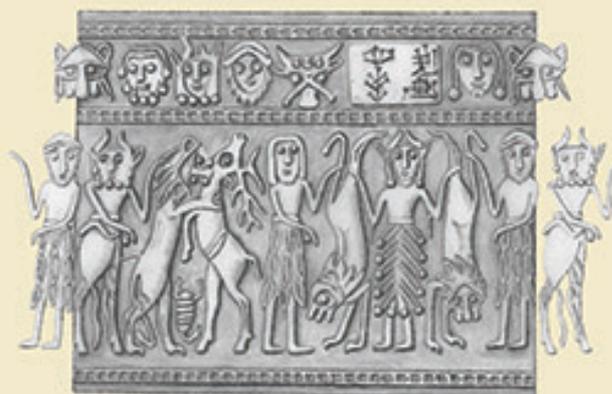


# LES ANNALES ARCHÉOLOGIQUES ARABES SYRIENNES

REVUE D'ARCHÉOLOGIE ET D'HISTOIRE

STUDIES ON THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF EBLA AFTER 50 YEARS OF DISCOVERIES



EDITED BY

PROF. DR. PAOLO MATTHIAE - PROF. DR. MAAMOUN ABDULKARIM - PROF. DR. FRANCIS PINNOCK - DR. MOHAMMED ALKHALID

MINISTÈRE DE LA CULTURE  
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Les Annales Archéologiques Arabes Syriennes (AAAS) est une revue d'archéologie et d'histoire publiée par la Direction Générale des Antiquités et des Musées de la République Arabe Syrienne.

La Revue a pour vocation de publier des études, des recherches et des découvertes archéologiques et historiques, de faire connaître les travaux et la contribution scientifique et archéologique de la Direction Générale des Antiquités et des Musées et de diffuser la culture archéologique de la Syrie dans le pays lui-même, dans le monde arabe et dans la communauté internationale scientifique.

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# THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF EXCAVATIONS AT TELL MARDIKH/EBLA

**Maamoun ABDULKARIM**

*Director-General of Antiquities and Museums*

Paolo Matthiae commenced work at Tell Mardikh, together with a number of professors and students of the Institute of Ancient Near East Studies at the University of Rome, in 1964. At the time, he expected to discover a significant metropolis at the hill, due to its massive area and strategic location, having no evidence, whatsoever, on the name of the hill or who dwelled there, with the exception of a part of a votive basin, engraved with embossed ornaments, which came up to the surface of the ground accidentally in 1955.

The expedition continued its excavations until 1975 when excavators unearthed an archive consisting of 17000 mud tablets, some of which were unscathed, while some others were broken, inside a small room in the Royal Palace dating back to the third millennium BC. This has been the greatest breakthrough in the history of archaeological discoveries in Syria. And those were the first written documents dating to that period.

The historical information and written documents, provided by Professor Matthiae's work on the Syrian land in Ebla, have introduced the world to the civilized side of Syria during the third and second millennia BC. Moreover, they have changed a historical misconception claiming that Syria, throughout history, was merely a transit point, or a center of communication or clash between the major civilizations, well-known at the time, i.e. the civilizations of Mesopotamia and the Nile Valley. His work at Tell Mardikh, however, has proved that Syria had its own special and unique character which was independent from those two civilizations, and which paralleled their originality and intellectual and cultural creativity.

Furthermore, we should not forget to make mention of the scientific team working alongside the Ebla expedition, whose members have become leading figures in the archaeological arena, including, first and foremost, Gabriela Matthiae and Frances Pinnock, deputy director of the mission and specialist in pottery; Stefania Mazzoni, an archaeologist, who was later in charge of excavations at the site of Tell Afis; linguists, such as Alfonso Araque, Mr. Franzaroli, Maria Giovanna Biga, Davide Nadali and many others, who have become distinguished and genuine «reference shelves» for archaeological and historical research.

Professor Matthiae's valuable and just stand, together with his team, in all scientific, historical and archaeological forums and societies, on Arab causes and in the face of all attempts to distort facts and documents concerning Ebla in order to serve non-scientific agendas, is the sharpest evidence of Professor Matthiae's scholarship, integrity and objectivity in his archaeological work and research in Ebla.

Besides, it is worth to say that Professor Matthiae has received the Syrian Order of Merit, First Class, and he has remained committed to his stands, disapproving of the politicization of the Syrian archaeological heritage due to the current crisis, we are experiencing in Syria.

Ebla site has been subjected to clandestine excavations, which damaged some archaeological buildings and archaeological strata and violated the sanctity of the hill by means of theft, looting and destruction. According to reports, random digging has taken place for a long time. Nonetheless, thanks to the efforts exerted by the DGAM's staff in cooperation with the local community, they have managed to mitigate the damage befalling the site. Thus, we can claim that in spite of the natural and human causalities, associated with the crisis, and by comparison with the status of other sites in Syria, in the absence of the government institutions, Ebla archaeological site is in reasonably good condition following the cessation of those criminal acts. We also hope that Ebla remains secure against violations and damage.

Finally, I would like, on behalf of all of my colleagues at the Directorate-General of Antiquities and Museums, to extend our deepest gratitude and most sincere wishes to Professor Matthiae and his team and all of those who have taken great pains to bring Syria's civilized and cultural face to light and to organize this overwhelmingly successful 50th anniversary of the discovery of the Kingdom of Ebla, held in Rome.

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# 50 YEARS OF EBLA DISCOVERY: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

**Paolo MATTHIAE**

*Directeur de la Mission d'Ebla*

The University of Rome asked the Ministry of Culture of Damascus the permission to excavate Tell Mardikh in 1963, with the aim to answer some question raised by the excavation of Tell Atshanah/Alalakh, led by Sir Leonard Woolley. First, was the culture the Alalakh excavations had revealed for the period 1800-1200 BC really a culture of northern Syria, autonomous from the contemporary worlds of the Old Babylonian Mesopotamia of Hammurabi of Babylon, and of Old Hittite Anatolia? Second, was the culture revealed at Alalakh located only in Alalakh or was it spread over the whole Aleppo region? Third, if Alalakh was only a part of a culture with a wide regional meaning, which were its historical roots in the Third millennium BC, in the Early Bronze Age? The project of a systematic archaeological exploration in the site of Tell Mardikh, nearly 60 km south of Aleppo seemed to answer effectively enough to these questions. The site is quite large, 56 hectares in surface, and in its morphology the imposing town walls and the central acropolis, surrounded by an extended lower town, appear clearly, while its chronology, as inferred from the pottery scattered on the surface of the hill, was included between the half of the Third, and the half of the Second Millennium BC.

