extensive main sacred area of the goddess Ishtar, including a temple (Temple P2) with its annexes, as well as a monumental stone terrace (Monument P3; fig. 6). Stretching along the north and west sides of an open space is the Square of the Cisterns, related to the Northern Palace to the north (fig. 7). To the west lay the Western Palace (fig. 8), the Residence of the Crown Prince, with Sanctuary B2 (fig. 9), probably dedicated to the deceased royal ancestors, and the temple of Reshef (fig. 10), all built over the contemporary Royal Necropolis, next to an area of private houses, quite likely related to the two temples. To the south and east where no excavations have thus far begun, traces visible on the ground on certain occasions, particularly after rains, lead us to propose the existence of two other possibly monumental buildings similar to those already brought to light. A well near Area B, reaching to water level and not to a cistern, might hint at the presence of another large open space similar to the one in Area P.

- The Town Wall was explored during the very first years of work at Ebla, but new excavations, mostly since 1996, have revealed interesting,

ture of the Middle Bronze I–II ramparts, to the west, where they were used as a core for the new fortification.

5. See P. Fronzaroli and P. Matthiae, "Il settore E," in *Missione archeologica italiana in Siria. Rapporto preliminare della campagna 1965 (Tell Mardikh)*, ed. P. Matthiae (Rome: Università degli Studi di Roma, 1966), 81–102; P. Fronzaroli, "Il settore E," in *Missione archeologica italiana in Siria. Rapporto preliminare della campagna 1966 (Tell Mardikh)*, ed. P. Matthiae (Rome: Università degli Studi di Roma, 1967), 79–110.

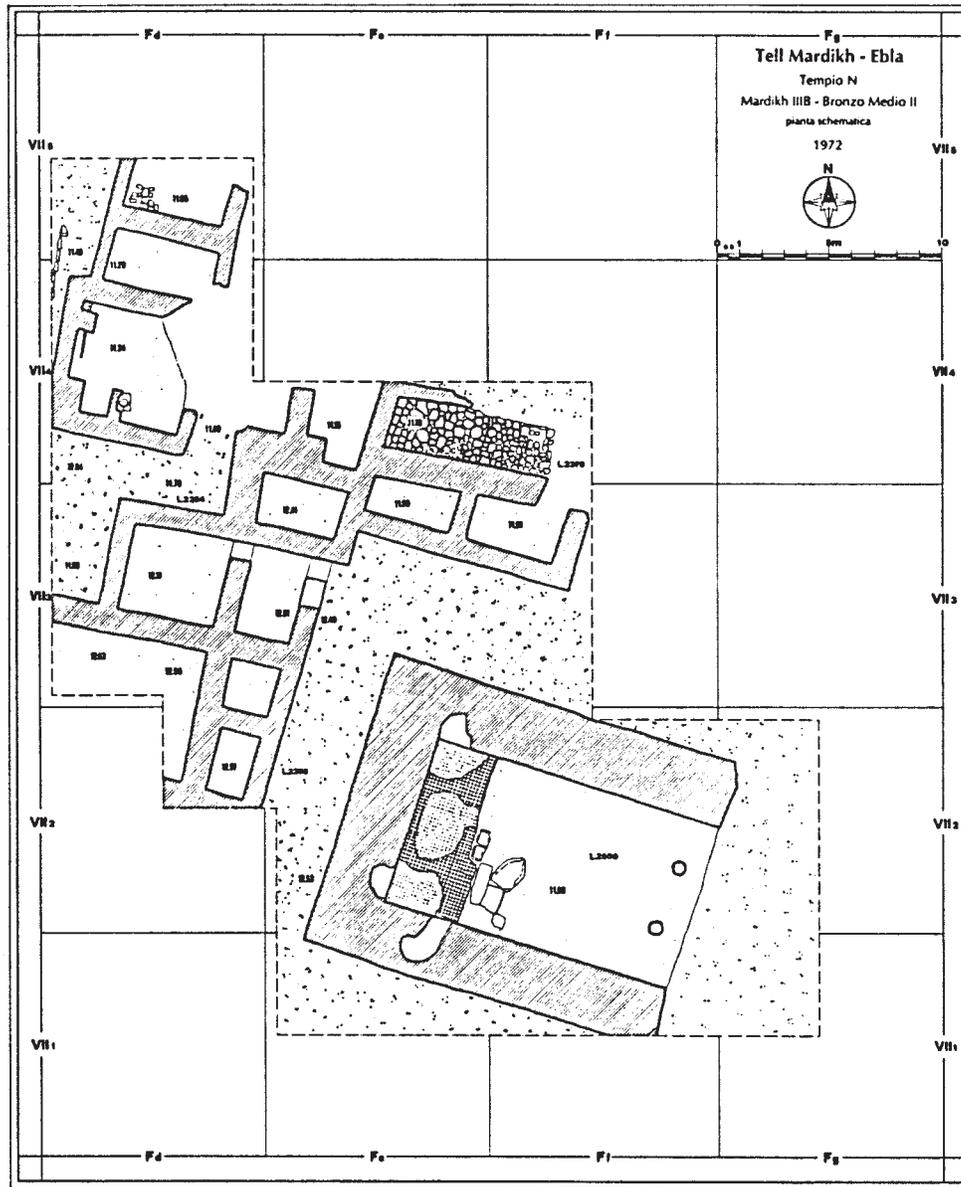


Fig. 5. Plan of the temple of Shamash in Area N, Middle Bronze I-II.

and unexpected, structural traits. The wall was bolstered by imposing earthwork ramparts (fig. 11) that were 22 m high and 40 m wide at the base. These were built with superimposed lay-

ers of soil, in part carried from the settlement itself, utilizing materials from the Early Bronze IVB level, and in part also those of Early Bronze IVA, as well as with dirt brought from outside

