

MORTIMER WHEELER ARCHAEOLOGICAL LECTURE

MASTERPIECES OF EARLY AND OLD SYRIAN
ART: DISCOVERIES OF THE 1988 EBLA
EXCAVATIONS IN A HISTORICAL
PERSPECTIVE

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PREVIOUSLY located near the Mediterranean coast, or in the Euphrates valley, or at the feet of the Taurus Mountains,¹ Ebla was finally identified in 1968 with Tell Mardikh, in inner Syria, 60 km South of Aleppo,² where in 1964 systematic excavations had been started by the University 'La Sapienza' of Rome.³ The ancient sources mention destructions of the great northern Syrian town in two different periods. The first time, an Old Babylonian copy of an original Old Akkadian royal inscription recalls the delivery by Dagan, the god of Tuttul, to Sargon of Agade of the western towns of Mari, Yarmuti and Ebla, in the upper country up to the Cedar Forest and the Silver Mountain, between 2340

¹ The identification of Ebla in the region of Amanus mountain and 'Amuq marshes was proposed by P. Jensen, *ZA*, 10 (1895), p. 361 and was accepted by J. Lewy, *ZA N.F.*, 4 (1929), pp. 262–4. The same opinions may be found in S. Langdon, in *Cambridge Ancient History*, Vol. 1, (Oxford, 1923), p. 405; s. also S. Smith, *Ur Excavations Texts*, 1, (Oxford, 1928), p. 28; B. Maisler, *Untersuchungen zur alten Geschichte und Ethnographie Syriens und Palästinas* (Giessen, 1930), pp. 9–10; S. Smith in *Mélanges syriens R. Dussaud*, (Paris 1939), Vol. 1, p. 29. The hypothesis of the localization of Ebla in the area of Mardin is due to B. Landsberger, *ZA N.F.*, 1 (1926), p. 213 and to E. Dhorme, *RB*, 35 (1926), p. 543. M. Falkner, *AfO*, 18 (1957–8), pp. 31, 34, 36 proposed the region between Birecik and Gaziantep. A localization of Ebla in the valley of Balikh river was proposed by E. Unger, *RLA*, 1 (1928), p. 394 and confirmed by W. F. Albright, *BASOR*, 78 (1940), pp. 28–9, who advanced the equivalence with Tell Bi'a.

² P. Matthiae, G. Pettinato, in *Missione archeologica italiana in Siria, 1967–1968* (Roma, 1972), pp. 1–37.

³ For the development of the researches at Tell Mardikh s. P. Matthiae, *Ebla, un impero ritrovato. Dai primi scavi alle ultime scoperte* (Torino, 1989), pp. 44–51, 58–65.

and 2290 BC.⁴ A few years later, around 2250 BC, Naram-Suen of Agade, Sargon's grandson, of whom two votive objects dedicated for the conquest of Armanum and Ebla are preserved,⁵ boasts, in a triumph inscription dedicated in Enlil's temple at Nippur and kept again in an Old Babylonian copy, of having destroyed Armanum and Ebla, from the Euphrates banks to the town of Ulisum, thanks to the goodwill of Nergal, the god of war, of having knocked down their peoples and kept under his dominion the Amanus and the Cedar Mountain.⁶ The second time, an epic composition, recently found at Boghazköy in a bilingual Hurrian-Hittite redaction of the Middle Hittite period, celebrates among the deeds of an unnamed Old Hittite king, certainly from the years between 1625 and 1590 BC, the conquest of Ebla, 'shattered like a pot' and ravaged in its outer wall and in its inner fortification.⁷ Undoubtedly, this Old Hittite sovereign was either Hattusili I, who for his military deeds became the protagonist of epic poems and was explicitly compared with Sargon of Agade,⁸ or Mursili I, whose figure was famous centuries later for the conquest and sack of Aleppo and Babylon.⁹

In the sequence of the settlements archaeologically documented at Tell Mardikh, the conquest of Ebla by Sargon of Agade corresponds to the destruction of Mardikh IIB₁, which is attested in a unitary and considerable way in every building of the large architectural complex of the Royal Palace G.¹⁰ Although for some years, after the identification of the first parts discovered of Palace G, we believed we could date the destruction and the sack of the Eblaic palatial complex from Naram-Suen,¹¹ several elements of evidence now lead us to believe it more likely that Sargon was the

⁴ H. Hirsch, *AfO*, 20 (1963), n.b2, b13, pp. 3-4, 38, 49; C. J. Gadd, in *Cambridge Ancient History* (3rd ed.), Vol. 1, 2A (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 424-6; B. Lewis, *The Sargon Legend* (Cambridge Mass.), p. 126-7.