The excavations went on without interruptions for 47 years, between 1964 and 2010, with the constant, generous, and friendly support of the Authorities of the Syrian Arab Republic. The results were sensational, and impressed the international scientific world, as well as the public opinion all over the world.

Summarizing, what did nearly fifty years of excavations at Tell Mardikh reveal? The site was identified for sure with ancient Ebla since the fifth campaign in 1968, whereas, in the scientific literature of the time, Ebla was a town in upper Syria, often located in Turkey, and always north, or east, and west, yet never south of Aleppo. The excavations allowed to reconstruct on the site of Tell Mardikh a succession of three great towns: the first Ebla, of the High Early Syrian period, between 2500 and 2300 BC ca.; the second, less relevant Ebla, of the late Early Syrian period, between 2300 and 2000 BC ca; the third Ebla, again a flourishing site, in the Archaic and Classical Old Syrian periods, between 2000 and 1600 BC ca.

The first Ebla is the town of the Royal Palace, and of the famous Royal Archives: it ruled politically the whole of northern Syria, expanded towards

upper Mesopotamia, beyond the Euphrates, had diplomatic relations with the land of Akkad in Lower Mesopotamia during the last years of the Early Dynastic period, and with Egypt during the sixth Dynasty of the Old Kingdom, the Pyramids age, and it received huge amounts of lapis lazuli from far away Afghanistan, where the Land of Aratta of the Sumerian texts was located, and gifts from two pharaohs of Egypt at least, one of whom is Chefred, the builder of the second pyramid of Gizeh. The first Ebla was conquered, sacked, and destroyed during the first years of Sargon of Akkad, around 2300 BC, possibly by Sargon himself.

The second Ebla was certainly smaller, and somehow declining: it is known only from a few evidences, and it is the town contemporary with Naram-Sin of Akkad's inscription, where he recalls he conquered Armanum, and Ebla, and, some decades later, with Gudea of Lagash's statue, mentioning Ebla as the place whence precious timber came for the building of a temple in the Land of Sumer.

The third Ebla flourished between 2000 and 1600 BC, and is the town best documented by excavations. The massive earthen-work ramparts, still standing 22 m high, date from this period, as well as the three large palaces in the Lower Town, with a ceremonial building (the Northern Palace), the Crown Prince's residence (Western Palace), and the great vizier's palace (Southern Palace), the four temples in the Lower Town, and the main temple on the citadel, the extended Royal Palace on the Acropolis, explored only for a very small part, the four city gates, among which the Damascus Gate is particularly well preserved, and the extended quarters of private houses, brought to light in three different parts of the town. The tombs of the Royal Necropolis, where jewels, bronze objects, ivories, and precious pharaonic gifts were found, date from the years between 1850 and 1700 BC.

The third and last Ebla was probably a powerful ally of Aleppo, the hegemonic power of Syria between 1775 and 1600 BC, and was destroyed around

1600 BC, quite likely by a coalition of Hittites, Hurrians, and Cassites, certainly led by the Old Hittite king Mursilis I, who was celebrated for centuries in Anatolia because he was the conqueror of Aleppo, and Babylon. The conquest of Ebla in 1600 BC is the subject, in mythical-historical terms, of a bilingual Hittite and Hurrian poem, the "Song of Liberation". In this extraordinary epic text, where several themes anticipate Homer's Iliad, the deadly fate of Ebla, called the "town of the throne", is marked, in the divine world, by the god Teshub of Kumme's rage against the town, and, in the human world, by the destruction by Pizikarra, lord of Nineveh. Teshub of Kumme is a great storm god of the Eastern Hurrians, while the otherwise unknown Pizikarra was certainly a Hurrian king of the great Assyrian town, allied with Mursili I.

Going back to the three problems at the origin of the exploration of Ebla, the imposing archaeological evidence for the Third Ebla of the first half of the Second Millennium BC proved beyond doubt that the culture revealed by the Alalakh excavations was certainly common to the whole of Upper Syria, from the Taurus mountains to the north, at least to the Homs region to the south, and autonomous both from Mesopotamia, and from Anatolia, though certainly in close relation with both. Moreover, the exceptional archaeological, and epigraphic evidence from the Royal Palace, and Archives, which make us know this very important cultural, and political centre of the Second half of the Third Millennium in Syria, sheds full light on the very ancient historical roots of that same Old Syrian culture, precisely in the historical centre, namely Ebla, where there was the strongest continuity between the third and Second Millennia BC.

The revelation of the Early Syrian culture, unknown until 1975, when the Ebla Royal Archives were discovered, allowed to shed light, in a so far unimaginable way, on one of the main problems of the global archaeology of our times. In fact, with the 17,000 inventory numbers of cuneiform tablets, mostly of administrative nature, but also, in a lesser

amount, lexical, and literary, the Royal Archives of Ebla offer a very large, and detailed evidence for the social, and economic life, religious structure, palace organization, scribal culture, military accomplishments of one of the most important urban centres of what we nowadays call the “second urbanization” in humankind’s history.

We could calculate that the Archives texts, before breaking up in the devastating fire of the 2300 BC destruction, were between 4,000 and 5,000, and were composed by the Ebla chancery during approximately 40 years. To give an idea of the extraordinary meaning of the discovery of the Ebla Royal Archives, we may recall that all the texts we thus far have, from several ancient centres, for the whole Akkad dynasty, the dynasty of Sargon and Naram-Sin, amount to approximately 5,000. Moreover, the Ebla texts belong to the central archives of the kingdom, and therefore include documents of primary importance.

Thus, the discovery of the Ebla Royal Archives in 1975 is one of the extraordinary events of Near Eastern Archaeology, and certainly the most important archaeological discovery in the world of the second half of the Twentieth Century.