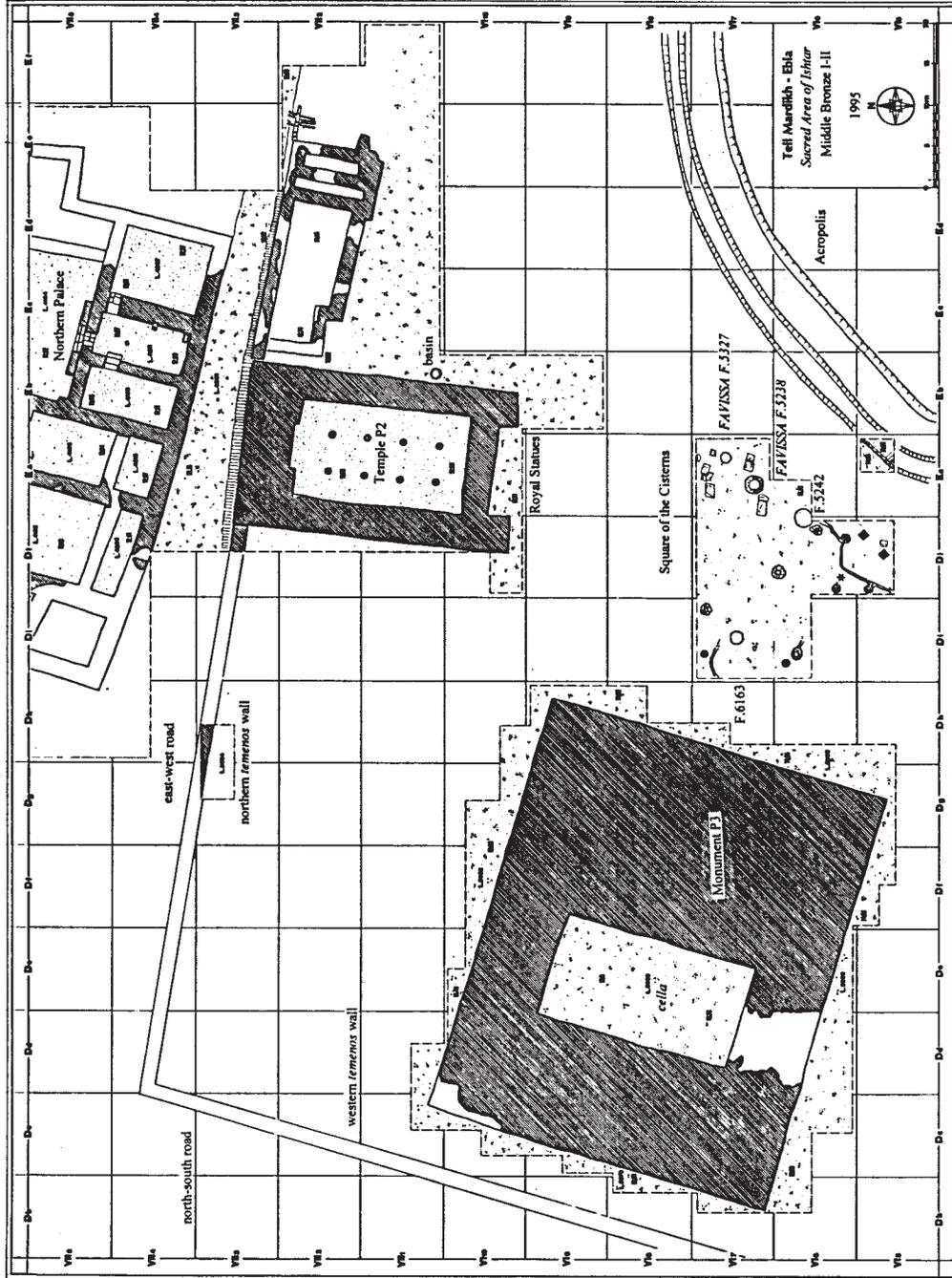


Fig. 6. Plan of the sacred area of Ishtar in the Lower Town north, Area P, Middle Bronze I-II (as elaborated by Nigro).

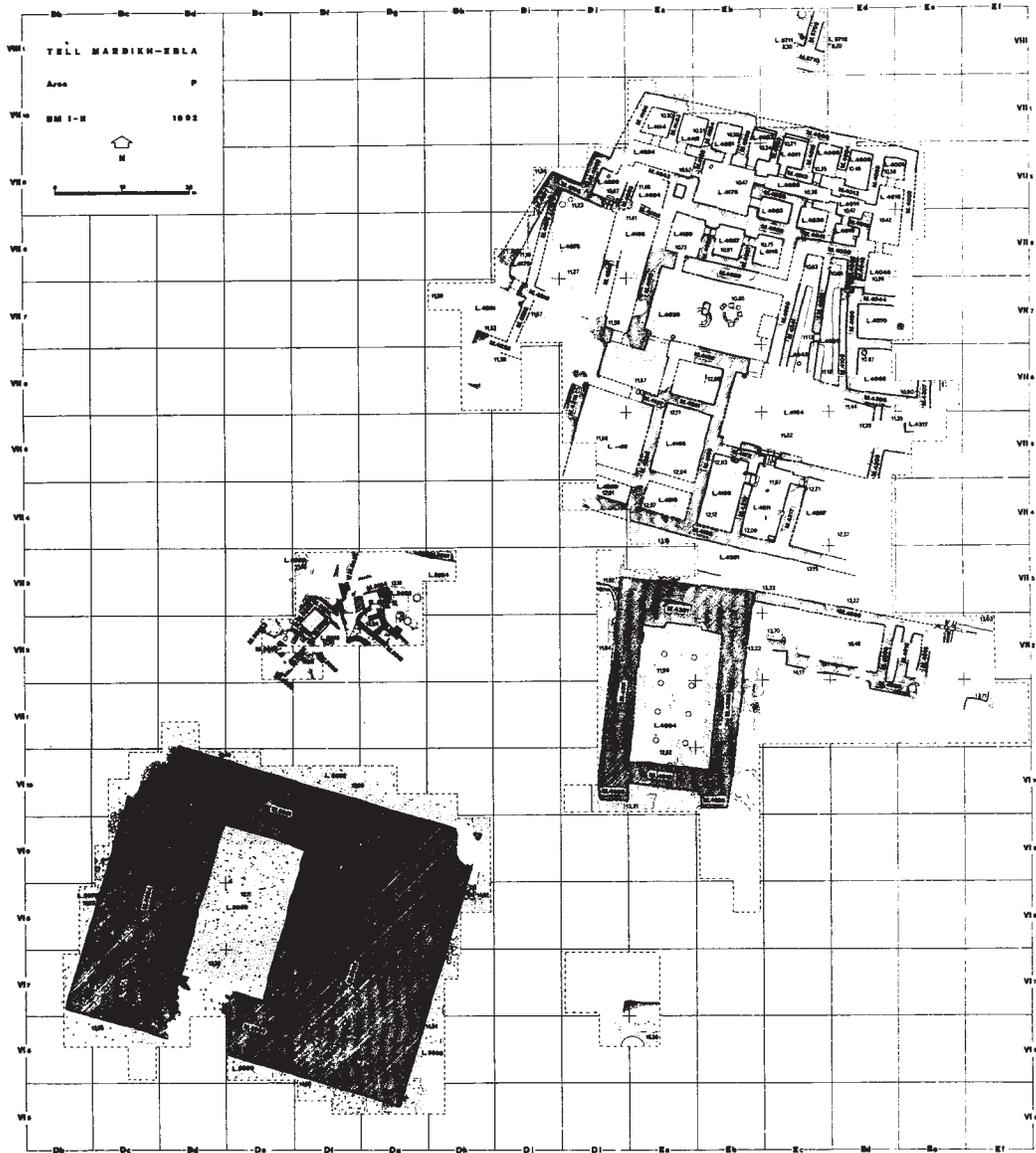


Fig. 7. General plan of Area P, in the Lower Town north, with the sacred area of Ishtar and the Northern Palace, Middle Bronze I-II.