⁵ H. HIRSCH, *AfO*, 20 (1963), n. 6, p. 18; J.-R. Kupper, E. Sollberger, *Inscriptions royales sumériennes et akkadiennes* (Paris, 1971), p. 106; C. J. Gadd, in *CAH* (3rd ed.), Vol. 1, 2A, pp. 441-2.

⁶ S. Smith, *UET*, 1, n. 275, pp. 74-6; H. Hirsch, *AfO*, 20 (1963), n. b5, pp. 20-1, 73-6.

⁷ H. Otten, *Jahrbuch der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen* (1984), pp. 50-60; id., in *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft von Ebla* (Heidelberg, 1988), p. 291-2.

⁸ F. Sommer, A. Falkenstein, *Die hethitisch-akkadische Bilingue des Hattusili I* (München, 1938), pp. 103-6; O. R. Gurney, in *CAH* (3rd ed.), Vol. 2, pp. 238-46.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 249-51.

¹⁰ P. Matthiae, *Ebla*, pp. 64-94.

¹¹ Id., *CRAI* (1976), pp. 209-15; id., *CRAI* (1978), pp. 229-36; id., *I tesori di Ebla* (Roma-Bari, 1985), pp. 28-37.

author of the destruction a very few years before.¹² In particular, the style of the palatial glyptics of Mardikh IIB₁, which although being clearly an autonomous production of a local royal workshop is undoubtedly parallel to Lugalanda's style,¹³ of the late Early Dynastic IIIB of Babylonia, and the level of the paleographic evolution of the cuneiform tablets of the royal archives of Mardikh IIB₁, which, according to E. Sollberger's analysis, corresponds to the level of the documents of the time of Lugalzagesi of Uruk¹⁴ who was defeated by Sargon, point to a contemporary between the final phase of the development of Mardikh IIB₁ and the first years of the reign of the founder of the Agade dynasty.¹⁵ On the other hand, some antiquarian elements of the iconography and aspects of the stylistic evolution of the wooden carvings and of the later limestone inlays of Ebla are high Early Syrian evidences chronologically parallel with developments which in southern Mesopotamia belong at least to the second Akkad generation.¹⁶ Moreover, the two basic historical synchronisms revealed by the excavations in Palace G of Ebla, which are the first ones to allow a correlation, albeit an indirect one, between Egypt and Mesopotamia in the IIIrd millennium BC, permit us to consider both the hypothesis of the destruction of Mardikh IIB₁ by Sargon and that of the ravaging of the same settlement by Naram-Suen acceptable, but they make any absolute dating previous to Sargon unacceptable.¹⁷ The finding of an Egyptian alabaster lid bearing the name and titles peculiar of the first part of Pharaoh Pepi I's reign,¹⁸ if one does not employ a very high Egyptian chronology, prevents any dating of the destruction of Mardikh IIB₁ before the years corresponding to the beginning of Sargon's reign around 2340 BC;¹⁹ on the other hand, the presence in the same Palace G at the time of the sack of a diorite bowl bearing Chefredon's name, clearly kept for a long time, does not have any chronologic relevance.²⁰ In some Ebla texts dating from

¹² Id., in *High, Middle or Low? Acts of an International Colloquium on Absolute Chronology, August 1987*, (Gothenburg, 1989), Vol. 3, pp. 163-9.

¹³ Id., *Ebla*, pp. 101-5, fig. 18, pls 55-6.

¹⁴ E. Sollberger, *SEb*, 5 (1982), pp. 221-8.