The importance of the Ebla excavations for the problems typical of contemporary global archaeology descends from the fact that the first Ebla, with its very rich archaeological, and textual evidences, is by far the best-known historical centre of the age of the “second urbanization”. What we nowadays call “second urbanization”, took place in the centuries around the mid-Third Millennium BC, and is the second and decisive phase of the revolution, or rather, of the exceptional social, economic, and institutional change we call “first urbanization”, which took place a few centuries earlier, during the Second half of the Second Millennium BC.

The importance of the Ebla discoveries, particularly as regards the first Ebla of the third fourth of the Third Millennium BC can be taken into account only within the picture of the development of

early state formations of the Near East, because the meaning of the “second urbanization” in the ancient Orient is a basic one for the history of humankind. In fact, if the urban and social model of the town were bound to the environmental conditioning of an alluvial plain, its fortune in the planet history would have remained quite limited. In Upper Mesopotamia and Upper Syria humankind faced around the mid-Third Millennium BC a challenge with a very special meaning, and they won this challenge, revealing that the town model, with some adaptation, could win over environmental conditionings. Since that time, the town model became the symbol itself of civilization, because towns became the place for community living for excellence, the focus of every development of complex societies, the irreplaceable seat of any economic progress, the place for any advanced ideological elaboration. For its archaeological, and epigraphic evidence, Ebla is by far the best known, and most complete example of this important phase of the history of humankind in the remotest past.

One second basic contribution, somehow unexpected for, deals more with historical archaeology, than with global archaeology, and is the evidence the extensive exploration of the third, and last Ebla, offered about the problem of the continuity of the culture of Syria between the first half of the Second Millennium BC, and the last urban flourishing of the Iron Age, of the first centuries of the First Millennium BC, until the years around 700 BC, when the whole Syrian region became a part of the Assyrian empire, and the urban centres suffered a final collapse. The continuity the Ebla excavations document in every aspect of material culture, from the shapes of architectural typologies, to the categories of artistic expression, between the years around 1800 BC, and those around 800/700 BC proof that the presumed mixed and hybrid nature, as it is nowadays called, of the architectural, and artistic culture of pre-Hellenistic Syria is not a fact, but is only the result of a lack of archaeological exploration in a cultural reality, that of Syria, which always re-elab-

orated with strong originality the repeated foreign influences which took place over the centuries.

The discovery of Ebla offers a thousand years of evidence between the mid-Third Millennium, and the mid-Second millennium: since the first discoveries it was perceived, not only in international scientific milieus, but also by the authorities of the Syrian Arab Republic, as the revelation of the most ancient culture of Syria, an authentically Syrian one, so to say.

The tragedy of the crisis of the Country, interrupted in 2011 the field operations, and the restorations at Tell Mardikh, the completion of the Archaeological Park, and the refurbishing of the Idlib Museum, but it did not block studies, and publications. Publications are going on, with several articles about archaeology, philology, and history, and two volumes of the final reports by Frances Pinnock, and Francesco Pomponio, in the series “Materials, and Archaeological Studies of Ebla” and “Royal Archives of Ebla. Texts” have just appeared. Among the main initiatives we may recall the pluriannual research “Ebla Chora”, financed by the European Union: it deals with the organization of the Ebla territory in the Archives Age, and one volume has already appeared, edited by Paolo Matthiae, and Nicolò Marchetti, called “Ebla and Its Landscape”, which includes a large amount of archaeological, palaeobotanical, zooarcheological, and archaeometric contributions. Amalia Catagnoti has published a grammar of the Ebla language, which is the first complete morphological analysis of the basic documentation of Eblaite. The publisher Harrassowitz of Wiesbaden recently published a large volume, which collects 42 articles by Paolo Matthiae in English, about the archaeology of Ebla, originally published between 1980, and 2010.

In 2014 an accurate schedule for the final excavation reports was launched, under the joint direction of Paolo Matthiae, and Frances Pinnock. These will appear as volumes of the series “Materials, and Archaeological Studies of Ebla”, and the authors

will be Paolo Matthiae, Frances Pinnock, Stefania Mazzoni, Luca Peyronel, Nicolò Marchetti, Agnese Vacca, Marta D’Andrea, Davide Nadali, Maria Gabriella Micale, Sara Pizzimenti, Andrea Polcaro, Alessandro Colantoni, Alessandra Enea, Ahmed Kzzo and Mohammed Alkhalid. A similar planning is also taking place for the publication of the Archives texts, including volumes of the two series “Royal Archives of Ebla. Texts”, and “Royal Archives of Ebla. Studies”, whose authors will be Alfonso Archi, Maria Giovanna Biga, Pelio Fronzaroli, Amalia Catagnoti, Gianni Marchesi, Jean-Marie Durand, Imad Samir, Gregory Chambon, Mohammed Hajouz. For the project “Ebla Chora” three more volumes are planned, edited by Nicolò Marchetti, and Luca Peyronel, devoted to archaeometric studies, which will appear in the series “Materials, and Archaeological Studies of Ebla”, whereas there will be a final volume of essays concerning analytical studies about the Ebla territory.

Some initiative will concern the fiftieth anniversary of the Ebla excavations: in agreement with the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums, an International Conference will be organized, called “Ebla and Beyond. The Ancient Near Eastern Studies after Fifty Years of Discoveries at Tell Mardikh”, which will take place on December 15th-17th 2014, where more than twenty scholars from different countries of the world will present their critical considerations about the revolutionary impact of the discoveries of Ebla over the ancient Near Eastern studies. The direction of the Expedition is also in charge of the publication of a new yearly journal, called “*Studia Eblaitica*”, which will include archaeological, philological, and historical studies about ancient Syria, with special concern for the contribution offered by the discoveries of Ebla, whose first issue will be published in 2015 by Harrassowitz of Wiesbaden.

The severe crisis hitting Syria since the beginning of 2011, which, also due to the intervention of foreign powers, endangers the integrity, and unity of the Syrian Arab Republic, does not leave the

members of the Italian Archaeological Expedition indifferent. More than three generations of scholars of this group dedicated a large part of their life as scholars to the rediscovery, study, and valorization of the priceless archaeological, and historical heritage of this Country. The decades long engagement on the site of Ebla, led in perfect, exemplary, and brotherly consonance with the People, and the Authorities of the Syrian Arab Republic, led the members of the Expedition to consider Syria as their second motherland: we all strongly share the anguish for the tragedy affecting the People of Syria, and for the growing risks for the cultural heritage of Syria, which is a universal heritage of humankind.