the site, where a moat was excavated. The layers of earth were laid over a core of mudbrick and ground limestone.⁶ On the outer side the ramparts were reinforced by a low stone wall, and included several imposing structures: the “Aleppo Gate,” to the northwest, in Area DD, whose excavation started in 1999; Fortress AA (fig. 12), built on the top of the Town Wall, very close to Aleppo Gate, to the west; the complex of the Western Fort, in Area V (fig. 13), including a fortress, and a related palatial building; and to the southwest another fortress is visible on the surface, close to the monumental “Damascus Gate” in Area A (fig. 14), with its imposing defensive tower protecting the eastern side. The southern sector of the rampart had a passage for guards on the top, protected by a low stone wall, traced for a length of nearly 250 m. To the southeast there was another fortress, on the inner slope of the rampart, followed by the “Qatna Gate” of Area L, the least fortified and worst preserved city gate of Ebla. Fortress M stretched in part towards the Lower Town (fig. 15) and therefore was possibly quite similar to the Western Fort, though only the fortress proper has been excavated thus far. Another fortress was built on the eastern side of the town walls, at even distances from Fortress M and the northeast gate (in Area BB, the “Euphrates Gate,” fig. 16). Finally, another fortress was singled out between the two north gates. Of these monuments, gates A, L, and BB, have been excavated completely, and the exploration of the Western Fort is now likewise completed. In Area M, only the fortress proper

6. In correspondence with the Fort AA, an important discovery was made in 1998: in this region, in fact, the earthenwork rampart was built over important remains of the mudbrick wall of Early Bronze IV. This evidence, with a similar one identified in correspondence with the Western Fort, leads to believe that the town of Early Bronze IVB, and possibly also of Early Bronze IVA, was as large as the Middle Bronze I, as was already proposed on hypothetical grounds.

has been excavated. The exploration of Fortress AA was began in 1996, while all the other monuments were identified on the basis of distinct traces on the ground. Soundings made inside the rampart, along its western side, in order to identify eventual private houses, have brought to light important remains of domestic architecture in Area Z (fig. 17), with several phases of occupation, possibly belonging to the residence of a lady of the royal family.

I will not deal here with the characteristics of the individual structures, but I can call attention to certain meaningful features that are characteristic elements of Old Syrian and Palestinian architecture of Middle Bronze I–II, with aspects peculiar to Ebla. In the apparent typological variety of the monuments, the two better known palatial buildings are characterized by the presence of a peculiar device, the Reception Suite, on which the palace revolves.⁷ The temples are all of the classical

7. The Reception Suite of Old Syrian palaces was singled out by P. Matthiae, “The Reception Suites of the Old Syrian Palaces,” in *De la Babylonie à la Syrie en passant par Mari. Mélanges offerts à M. J.-R. Kupper à l’occasion de son 70e anniversaire*, ed. Ö. Tunca (Liège: Université de Liège, 1990), 209–22. This is a sector of the building including three series of rooms in the sense of width; the central part was usually divided into two halls of different length by means of two columns. The Reception Suite is present in this classical type in the Western Palace of Ebla, and at Tell Atchanah/Alalakh, in the palaces of levels VII and IV, while variants of the main typology have been singled out in the Northern Palace of Ebla, where the central sector includes one long hall only, without inner partitions, and in the palace of Tilmen Hüyük, where only the general pattern is respected. Recently, this particular device has been identified also in some Palestinian palatial building, which are unfortunately not well preserved, particularly at Megiddo: L. Nigro, *Ricerche sull’architettura palaziale della Palestina nelle età del Bronzo e del Ferro (= CMAO 5)* (Rome: Università degli Studi di Roma “La Sapienza,” 1994), 376–77. The Old Syrian Reception Suite may also be considered the main model for the Late Syrian *khilani*: F. Pinnock, “Elements of Urbanization in Inner Syria in the Late Bronze Age,” in *Nuove fondazioni nel Vicino Oriente antico: realtà e ideologia*, ed. S. Mazzoni (Pisa: Giardini, 1995), 191–93, 195.

Old Syrian type, with single cella, of the *Langraum* kind.⁸ The only exception is the multiple Sanctuary B2, while Temple D, on the Acropolis, has an inner tripartition, which most likely derives from its function as palatine temple.⁹ The different typology of Sanctuary B2 is a possible functional consequence of the fact of its being devoted to the cult of the deceased sovereigns, and not just of one deity.¹⁰ The gates are, at least in two instances, to the southwest and northeast, of the *tenaille* type, and it is not unlikely that the monumental northwest gate was similar in construction. The southwest gate is too poorly preserved for reconstruction, but was apparently much simpler in nature. The fortresses, even when they are included in larger buildings, called forts, are nearly all 13 × 27 m in area, with two rows of parallel rooms, and were built at an average distance of 300 m from one another.

On the basis of these considerations, supported by excavation data demonstrating that all the buildings, with the possible exception of the monumental terrace P3, were founded during Middle Bronze I, and probably toward the beginning of the period, around 1900 BC,¹¹ we may maintain that Old Syrian Ebla was built in a relatively short period of time. The massive undertaking was a project of wide scope, which, besides the effort necessary to erect the individual buildings, demanded as well a

large labor force and resources to make the urban space more regular and even, through the movements of earth from the Lower Town to the earthenwork ramparts. In fact, as the latter contain a large amount of pottery of Early Bronze IVA and B and no sherds of Middle Bronze I, it is quite evident that they were built first, and at the beginning of this last phase, namely Mardikh IIIA. Certainly the defensive aim was a primary one, but it seems quite clear that the designs required a leveling of older ruins, as well as a desire for a certain order in town planning.

Old Syrian Ebla is not a progressive adaptation to sporadic needs, but rather may be defined as an intentional monumental center, planned at one time. The project was so clear and complete at the moment it was conceived that in constructing the earthenwork ramparts, the builders arranged certain irregularities in view of the later placement of the fortresses, which, on the contrary, were built in a more advanced phase of Middle Bronze I.¹² The presence of the fortresses is the only explanation for the strange profile of the Town Wall, which, apparently originally conceived as a regular oval, was adapted for the basic need of controlling its base from its top for a certain length. In fact, one can appreciate how it is possible to check the outer base of the fortification from the forts over the distance occurring between one fort or fortress and the other. This ability was obtained by means of the deviations of the fortification from its main line. These deviations are not the result

8. See, at this regard, the considerations by P. Matthiae, "Unité et développement du temple dans la Syrie du Bronze Moyen," in *Le temple et le culte. Compte rendu de la XXe Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Leiden 3-7 juillet 1972*, eds. E. Van Donzel, P. H. E. Donceel-Voûte, A. A. Kampman and M. J. Mellink (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 1975), 43-72.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 51-52.

10. P. Matthiae, "Sull' identità degli dèi titolari dei templi paleosiriani di Ebla," *CMAO* 1 (1986) 342-43.

11. It is impossible to deal here in detail with the problem of the absolute chronology of Ebla and of inner Syria; briefly the Early Syrian period, corresponding the Early Bronze IVA-B, lasted from ca. 2400 to 2000 BC, and the Old Syrian period, corresponding to Middle Bronze I-II, started immediately after, or with a possible gap not exceeding fifty years,

and ended around 1650 BC, when it was destroyed by the Hittites; Middle Bronze I, the archaic Old Syrian period ended around 1750/1700 BC, and corresponds to a phase when Ebla still had a leading role in North inner Syria, while in the second phase of the period it became a vassal to the kingdom of Yamhad, whose capital was Aleppo.