¹⁵ Cfr. J. Boese, *WZKM*, 74 (1982), pp. 48-53.

¹⁶ P. Matthiae, *Ebla*, pp. 105-13, pls 37-43.

¹⁷ A dating about 2500 BC for the destruction of Ebla and of Royal Palace G has been repeatedly advanced by G. Pettinato, *Ebla: un impero inciso nell'argilla* (Milano, 1979), *passim*; s. also P. Matthiae, in *Wirtschaft*, pp. 75-8.

¹⁸ G. Scandone Matthiae, *SEb*, 1 (1979), pp. 33-43; Ead., in *XXVe RAI*, 1 (Berlin, 1982), pp. 125-31; Ead., in *Wirtschaft*, pp. 69-71.

¹⁹ P. Matthiae, in *High, Middle or Low?*, pp. 166-7.

²⁰ G. Scandone Matthiae, in *Wirtschaft*, p. 70.

one or probably two generations before the destruction, Iplul-II, king of Mari, is mentioned,²¹ who is also known from inscriptions on votive statues of dignitaries discovered in the late Early Dynastic IIIB temples of Mari.²² This does in no way contrast with the theory of the destruction of Palace G by Sargon of Agade.²³ With this historical reconstruction we eliminate all apparent discrepancy between the archaeological evidence and the epigraphic documentation, as results from the findings of Mardikh IIB1. However, the question is still open of the peculiar statement by Naram-Suen, who maintained he had ravaged Armanum and Ebla, as no other king before him, according to his words, had ever done 'since the foundation of mankind'. As, however, neither the inscriptions of Naram-Suen's chancery nor the epic tradition about the great king's deeds record the name of the king of Ebla, while they recorded the name of the king of Armanum,²⁴ it seems clear that the problem must be solved in the following way. First, Naram-Suen intervened in upper Syria nearly half a century after Sargon had destroyed the town of Ebla, putting an end to its political dominion, in order to oppose a new situation of political territorial organization, dominated by Armanum, which is probably the ancient name of Aleppo.²⁵ Second, he defeated, in reality, the king of Armanum through a devastating military expedition, to which refers the protection by Nergal, the war-god, and without invoking the legitimation of his intervention as this had already been guaranteed to Sargon by the god Dagan's favour;²⁶ thus he finally drew under his control, even if for a few years, the region of Armanum and Ebla, which Sargon could not accomplish.²⁷ Third, recalling Ebla's name, he meant a statal-territorial and geographical entity which took its name from the town conquered by his grandfather, but not the city itself which at that time was no more than a field of ruins, and thus he used the place name exactly in the same way as Gudea of Lagash did nearly a century later in his inscriptions, where the

²¹ A. Archi, *MARI*, 4 (1985), pp. 47-51.

²² G. Dossin, in *Mission archéologique de Mari, III, Les temples d'Ishtar et de Ninmi-zaza* (Paris, 1967), n.11, 17, 69, pp. 318, 323, 328.

²³ A. Archi, *MARI*, 4 (1985), pp. 64-9.

²⁴ A. K. Grayson, E. Sollberger, *RA*, 70 (1976), pp. 125-8.

²⁵ S. Smith, *Alalakh and Chronology* (London, 1940), p. 32; E. F. Weidner, *AFO*, 16 (1952-3), pp. 12-13; H. Klengel, *Geschichte Syriens im 2. Jahrtausend v.u.Z.*, (Berlin, 1970), Vol. 3, p. 118.

²⁶ J.-R. Kupper, *OrAn*, 10 (1971), 91-106.