For this reason the direction of the archaeological Expedition to Ebla took part, directly, and actively in the conference organized by UNESCO in Amman, in February 2013, and in the conference UNESCO organized in Paris in May 2014, to study any form of defense, and protection of the cultural heritage of Syria. The Ebla Expedition wishes to offer all support, and to endorse every initiative for the protection of the cultural heritage taken in agreement with the Directorate General of the Antiquities and Museums of the Syrian Arab Republic, and with the UNESCO patronage.

With this same perspective the Archaeological Expedition at Ebla, in cooperation with the Institute for Cultural Diplomacy, chaired by Francesco Rutelli, and with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Italian Republic, with the patronage of UNESCO, organized the exhibition "Syria. Splendor and Tragedy". It took place in Rome, in the important seat of Palazzo Venezia, between June 19th and August 31st 2014, and it had a large success. The aim was to draw the attention of the Italian, and international public over the tragedy of the Syrian cultural heritage, and over the necessity to provide all support to the Syrian Arab Republic for the preservation, and reconstruction of their cultural heritage. The exhibition was the clear manifestation of the engagement by the Institute for Cultural Diplomacy, and the Archaeological Expedition to Ebla to

prevent that the chain life, landscape, culture breaks up, and to obtain that the people of Syria have back, as soon as possible, peace, justice, unity, solidarity, freedom, in the mark of culture, and tolerance, of which Syria has always been bearer over the millennia.

With the mind and heart full of anguish for the dramatic conditions of the Syrian people, victim of a terrible tragedy, we wish to recall that this tragic situation has forcefully stopped a very large network of exemplary international scientific cooperation, with the presence in the Country of slightly less than one hundred archaeological Expeditions from all the world. The Ministry of Culture of Damascus, also in this very difficult situation, is profusely operating for the protection of the universal cultural heritage of the Country, making appeals to all the parts involved in the armed conflict, with operations of documentation, and cataloguing of the damage, with continuous interventions of its officials in a desperate attempt to protect these works, even risking their lives.

It is my deeply felt auspice that the crisis of the Country, bearing now humanitarian consequences surpassing even the worst expectations, may have a political conclusion, and that a civil pacification should prevail as soon as possible in a Country renewed in its institutions, and unitary in its structure, which may still be as plural and tolerant as it was for centuries. I wish to conclude this presentation with the solemn statement that, as soon as the security of the Country will allow it, Italy is ready to co-operate in the most intense and active way, for the renaissance of Syria in general, and for the protection of its extraordinary cultural heritage in particular.

Rome/Damascus

*This paper has been read in September 2014 via videoconference, in occasion to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Excavation at Tell Mardikh/Ebla.*

## DEFENSIVE BUILDINGS AT EBLA (SYRIA) DURING THE MIDDLE BRONZE AGE (C. 2000-1600 BC)

**Luca PEYRONEL**

*University IULM, Milan*

*The evidence here briefly overviewed, including several defensive buildings excavated on the rampart, the articulated system of the urban gates and the overall project of the construction of the Old Syrian fortification (an outer rampart outside the eastern and southern town, a rampart protecting the lower town, and an inner one defending the citadel), makes Ebla the Middle Bronze urban center of the whole Levantine region in which the defensive architecture is best known. Moreover, the presence of several military buildings in a very good state of preservation with associated materials in situ allowed a deep analysis of architectural tradition, typological definition and functional interpretation*

After the excavation of the monumental urban gate in Area A (the so-called ‘Damascus Gate’) and the investigation of the rampart during the first years of the archaeological expedition at Ebla, an articulated project of research on the defensive system of the Old Syrian town started in 1995 with the discovery of a huge fortress on the western rampart (Matthiae 1998: 575-580). Large sectors especially of the western, northern and eastern rampart were excavated between 1995 and 2000 (Fig. 1), bringing to light the Western Fort, the Northern Fort, the large tower flanking the not-yet excavated ‘Aleppo’ Gate, the North-East city Gate (the so-called ‘Steppe Gate’), the Fortress East-North-East (Area EE) (Matthiae 2001; 2010: 399-407). Moreover, the Fortress East-South-East in Area M (discovered in 1971) was cleaned and re-studied, and during the restoration of the Damascus Gate in 2003-2004 rooms in the inner

part of its southern bastion and structures in the area immediately outside the gate were excavated, bringing to light also part of the stone escarp of the rampart. Lastly, at the beginning of the Ebla-Chora project, a multi-targeted and interdisciplinary research funded by the European Research Commission (7-P IDEAS, 2010-2014), an off-site survey in the area immediately outside the southern and eastern rampart allowed the identification of an ‘outer town’ protected by an external rampart dated to the Middle Bronze Age (Peyronel 2015: 134-140).

This article deals with the defensive structures which can be considered bastions and fortresses built on the ramparts, discussing their function in the overall system of fortification at Ebla, and their comparison in the wider regional framework of military architecture in the Levant and Anatolia.