12. In fact, the ramparts were used as a burial area, with several, quite poor tombs precisely dating from Middle Bronze I, which are placed near or below the fortresses, and thus date exactly the building of the town walls, and of the forts, which, in some instances overlap to the burials.

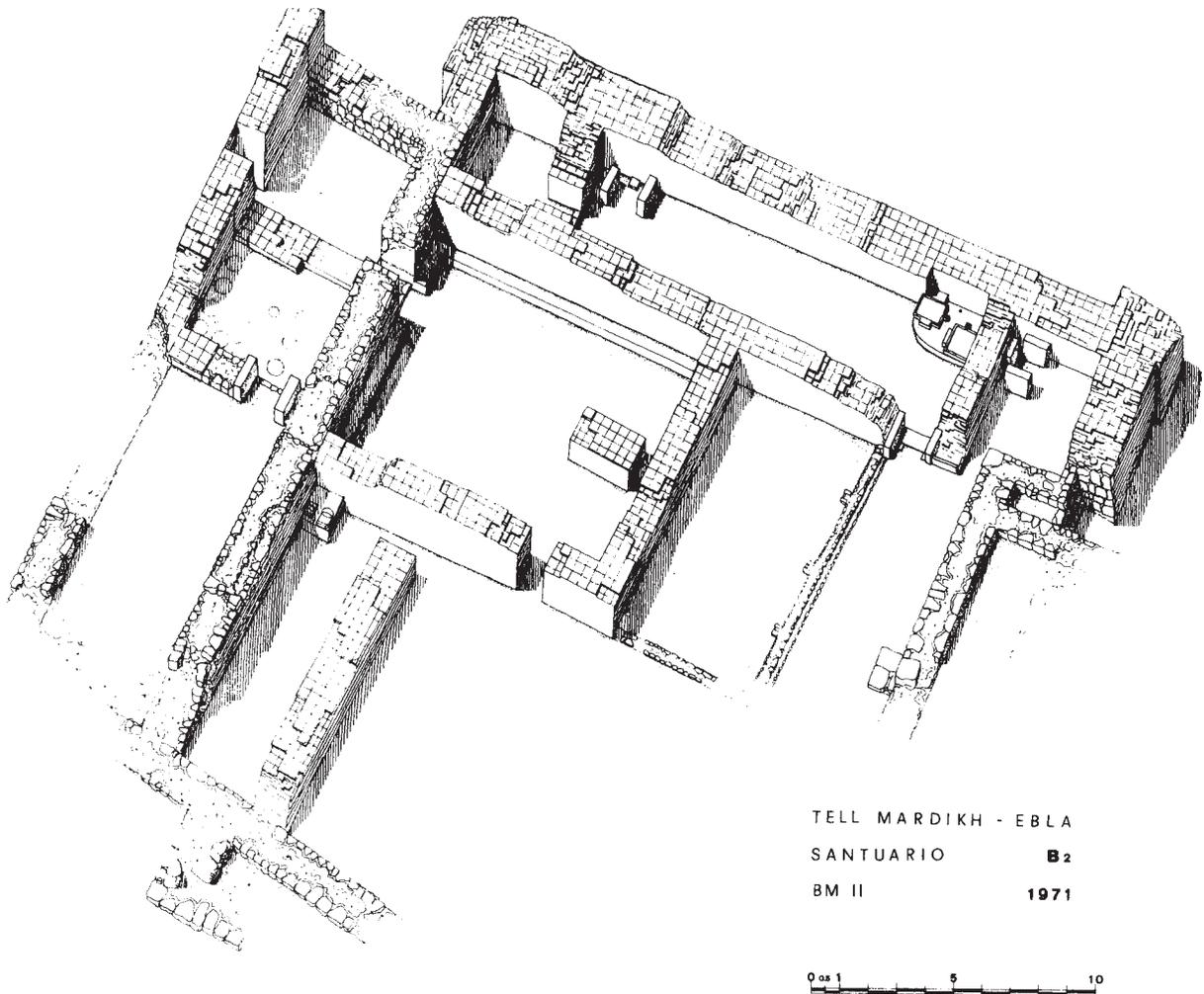


Fig. 9. Isometric view of the sanctuary for the cult of dead kings, in Area B, Middle Bronze I-II.

of corrosion or crumbling: A deep sounding revealed that, in correspondence with the Eastern Fort, where one change of direction in the rampart is clearly perceived, the foundation of the fortification has the same irregular profile. One can therefore maintain that, as the mudbrick wall of Early Bronze IVA-B certainly did not require the same kind of control, and was therefore probably regu-

lar, the irregular profile of the Middle Bronze rampart is not due, as was supposed at first, to the partial preservation of older structures, but that it was a clever adaptation to the multiple needs resulting from the elaboration of this completely new type of fortification in a large site, with an important linear development of its perimeter, which is nearly 3 km long.

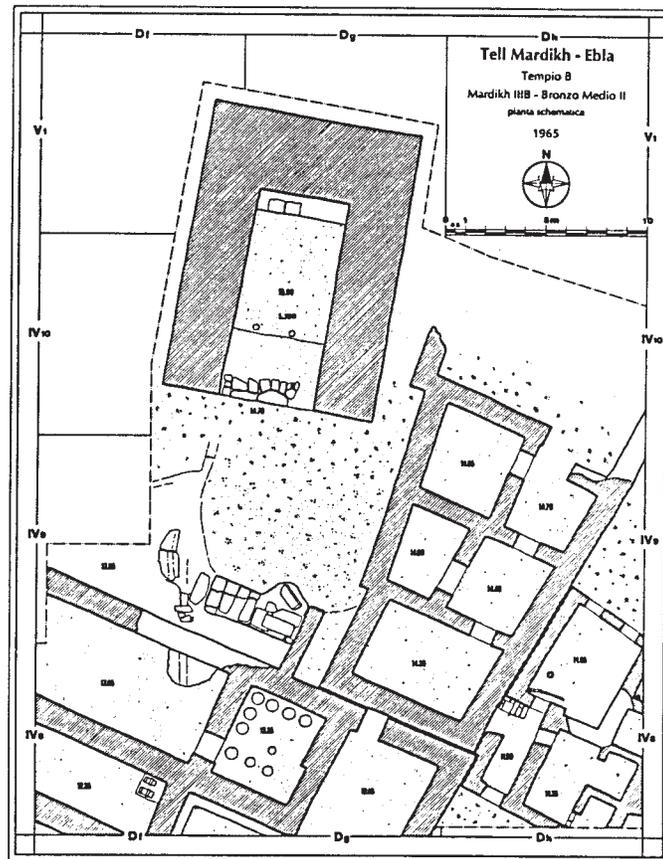


Fig. 10. Plan of the temple of Reshef in Area B, Middle Bronze I-II.

Taking into consideration the age of these ramparts, and the probable consequent leading role of the Syrian centers, and of Ebla in particular, in the elaboration of the architectural, and possibly also of the urban models of Middle Bronze, the level of planning sophistication, which may be appreciated particularly in the organization of the ramparts is remarkable.