C. J. Gadd, in *CAH* (3rd ed.), Vol. 1, 2A, pp. 441-3.

place name of Ebla is used to mean the region while the politically dominant town, explicitly mentioned, was in that time Urshu.²⁸

The second destruction of Ebla mentioned by the ancient sources, and whose protagonist was an Old Hittite king, around 1600 BC, undoubtedly corresponds archaeologically to the devastation of Mardikh IIIB.²⁹ It marks the end of the last great urban settlement in the site of Tell Mardikh, everywhere and without exceptions: on the ring of the huge earthenwork ramparts of the outer fortifications, in all the palatial, templar and domestic buildings of the lower town, in the imposing inner fortifications of the citadel, as well as in Palace E and in Temple D of the citadel itself.³⁰ Thus the fall of Mardikh IIB₁, by the end of Early Bronze IVA, around 2300 BC, puts an end to the great cultural and political flourishing of the high Early Syrian period in the same years when the power of the Agade dynasty asserted itself in southern Mesopotamia.³¹ The destruction of Mardikh IIIB by the end of Middle Bronze II of upper Syria, around 1600 BC, is placed in the last years of the late Old Syrian period,³² nearly fifteen years before the end of Middle Bronze IIC of Palestine, whose collapse is provoked by the expeditions to Asia of the first pharaohs of the XVIIIth dynasty.³³

Three important groups of figurative artefacts, one of the high Early Syrian Period and the two others belonging to different phases of the Old Syrian period, were discovered during the 1988 excavation season (Fig. 1).³⁴ They offer an exceptional evidence of the excellent quality of the artistic productions of the palatial milieux of the two periods, and contribute in an extraordinary

²⁸ A. Falkenstein, *Die Inschriften Gudeas von Lagaš, I, Einleitung* (Roma, 1966), pp. 52–3.

²⁹ P. Matthiae, *I tesori*, pp. 118–19; id. *Ebla*, p. 55–6, 134–5.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 141–75.

³¹ According to our terminological proposal, the high Early Syrian period should correspond to the years of Ebla flourishing before the Sargon's destruction (Mardikh IIB₁) and the late Early Syrian period would be the post-palatial phase (Mardikh IIB₂) during the last centuries of IIIrd millennium after 2300 BC.

³² The destruction of Mardikh IIIB was perhaps provoked by Mursili I, while the end of Alalakh VII happened because of the invasion by Hattusili I: J. D. Muhly, in *The Archaeology of Cyprus: Recent Developments* (Park Ridge, 1975), pp. 78–81; N. Na'aman, *AnSt*, 26 (1976), 129–43; M.-H. Carré-Gates, *SMS*, 4 (1981), pp. 41–49.

³³ A. Kempinski, *Syrien und Palästina (Kanaan) in der letzten Phase der Mittelbronze IIB-Zeit (1650–1570 v.Chr.)* (Wiesbaden, 1983), pp. 197–229.

³⁴ P. Matthiae, *CRAI* (1990), in press.