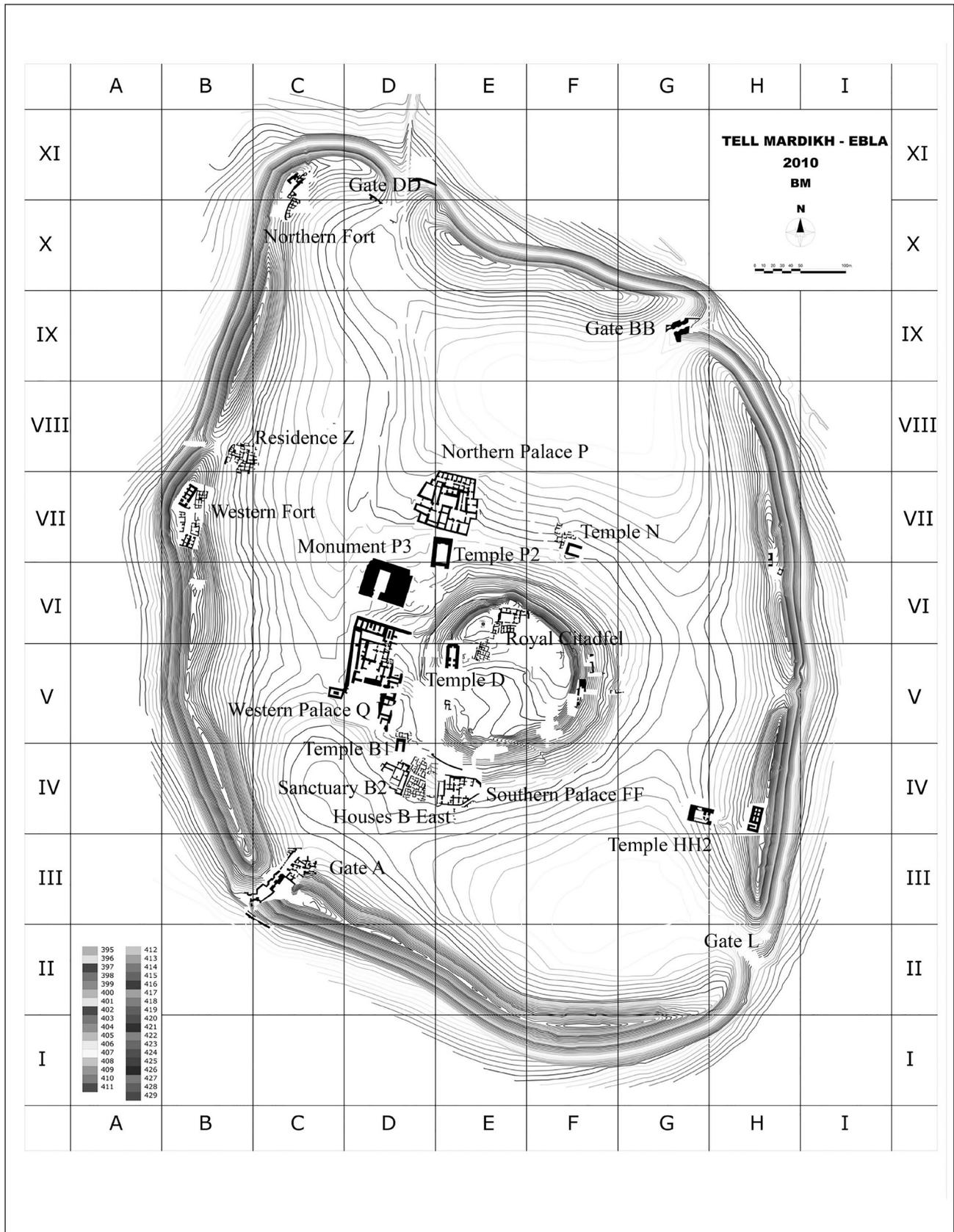


Fig. 1: Tell Mardikh-Ebla. Topographic plan - Middle Bronze I-II (c. 2000-1600 BC).

The complete renovation of the town at the beginning of the Old Syrian Period is characterized by the construction of a new and articulated fortification system protecting the town with a monumental earthen rampart. Stratigraphic data and radiocarbon dating clearly indicate that the rampart was built at the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC and that the new defensive structure incorporated in its core the preceding Early Bronze IV fortification (Matthiae 2001: 33-34; 2013: 134). The rampart is composed by alternating horizontal layers of reddish clay and limestone crumble as a result of the excavation of an outer ditch or by oblique layers of ashy earth with EB IVB materials, testifying for large removal of debris from the 3rd millennium ruined town. The new rampart is c. 2,8 km long, enclosing the Lower Town with the walled Citadel, 20-22 m high on the outer plain and 10-12 m on the lower town, with a regular thickness of 40-50 m at the base (Burke 2008: 198-201; Matthiae 2001: 31-33; 2010: 399-403; 2013: 137-139). The fortification is provided by four city-gates and it is characterized by an irregular elliptical shape where changes of axis were carefully planned and were intended to facilitate the control of the outer foot of the fortification, which was also reinforced by a stone escarp: the longer western and eastern sides (respectively 830 m and 790 m long) includes three straight segments with two deliberate changes in axis; the north rampart presents an arched projection in correspondence of the Aleppo Gate followed by an evident curve inside, while the south rampart has a slight change of axis at the midway. The characteristics and the location of the defensive structures related to the rampart (fortresses and gates with towers) suggest that the fortification was conceived taking into account the differences among its parts in a planned project functional to assure the best defense to the town.

The survey carried out at the beginning of the excavations at Ebla and during the renewed investigation of the rampart in 1995 has showed that the shorter northern and southern rampart has no traces of defensive buildings; the latter is integrated by a

walkways on its top, probably connecting the Damascus Gate with the south-eastern Gate and the former is provided by a massive semi-circular tower to the east of the Aleppo Gate. On the contrary, the western rampart was defended by three huge buildings (called 'forts' in the terminology adopted by the Italian Expedition), located at a distance of c. 300 m one from the other. Two of them (the Western Fort and the Northern Fort) have been largely excavated revealing an articulated plan and the presence of bastions of a standard type, while a third one is placed between the Damascus Gate and the Western Fort and it was identified by walls still visible on the eroded top of the rampart. To the east, the long line of the rampart is characterized by bastions/arsenals of standard plan (called 'fortresses' by the Italian Expedition) again placed at a regular distance of c. 250/300 m. The walkways to the south and the arsenals on the inner slope of the eastern fortification should be now considered in relation with the presence of an outer rampart and an outer extension of the town, whereas the strong defenses to the west were possibly planned in order to give the best protection on that side, which had no structures outside the town (Peyronel 2015).

The Western Fort (Fig. 2), almost completely brought to light during the 1995-1998 excavation seasons (Matthiae 1998: 572-588; 2000: 580-600), extended over more than 2300 m<sup>2</sup> and it is composed by architectural units/quarters, arranged around a long irregular courtyard (L.6315+L.6621+L.6525) (Matthiae 2001: 44-46, fig. 8; Peyronel 2000; 2007; see also Burke 2008: 203; Rey 2012: 37-40, fig. 23). It develops along an N-S axis with a length of 74 m, while its width along the E-W axis might have been 34/35 m. Unfortunately the western limit of the fort is completely missing, due to the erosion of the upper outer slope of the rampart, which caused the collapse of the structures.