The Urban Pattern of Old Syrian Ebla

The general urban pattern of Old Syrian Ebla was quite regular. The town walls, reaching a height between 19 and 23 m over the level of the countryside, presented a regular distribution of

fortresses and forts, which possibly exceeded the top of the ramparts by nearly 6 m, where they had an upper floor. The Lower Town, in the region closer to the Acropolis, included a sequence of important public and religious buildings with at least two main sacred areas, one in the north devoted to the cult of Ishtar, and one to the west devoted to the cult of the dead royal ancestors. The Acropolis was the seat of royal power, comprising the royal residence and the dynastic temple. The distribution of the princely residences in the lower town, and the presence of the imposing forts on the town walls, suggest that they reflect a distribution of power and state functions, possibly

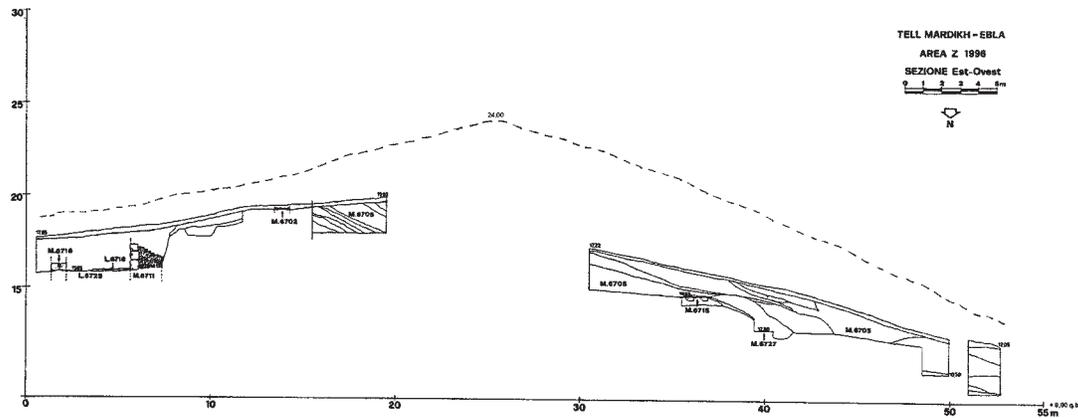


Fig. 11. Cross section of the rampart in Area Z, Middle Bronze I.

among members of the royal family. This distribution of power probably took place during the Early Syrian period, as appears from the written documentation.

In the final plan of Ebla, the town as seen from the outside was obviously dominated by the imposing structure of the ramparts, and by the development of the fortresses, which in some instances stood up quite high. At least in the Western Fort and in Fortress M, the presence of staircases hints at the possible existence of a second floor, presumably only over a part of the buildings. As one approached, the town probably appeared as a hill emerging from the red soil of the country, and made the more startling for the contrast offered by the white plaster of the ramparts, and the mudbrick structures of the forts and fortresses. This contrast was possibly enhanced by the line of gray stones at the base of the fortifications and of the foundations of some buildings on top of it.¹³ Moreover, considering that the floors of the fortresses are at an absolute height between 19 and 23 m

above ground level, corresponding to the height of the top of the rampart, while the buildings probably had an average height of 3 m, even admitting the existence of at least one building with double this height, namely the Western Fort, it is evident that two buildings stood out when viewed from the outside: Royal Palace E and Temple D. Royal Palace E, which stood on the north edge of the Acropolis, with floors 26 m higher than the surrounding plain (at the same level as the presumed roofs of the fortresses), undoubtedly had two floors. Temple D was on the same level as the palace, and was undoubtedly quite high, in keeping with the current typology of temples. All the other monuments were concealed from the outside, and could be seen only after passing the town gates. These gates were constructed with a bent axis, thus preventing any clear appreciation of the town inside, even while passing through them.

The most startling feature of Old Syrian Ebla was, therefore, the defense system, which stressed the power of the town, and demarcated the limit

13. There is a possibility that also the stone structures were plastered: in fact, in some palatial buildings inside the town, in some places fragments of clay plaster were preserved, covering the stones, although there was no trace of white plaster

over them. The plastering was certainly needed in order to protect these stone bases from water infiltration. To the same purpose the floors frequently extended, in order to cover, with a slight curve, the foot of the walls.

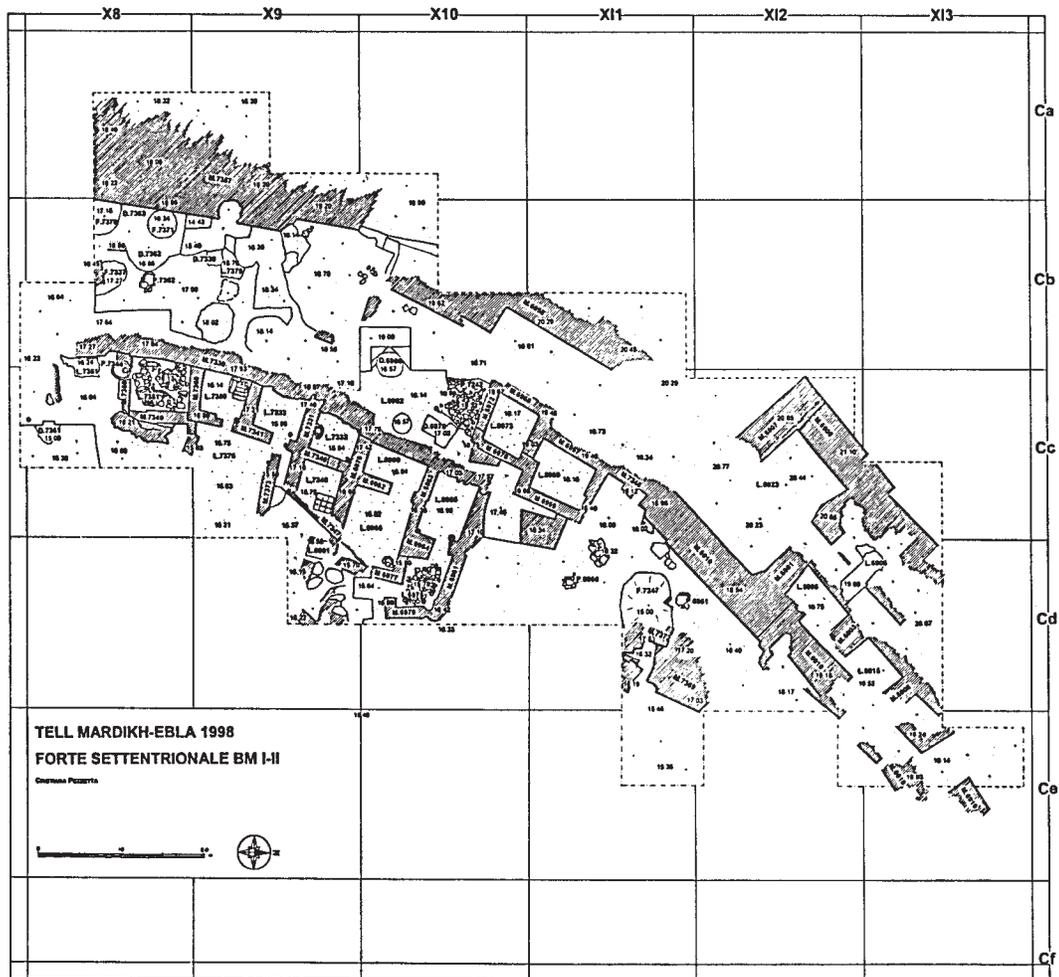


Fig. 12. Plan of the Northern Fort, in Area AA, Middle Bronze I-II.

between outside and inside (where entry was forbidden), as well as the residence of the king and the sanctuary of the main deity. This system possibly reflects the main tripartite division of functions of the town.