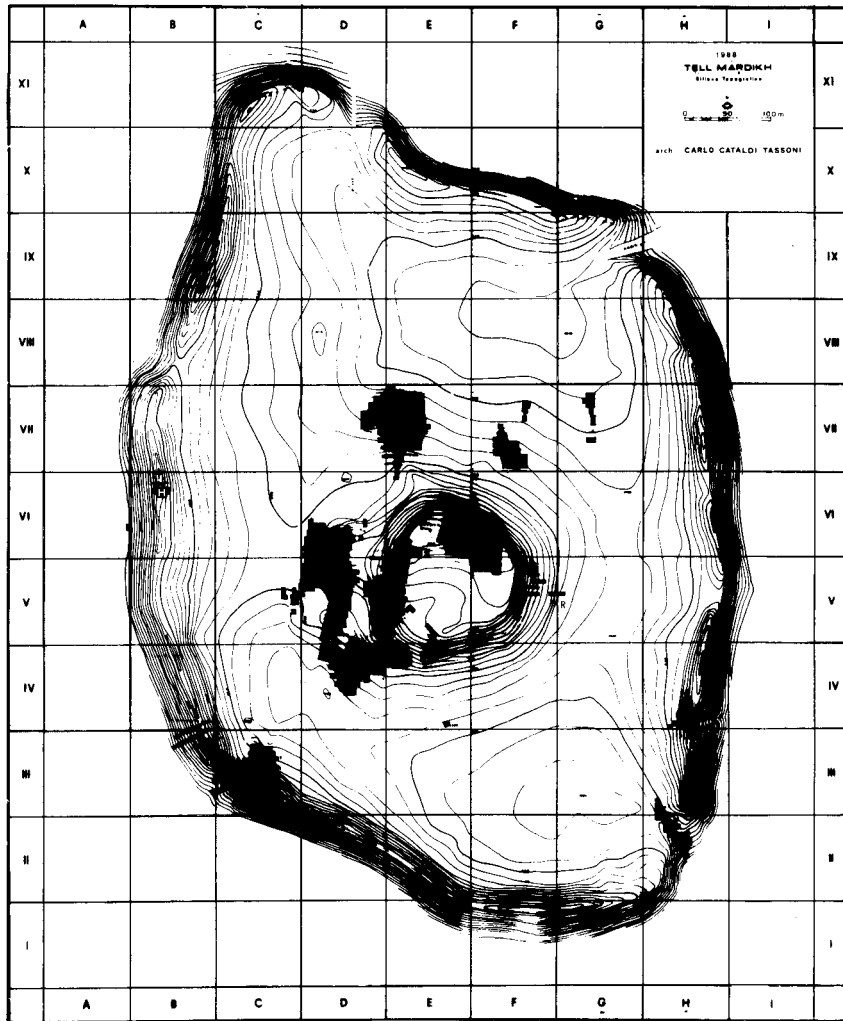


FIG. 1. Tell Mardikh—Ebla: topographical map with the excavation areas until 1988.

way to the definition of the characteristics, influences and trends of the artistic culture of the town during the third fourth of the IIIrd millennium BC and the second fourth of the IInd millenium BC. The first group of artefacts includes more than thirty limestone inlays of figurative subject, for the greatest part in a good condition of preservation, which were recovered in a services wing of the west unit of the Royal Palace G (Fig. 2).³⁵ There they had re-employed, for a floor decoration, two or more wooden

³⁵ Id., *CRAI* (1987), pp. 141–3, figs 3, 5.