The building was destroyed and set on fire at the time of the final sack of the town as revealed by thick layers of ashes over the floors. The dramatic event of





Fig. 4: Tell Mardikh-Ebla. Aerial view of the northern part of Western Fort.



Fig. 5: Tell Mardikh-Ebla. Sealing from L.6516, Western Fort.

on a inscribed bronze spear-head found in Fortress M (see *infra*), making possible that this person, if the same, was one of the officials in charge of the fortification control.

To the south, four quarters pivoted upon the rectangular courtyard L.6315+L.6621 (Fig.2): a peripheral unit located at the south-eastern corner of the building equipped with several grinding tools for food processing (South-East Wing); a sector characterized by two parallel rectangular courts paved with flat basalt stones and equipped with stone basins, reached from the central court through a small square vestibule with a staircase (East Wing); the South-West wing, characterized by a room with the entrance flanked by orthostatic limestone slabs,

which could have been a kind of treasury of the fort; and a residential wing opening on the courtyard's western side with two separate groups of well-built and large rooms (Matthiae 2001: 44-46, fig. 8).

The Northern Fort (Fig. 6) was excavated between 1996 and 2002 on the northernmost section of the rampart (Matthiae 1998: 579-584; 2000: 584-588). It is a huge building that develops along the N-S axis following the rampart's curve, and it is arranged on the three terraces at different levels, separated by two retaining walls (M.7330+M.7369 and M.7974+M.7968) (Matthiae 2001: 46-48; 2010: 414-419; see also Burke 2008: 203; Rey 2012: 40-42, fig. 24). The building was certainly more than 70 m long and larger than 35 m, since its western limit (M.6956+M.6958) is the only identified. As in the Western Fort, a bastion is located at the north-western edge (Fortress AA), presenting a standard plan with three pairs of rooms and an entrance vestibule with a staircase. Notwithstanding the bad preservation of the structures, a large fire installation (L.6906), probably a fireplace for smoke signals, was found in one room (Matthiae 1998: 580).

The fort is organized in wings located on the different terraces, which apparently sharing a residential use, with small bipartite units composed of two rooms along the E-W axis (Fig. 7). Thus, it seems that the defensive building had a homogeneous function related to host a consistent garrison of soldier and a military arsenal. The deliberate mud-brick filling of several rooms of the upper terrace indicates that a part of the fort went out of use before its destruction at the end of MB II, possibly as a consequence of a demographic crisis resulting in a settlement contraction, as it is also testified by the abandonment of domestic buildings in the lower town and the eastern outer town (Matthiae 2009: 67-74; Peyronel 2015: 140-141).

Western Fort and Northern Fort shared a number of general features, such as the position of the bastion at the north-western edge, the presence of rows of chambers along the major north axis, the





Fig. 7: Tell Mardikh-Ebla. Residential units, Northern Fort.

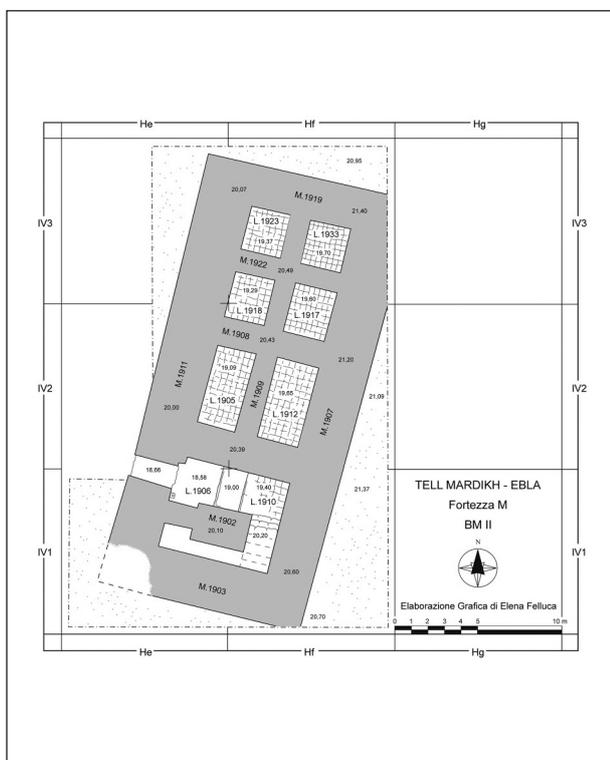


Fig. 8: Tell Mardikh-Ebla. Plan of the East-South-East Fortress (Area M).

The bastions at the north-western edge of the two forts are characterized by standard plan and dimension, with three pairs of six non-communicating room and the entrance wing with a vestibule and the staircase leading to the upper floor from where it was possible to reach the other rooms (with the exception of room L.6516 in the Fortress V in which a door opened to the vestibule).

This kind of fortress was conceived at Ebla also as a free-standing building: on the eastern rampart two similar bastions were excavated and a third one identified by surface scraping. They were built at a regular distance of 250/300 m in the central/upper part of the inner slope of the rampart.

Fortress East-South-East (Area M) (Fig. 8) is a massive rectangular bastion 27 m long and 13 m large (Matthiae 1985: tav. 89; Burke 2008: 202-203; Rey 2012: 43-44). It is composed by three pairs of mud-brick paved rooms and by an entrance wing. The entrance is through the western side, near the southern corner: a small vestibule (L.1906) leads to a staircase and the six non-communicating rooms could be entered from above by means of ladders (Fig. 9). Materials from Fortress M are quite scanty, albeit the pottery sherds collected in the thick destruction layers inside it certainly date the end of the building to the last phase of MB IIB, or around the second half of the 17th century. BC. Several grinding tools (pestles, grinding slabs, grinding tables) were found immediately outside the south-western corner of the fortress, revealing primary activities related to the building and associated with ephemeral structures. However, it is sure that an articulated complex such as those of the western rampart never existed around Fortress M, which could be regarded as an isolated arsenal/defensive bastion. Three remarkable objects point out at the importance of the fortress in relation to administrative personnel of the town. Two bronze spear-heads 30 cm long (de Maigret 1976; Matthiae *et al.* 1995: n. 307) were found in the understairs L.1900 (Fig. 10). They were probably hidden together there before the siege of the city, though we cannot rule out the possibility that the small recess was a sort of storing place under the control of some official. Both have a short cuneiform inscription on the ridged blade with the names of the owners: 'Teirshe, the scribe', and 'Alishu, the general' (de Maigret 1976: 34). The weapons morphology with a curved-point seems to suggest a 'ceremonial' function, linking them with the scenes carved on the ritual limestone basins found



Fig. 9: Tell Mardikh-Ebla. View of the East-South-East Fortress.