The main seats of royal and divine power, so prominent when viewed from the outside, were neatly isolated on the inside. These were the pre-eminent symbols of town and urban life, and yet ordinary people were prevented from close contact with them. If we take into consideration the

presumed original regular oval plan of Ebla, the two main axes, north-south, and east-west, meet exactly at Royal Palace E. This is possibly due to chance, but it cannot be ruled out as an intentional effect.

Certain elements can be noted in the urban pattern of Middle Bronze I-II Ebla. First, the town was carefully planned and precisely laid out, undoubtedly prior to the actual building. Second, the architectural structure of Ebla is a mirror of its political and administrative organization. Being as a

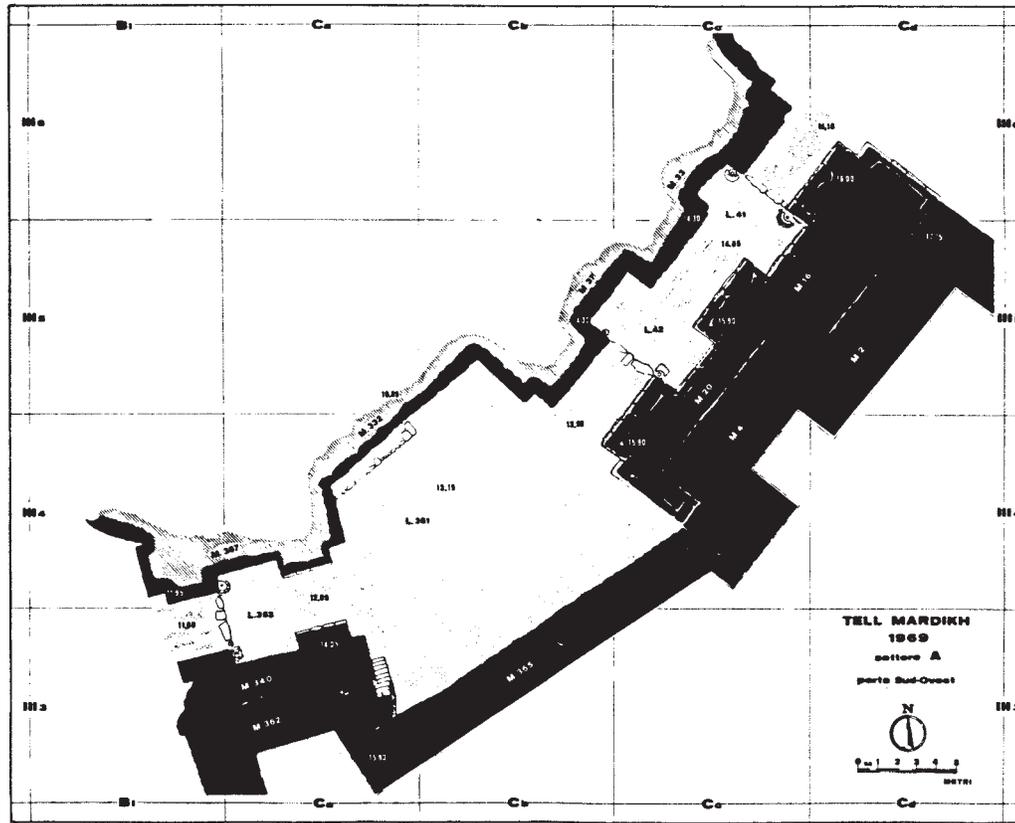


Fig. 14. Damascus Gate in Area A, Middle Bronze I-II.

whole a huge directional center, it certainly had a complex management, which is reflected in the placement and grouping of the main buildings inside it. As we have already stated, the Royal Palace E and Temple D on the Acropolis were the main symbols of Ebla, and, quite likely, the main expression of local notions of urbanism, and the places where decisions were taken. Their separation from the Lower Town possibly hints at an accent on the representative functions of the sovereign, as opposed to his capacity as a ruler.¹⁴

14. There is a possibility that the king delegated part of his administrative, and possibly also military, powers to mem-

The belt of imposing palaces and temples at the feet of the acropolis constituted the real core of the town life and administration, with continuous feedback between town and the Acropolis. The Western Palace was the mansion of the crown prince, whence he controlled on the one hand the princely tombs (and therefore the cult for the royal

bers of his family and entourage, as suggested by the presence of other huge buildings with residential and administrative functions in the Lower Town, and on the ramparts, and from a comparison with the organization of power in Early Syrian Ebla (see M. G. Biga, "Au de-là des frontières: guerre et diplomatie à Ebla," presented at the 44th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Venice, July 9, 1997).

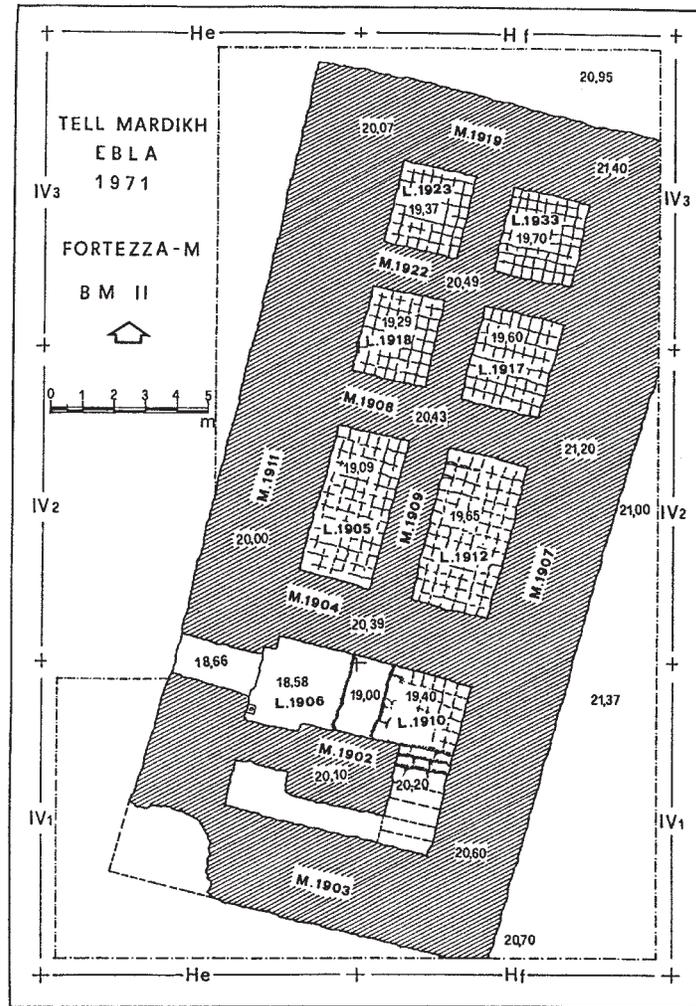


Fig. 15. Fortress M, Middle Bronze I-II. This building provides a good example of the modular unit that is the base of the larger structures of the Forts in Areas V, and AA.