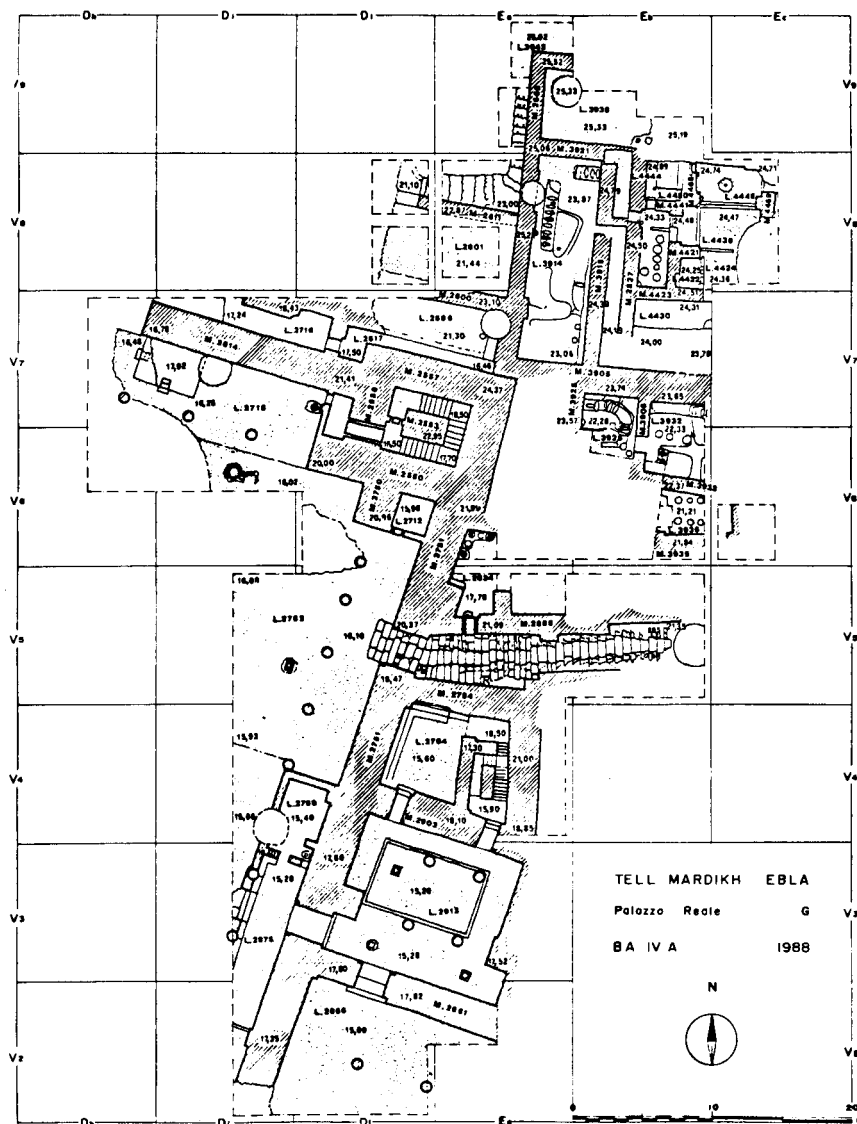


FIG. 2. Tell Mardikh—Ebla, Royal Palace G: schematic plan of the west unit and of the Administrative Quarter, Mardikh IIB1, c. 2400–2300 BC.

planks, that probably were parts of a large decorative panel and on which the figurative inlays were still fixed, together with the geometric tesserae of the registers divisions of the original monument.³⁶ The second group of artefacts is represented by some

³⁶ A detailed preliminary report on this find will be published by P. Matthiae, *Scienze dell'Antichità*, 4 (1990), in press.

tens of quite fragmentary Old Syrian ivory inlays in Egyptianizing style, presumably belonging in the origin to a luxurious piece of furniture. They have been discovered scattered in a store room of the Northern Palace in the lower town north, identified in 1986, where they had probably stored what had certainly been a precious royal piece of furniture, after it had decayed.³⁷ The third group of artefacts is made by three Old Syrian votive statues of basalt. One of them is complete. They have been collected in a kind of 'cachette', in front of the entrance to the badly decayed and severely sacked and upset Temple P2 in the lower town north, which was identified in 1988.³⁸

The high Early Syrian limestone inlays of the west unit in the Central Complex of the Royal Palace G have been collected in three different situations of finding, in the destruction level of this upper peripheral part of the palatial building (Fig. 3). The most numerous inlays were found perfectly in place but with the carved side always turned to the ground, in a long and regular rectangular furrow, in the floor of the small room L. 4436 (Pl. I), which connected the west jambs of a north door and of a south one and which had been made in front of the west door, parallel to the threshold. In this furrow (S. 4443), measuring 2.90 m in length and 19 cm in width, at the time of a final inner rearrangement of this wing of the Palace they probably placed one very long wooden plank, or several smaller and modular planks, on whose hidden face, at the moment of the installation, there were the inlays, still in place, and they were not disturbed at the time of the destruction of the Palace (Pl. II). A second group of inlays, quite numerous too, but in more fragmentary conditions, was collected in a similar furrow (S. 4442) at right angles with the previous one, oriented East-West, and set at the north edge of the threshold of the south door of the room. In this second furrow the inlays were not found in place but were disturbed and in more than one instance piled up one over the other. The inlays belonging to the third group, the least important for their number and the most fragmentary ones, were recovered scattered in the central region of the same room L. 4436, in the west room L. 4420 and in the south room L. 4424.³⁹ Among the last inlays there was also a big

³⁷ Id., *CRAI* (1987), pp. 154–61, fig. 10.

³⁸ Id., *CRAI* (1990), in press.

³⁹ These rooms were part of a whole, called north wing of west unit, which develops east of the court L.3914, has an apparently regular plan, and is removed, in its east sector, by two large pits of Iron II; this north wing had three central rooms from south to north, L.4424, L.4436 and L.4448, and perhaps two