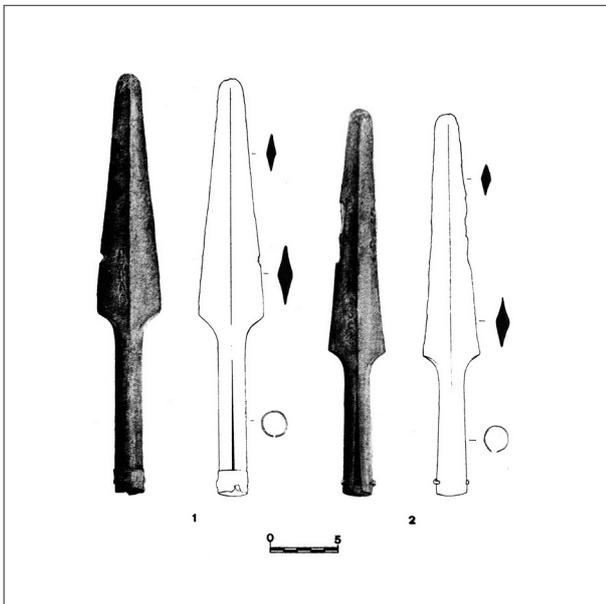


Fig. 10: Tell Mardikh-Ebla. Bronze spear-heads from L.1900, East-South-East Fortress.

in Temple D and B1 (Matthiae *et al.* 1995: nn. 290-291). This kind of weapons was attested in Syria at the end of the Middle Bronze, as testified especially by Ugaritic examples, found in tombs dating from Ugarit Moyen 3 (Philip 1989: 88-89, 350-351).

An elongated bulla (8,5 cm long) was found in L.1917 (Fig. 11; Matthiae *et al.* 1995: n. 247). It bears a cylinder seal impression, unfortunately quite fragmentary; the edges and part of the plain back show a fine textile pattern, probably indicating that it was used to seal objects wrapped around a textile. The seal belongs to the mature Old Syrian

glyphic style with representations divided in two registers of different size. The main scene shows on the left four figures raising hands and walking towards a male deity in a high oval headdress and a mantle with rolled borders; behind the god there are two columns of cuneiform inscription, unfortunately so damaged that the reading is not possible. The first personage of the procession is a female goddess, maybe Khepat with her high horned headdress, whereas the other three are certainly human male figures, quite probably high-rank officials of Ebla. In the lower register a griffin and a lion are depicted together with other indistinguishable figures.

Another bastion (Fortress East-North-East) (Fig. 12) has been excavated in 1999 on the inner slope of the eastern rampart, c. 270 m north of Fortress M (Matthiae 2000: 587-593; 2001: 41-42; Rey 2012: 42-43). The building is badly preserved and pillaged in modern times; however, it has been possible reconstructing one half of the general plan. The fortress is a variation of the common type of Eblaic bastions and it might have been composed by two pairs of non-communicating rooms and by an entrance with a vestibule and a staircase on the southern side, with a main axis running S-N. Only the half of the eastern rooms (L.7764, L.7775), 3 m long, the eastern rear wall (M.7766) and the eastern face of the central pillar of the staircase (M.7750) are still preserved. Part of a stone drain was found in L.7775 and it was probably used to carry water to a cistern located at the foot of the rampart. Interesting information came from the floors located outside the fortress on the top of the rampart (L.7769). Along this walking area some piles of medium-small sized stones were found on the floor or leaning against the fortress rear wall, possibly grouped there to be used as projectiles to throw outside the city-wall. Further north six skeletons of adult males were discovered in disconnected positions (Matthiae 2000: fig. 18), and it is likely that they were soldiers killed during the siege of the Old Syrian city, coupling the evidence coming from the Western Fort, where two



Fig. 11: Tell Mardikh-Ebla. Sealing from L.1917, East-South-East Fortress.

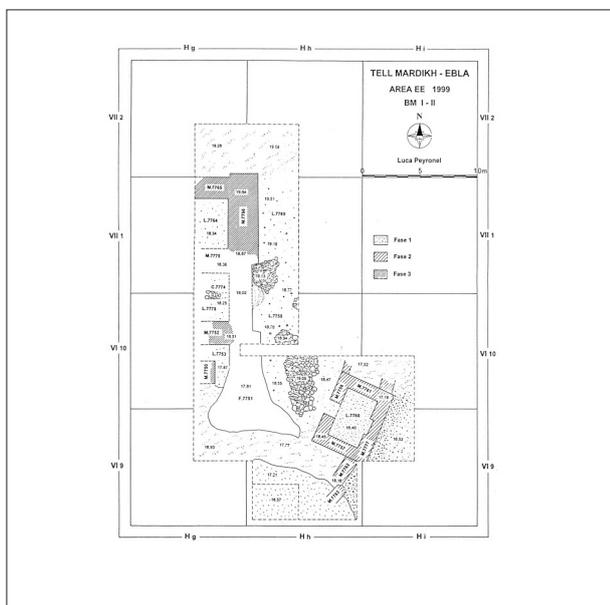


Fig. 12: Tell Mardikh-Ebla. Plan of the East-North-East Fortress (Area EE).

complete burnt male skeletons were discovered in front of the entrance of Fortress V).