ancestors),¹⁵ and on the other part of Ebla politics and economy, as suggested by a hoard of stone catapult projectiles, and by a room devoted to the preparation of large amounts of food, in addition to a few tablets and some cylinder seal impressions (which also show the high quality of the royal

15. See P. Matthiae, "The Excavation of the Western Palace and the Royal Necropolis of the Amorite Period," *BA* 47 (1984) 19-32.

workshops).¹⁶ The goddess Ishtar, who was the titular deity of Temple P2, and was the lady to whom the extended sacred area was dedicated, was

16. The tablets are legal documents concerning loans of silver; what is quite interesting is that in one fragment of tablet a date formula is preserved with the mention of one Indilingur; this is also the name of the father of the personage, whose seal is impressed on a jar from the same palace. For the other finds in the Western Palace, see P. Matthiae, "The Western Palace of the Lower City of Ebla: A New Ad-

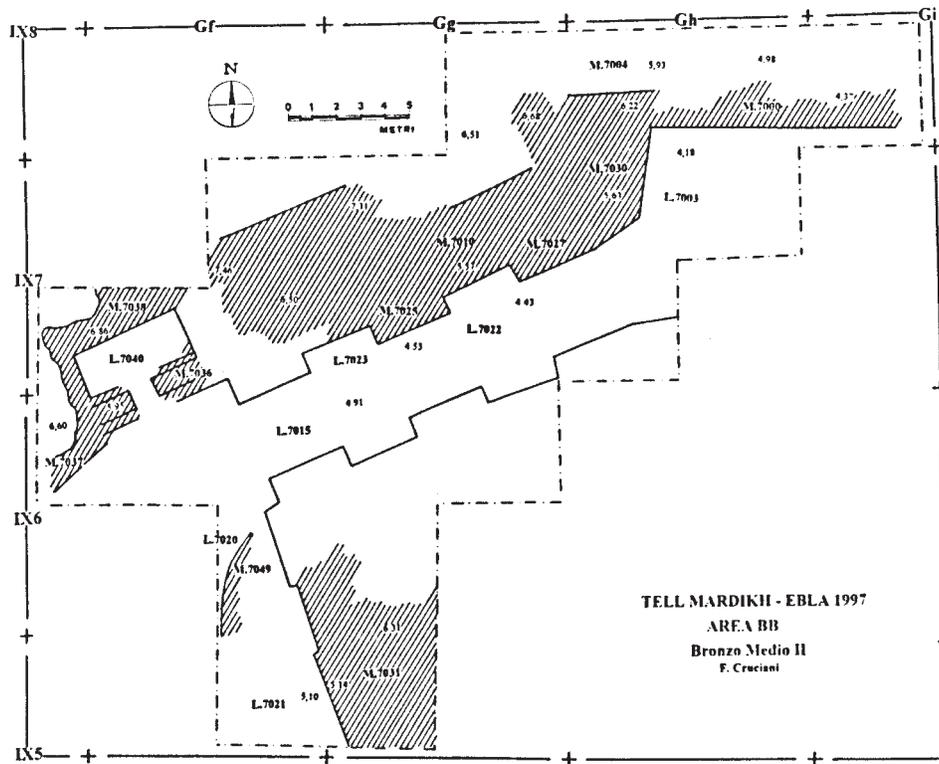


Fig. 16. The Euphrates Gate in Area BB, Middle Bronze I-II.

not, in that function, the dynastic goddess ruling over the Acropolis, but rather the powerful patron deity of the town, guarantor of fertility and abundance. One cannot rule out that her priestess, depicted on the fragment of carved double basin from that temple,¹⁷ and on a cylinder seal from a *favissa* excavated in the Square of the Cisterns,¹⁸ was the

ministrative Building of Middle Bronze I-II," *AfO* 19 (1982) 124-25, while for the interpretation of the burial area see P. Matthiae, "A Hypothesis on the Princely Burial Area of Middle Bronze II at Ebla," *ArOr* 49 (1981) 55-65; "L'area cimiteriale principesca nella città bassa di Ebla amorrea," *PdP* 192 (1980) 212-31; "Two Princely Tombs at Tell Mardikh-Ebla," *Archaeology* 33 (1980) 9-17.

17. P. Matthiae, "Due frammenti di un nuovo bacino scolpito dal Tempio P2 di Ebla," *Studi Miscellanei* 30 (1996) 9.

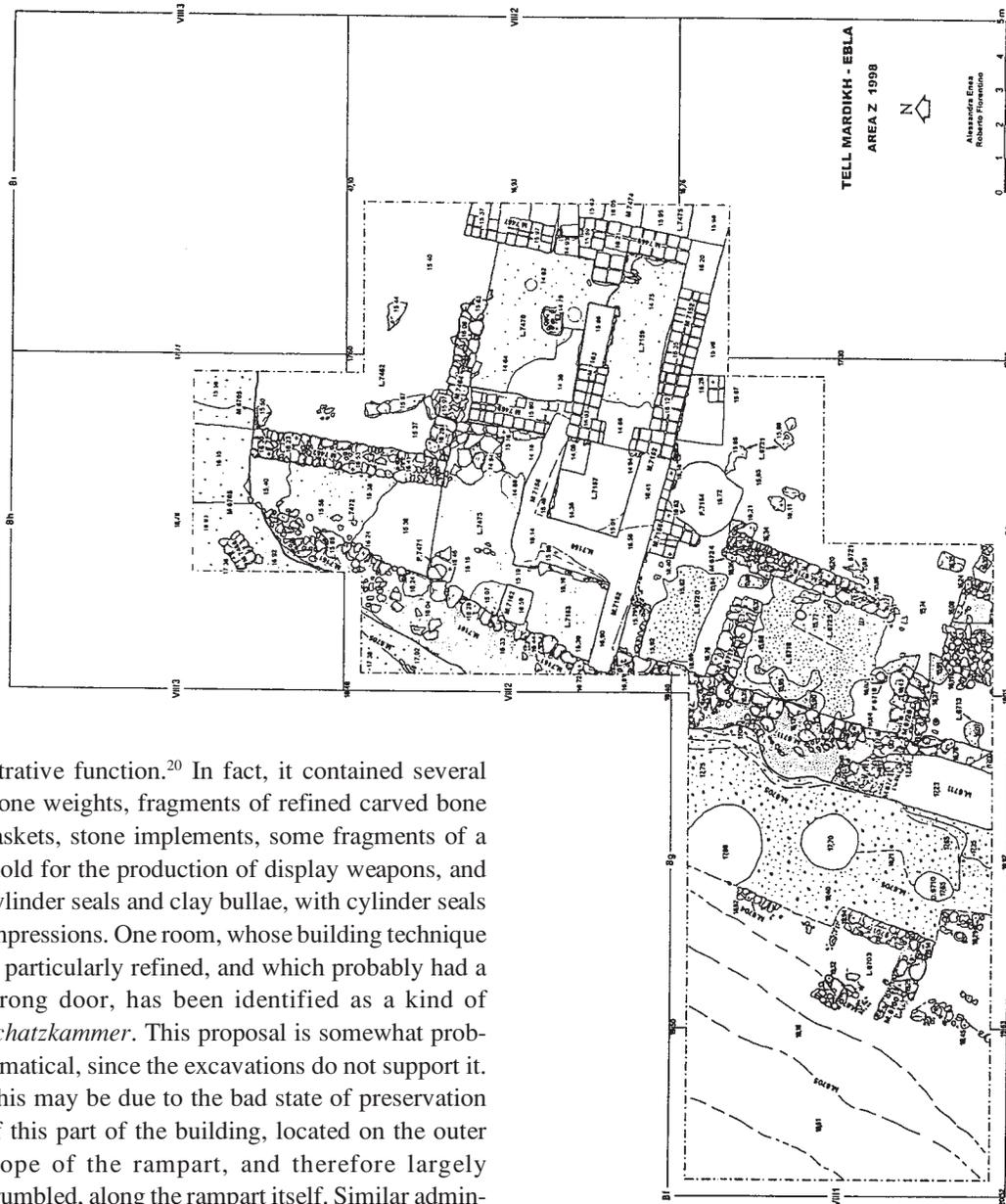
18. P. Matthiae, "The Lions of the Great Goddess of Ebla: A Hypothesis About Some Archaic Old Syrian Cylinders,"