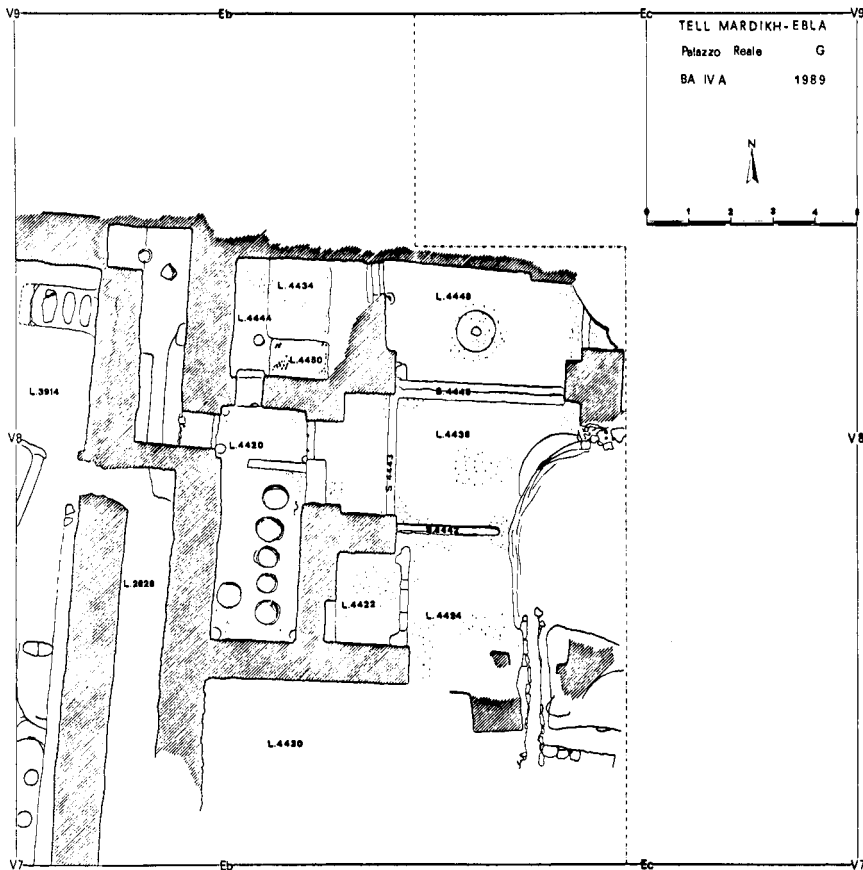


FIG. 3. Tell Mardikh—Ebla, Royal Palace G: schematic plan of the northern sector of the west unit, Mardikh IIB1, c.2400–2300 BC.

skirt, complete and worked in relief, belonging to a figure quite larger than the inlays, but carved in the same limestone as the inlays and worked, in a bigger size, as the numerous skirts of the

side wings of two rooms each, kept only to the west, L.4420 and L.4434. The south limit of this north wing is still difficult to define, but it seems undoubted that it was preceded by the large room L.4430. The function of this wing is difficult to define: one of the few important elements, useful for the identification of the function is the round trace left quite clearly in the middle of the inner room L.4448, which might lead one to think of a cult fitting, while in the two rooms along the west side there were places for the preparation and preservation of the food. Of course, the finding of the inlays does not offer any contribution for the identification of the function of the north wing, as they were there only as a consequence of a secondary employ of the wooden planks.

presumed composite panels in relief of the Administrative Quarter of the Royal Palace G.⁴⁰

While no incomplete inlay of the first group could be joined to fragments from the second and third groups, several joins were possible among the fragments from the second and third groups. Two deductions of some importance may be inferred from this situation of finding. First, the scattered fragments of the third group probably were all in the second furrow (S. 4422), whose timber was taken off at the time of the destruction of Palace G. The consequence of this was the breaking off and the dispersal outside the furrow of some inlay placed on the timber, mostly in the same room but also in two rooms nearby. Second, the wooden plank or planks of the first furrow (S. 4443) were possibly not mounted side by side with the plank or planks placed in the second furrow to the South in the original work which had been disarticulated in order to obtain the wooden decoration. On the one hand, it is undoubted that the planks of the two furrows were taken from a large wooden panel with decorative figurations made from inlays set in registers; the panel was dismantled and dismembered in order to reuse the planks with the back faces of the panel visible on the floor and the decorated faces concealed. On the other hand, it is likewise certain that all the remains of inlays discovered in the west unit came from the planks re-employed in the two furrows and, therefore, none of them belonged to a complete and visible panel still present in the room at the time of the destruction of Palace G by Sargon of Agade. Whichever were the structure and function of the dismantled panel, it must have been composed, as concerns its chronology, sometime previous to the last phase of rearrangement of the west unit of Palace G and, in this last time, it probably did not have any meaning and value, for reasons of taste, subject and decay, if it was even dismantled for a secondary re-employment unrelated with its figuration.⁴¹