Before the construction of the bastion an older defensive building of different type was in use in Area EE (Fig. 13). The building, of which only one room was completely excavated (L.7760), seems to be arranged following the curve of the rampart. The rectangular room is quite well preserved with walls 1, 5-2 m high and it was filled with layers of fallen mud-bricks without any evidence of destruction. The connection between the eastern outer wall and the rampart plaster points out at a direct relation of

the structure with the defensive city-wall in a phase which can be dated, on the base of pottery fragments collected on the floor, between the end of MB I and the beginning of MB II. Immediately before the implantation of this building and shortly after the construction of the rampart this area was used as a midden: a large ash-pit several meters in diameter, full of organic materials, pottery and small objects dates in fact to the second half of the 20th century BC (middle-late MB IA) (Peyronel 2008: 178-179, figs. 2-3; Fiorentino and Caracuta 2014).

As already remarked, the bastions of the eastern rampart were built on the inner slope in a position not particularly effective to the control of the outer foot of the fortification. The reason for this choice might be the presence of an outlying rampart delimiting a south-eastern outer suburb (Matthiae 2001: 49). The outer rampart run roughly parallel to the eastern rampart of the town: the study of satellite imagery and an off-site survey carried out in 2010 showed that in origin it joined with the fortification near the north-east city gate and that another defensive structure was built south of the tell, almost completely destroyed by modern agriculture (Fig. 14). The survey demonstrated that the area limited by the eastern outer rampart and its southern prosecution is c. 30 ha. However, only a part of this south-eastern outer suburb was certainly settled during MB I-IIA (c. 1950-1700 BC), corresponding to c. 15/20 ha. The lack of MB IIB pottery might



Fig. 13: Tell Mardikh-Ebla. View of L.7760, Area EE.

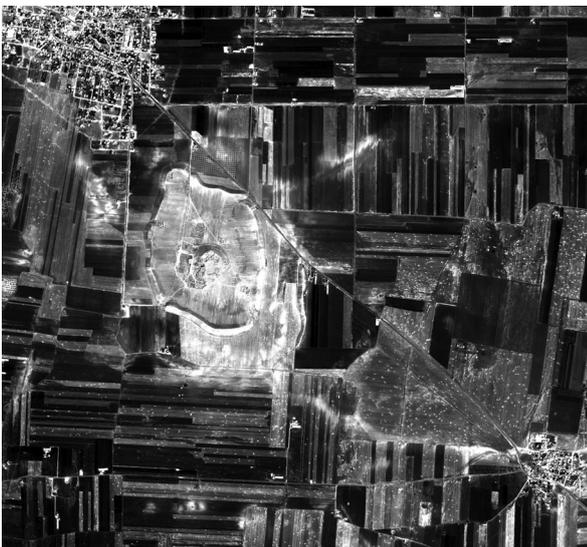


Fig. 14: Tell Mardikh-Ebla. WorldView-2 satellite image (2011).

indicate an abandonment of the area before the final destruction of the Old Syrian town (Peyronel 2015: 137-138).

The standard typology for bastions/arsenals/watching-towers employed during the Old Syrian Period at Ebla, well-documented by Fortress V in the Western Fort, Fortress AA in the Northern Fort, and by fortresses in areas EE and M on the eastern rampart, was conceived as an integrated unit of the forts or as a free-standing building. It seems probable that these structures might be considered a peculiar Syro-Palestinian military device, elaborated

for the first time in the Old Syrian milieu during the MB II period. They find comparisons in the towers 5017 and 1005 at Tell el-Jezairi/Gezer (Kempinski 1992: 132-133; Burke 2008: 260-263) and also the towers of Area AA and BB at Tell et-Mutesellim/Megiddo (Strata XIII-XII) can be included in the same tradition of rectangular defensive structures (Burke 2008: 291-295). Tower 5017 at Gezer had a plan formed by a vestibule with a staircase and two pairs of rooms, exactly as the fortress in Area EE at Ebla, while the others had only the entrance wing with a staircase and a main rectangular room; they should be regarded as true defensive towers and not multi-functional buildings as is the case of the larger bastions.

However, a more precise definition of MB architecture related to defensive buildings needs further investigations in the major urban centers of the Syrian region (e.g. at Mishrifé-Qatna, Tell Nasriya, Tell Asharneh; cf. Matthiae 2013: 142-147), up to now limited to the analysis of gates and earthen work ramparts.

It has been recently suggested that in south-eastern Anatolia during the MB period fortifications display a combination of Syrian and Anatolian features (Benati and Zaina 2014). In particular, fortresses P-P2, K and H at Tilmen Höyük were built during MB II according to a standard plan with a staircase and a two-room suite and they were associated to the casemate wall. The continuity of this kind of tower/fortress could be envisaged in Fortress A at Taşlı Geçit Höyük, dated to LB I (which is however the unique example in so far), while in Northern Syria defensive building of this type was no longer attested (see e.g. the LB fortress-like complexes of Alalakh; Akar 2013) and in Palestine new models appeared probably under the influence of the Egyptian architecture (cf. Oren 1985).

The evidence here briefly overviewed, including several defensive buildings excavated on the rampart, the articulated system of the urban gates and the overall project of the construction of the

Old Syrian fortification (an outer rampart outside the eastern and southern town, a rampart protecting the lower town, and an inner one defending the citadel), makes Ebla the Middle Bronze urban center of the whole Levantine region in which the defensive architecture is best known. Moreover, the presence of several military buildings in a very good state of preservation with associated materials in situ allowed a deep analysis of architectural tradition, typological definition and functional interpretation (Matthiae 2013: 137-142). After the renewed investigation of the rampart it becomes clear that the anomalies in the circuit of the fortification were the result of an intentional and well-defined integrated project carried on in order to assure the best protection of the town. Thus, the longer western and eastern ramparts were provided with huge forts and fortresses/bastions, while following different strategies of protection. To the east, the presence

of an outer rampart was conceived as a second line of defense protecting an expansion of the town and therefore isolate bastions were built on the upper part of the inner slope of the proper rampart. On the contrary, the western rampart was intended as a stronger defensive barrier, completed by huge forts and massive towers flanking the monumental Aleppo and Damascus gates. The shorter northern trait of the fortification is characterized by an evident indentation due to the structure of the urban gate and the southern one was provided by a paved walkway on its top. The presence of administrative devices (seals and sealings, balance weights, a cuneiform tablet) and inscribed objects belonging to officials in the defensive buildings point at a strong centralized control of the fortification (Pinnock 2001: 25-33), according to an urban pattern in which the central power was spatially pervasive and functionally articulated.

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