king's eldest daughter. She might have been the same princess whom Matthiae proposed to identify with the naked female figure on the bone talisman rod from the Tomb of the Lord of the Goats, where the crown prince also should appear in ritual nakedness.¹⁹

The buildings on the ramparts were not mere defensive devices, albeit of a very advanced concept. At least the Western Fort also had an admin-

in *Cinquante-deux réflexions sur le Proche-Orient ancien. Offertes en hommage à L. de Meyer*, ed. H. Gasche, M. Tanret, C. Janssen and A. Degraeve (Louvain: Peeters, 1994), 329, fig. 3.

19. P. Matthiae, "Princely Cemetery and Ancestors Cult at Ebla During Middle Bronze II," *UF* 11 (Fs. Schaeffer) (1979) 563-69; P. Matthiae, F. Pinnock, G. Scandone Matthiae (eds.), *Ebla. Alle origini della civiltà urbana*, n. 470: 505.



istrative function.²⁰ In fact, it contained several stone weights, fragments of refined carved bone caskets, stone implements, some fragments of a mold for the production of display weapons, and cylinder seals and clay bullae, with cylinder seals impressions. One room, whose building technique is particularly refined, and which probably had a strong door, has been identified as a kind of *Schatzkammer*. This proposal is somewhat problematical, since the excavations do not support it. This may be due to the bad state of preservation of this part of the building, located on the outer slope of the rampart, and therefore largely crumbled, along the rampart itself. Similar admin-

20. Really, also the northern Fort, in Area AA, whose excavation is still in course, is a huge building, and thus it also probably had other functions than the defensive one; the same considerations should apply to Fortress M, to the east, where the exploration should go on, in order to ascertain if the traces of stone structures visible on the ground belong to a fort.

Fig. 17. The residence in Area Z, Middle Bronze I-II.

istrative functions can quite likely be attributed to Fortress M, and to the related fort, where two beautiful spearheads, one bearing a cuneiform inscription and one cylinder seal impression were found.

An Old Babylonian tablet with part of a lexical list, found out of context during the excavation of Fort AA, hints at the presence of an important archive of documents outside the Acropolis, possibly related to the Northwest Gate.²¹

In the light of these considerations, Ebla appears as a true *Ville Royale*, a town where the central power, apparently isolated in its “high place,” in reality radiated everywhere, through a permeating and complicated distribution of functions to officials and to members of the royal family. The urban pattern, established since the beginning of Middle Bronze I, and the social structure, which may be reconstructed from all the different clues at hand, are the reflection of a highly developed urban organization. The people who settled Ebla at the very beginning of Middle Bronze I were not nomads or semi-nomads of the steppe, who took the place of those who had fled from Ebla after the destruction of the town by Sargon of Akkad.²² Rather, they had a clear and advanced urban culture. These were not groups of squatters, who placed their tents and settled down in a deserted place, but the direct heirs of the previous Early Syrian culture. These people had the capacity to

21. So far, some fragments of cuneiform documents of the Old Syrian period were found mainly on the slopes of the Acropolis, and only one complete document was brought to light on the floors of the Western Palace.

22. Really, we must remember that one of the discoveries of the most recent years is a palatial building of Early Bronze IVB, which proves that the town was not abandoned, but rather that it had a new period of flourishing, hints of which were thus far to be found only in Mesopotamian documents of the time of the Third Dynasty of Ur: D. Owen, “Syrians in Sumerian Sources from the Ur III Period,” *BiMes* 25 (1990) 107–75.

mobilize huge labor forces, as the reconstruction of the city was most likely accomplished in to a large degree in a very few decades. They obliterated the older ruins, and yet their main buildings, specially the temples, were built over the previous ones, sometimes reusing the same foundations.²³ Certainly their material culture was totally different from the Early Syrian one, but we believe that the definition of the relations between these two ceramic horizons, and, consequently, between the persons who produced them, is one of the most stimulating subjects for study in the next years of excavations at Ebla. Another open question concerns the relationship between the elaboration of the concepts of kingship and urban pattern and planning, which is starting to be traced for Old Syrian Ebla,²⁴ and what was happening at the same time in Aleppo, the capital town of the region, a question, alas, that is apparently destined to remain unanswered.

23. This persistence of religious cults is a striking feature also at the time of the passage from Middle Bronze to Late Bronze, when ritual offerings of pottery and other objects were made in a pit in the Cisterns’ Square, by people who certainly did not live at Ebla, where there is no trace of a Late Bronze age settlement.

24. Examining different kinds of evidence, it seems possible to maintain that at Ebla they had so much elaborated about the concept of kingship, its relation with the gods, and its visual expression, that they influenced even far away regions, as certainly happened, for instance, with the Cappadocian centers, precisely in the period of apparent gap, between the two main phases of flourishing of Ebla: F. Pinnock, “Some Thoughts about the Transmission of Iconographies between North Syria and Cappadocia. End of the Third–Beginning of the Second Millennium B.C.,” in *Proceedings of the 1st International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East, Rome May 18th–23rd 1998*, eds. P. Matthiae, A. Enea, L. Peyronel, F. Pinnock, in press.