⁴⁰ TM.88.G.520: height 13.8 cm; width 13.7 cm. For the skirts found in the Administrative Quarter s. P. Matthiae, *CRAI* (1978), pp. 222-7, figs 10-13.

⁴¹ It is, therefore, probable that the original monument to which the planks with the inlays belonged were created at least one century before the destruction of Palace G, as it was dismantled in order to re-employ the wood at the time of the last restorations in the west unit: this restoration should be dated, just in a conventional way, from the first part of the period of the three or four sovereigns, whose documents were attested in the State Archives (Igrish-Khalam, Irkab-Damu, Ishar-Damu): A. Archi, in *Eblaite Personal Names and Semitic Name-Giving* (Roma, 1988), pp. 207-16; P. Matthiae, *Ebla*, cit., pp. 251-4; M. G. Biga, F. Pomponio, *NABU*, I (1987), p. 60.

The inlays, which are all made of a beautiful alabastrine limestone with a creamy colour and a very compact texture, are very homogeneous as concerns their material, technique and style (Pl. III). Usually every inlay represents a complete subject in itself, worked *à jour*; only in the lower part of each inlay, where animal or human legs are represented, the background is included. All the inner details of the figures are only carved without changes of level; on the contrary, where parts of the background are included, this is kept at a slightly lower level, in comparison with the outline of the figures which, therefore, appear with a very low, totally flat relief.⁴²

The subjects of the inlays belong to two groups only, one with a historical-military nature and one of a symbolic-mythological type. The subjects of the inlays belonging to the first category are of four different types with minor variants: soldiers parading bearing their weapons, soldiers pushing bare prisoners in front of them (Pl.IV*a*), soldiers slaughtering bare prisoners (Pl.IV*b*), soldiers carrying the cut off heads of their enemies (Pl.IV*c*).⁴³ In the second category of inlays, only one type of representation is documented, namely the composition with the lion-headed eagle in the traditional frontal posture, dominating two man-headed bulls (Pl.IV*d*). The height of the inlays representing the soldiers, with a stronger development of height, varies between 14 cm and 15 cm. The height of the eagles is slightly smaller, while that of the bulls is even shorter, around 12 cm, but these types of figures had to be composed together and thus the total height of the symbolic-mythological motifs was around 17–18 cm. The bands with geometric decoration which separated the registers with the figurative inlays were made of regular triangular inlays, set in two rows with opposing points and limiting within them a line of lozenges, probably made of wood.⁴⁴

A problem of basic importance, but very difficult to solve, is that of the reconstruction of the original structure and form of the dismembered panel, which was re-employed in the two furrows of

⁴² This detail of execution is found in the Mesopotamian milieu, in the inlays from Palace A at Kish, but it is certainly related not only with the craftsmanship tradition, but also with the material employed: R. Dolce, *Or*, 52 (1978), 37–49, pls I–VI.

⁴³ The type which shows the greatest number of variants is the soldier slaughtering prisoners, while the most conventional type is represented by the soldier with cut-off heads.

⁴⁴ The wooden horizontal bands with the inlaid triangles which made up a central line of saved lozenges must have had a height of nearly 7 cm.

the floor. The evidence offered for this problem by the inlays found in the western furrow (S. 4443) is basic. In fact, these inlays, whose position reflected their original setting on the re-employed plank or planks, were clearly placed in twelve horizontal registers one following the other, separated by sectors with a framing of triangular tesserae (Pl. V). Although the inlays were not preserved intact in every register only two important absences could be noted: first in one register, the sixth one, the figurative inlays were totally missing, of course because they had fallen before the placement of the timber decoration in the floor; second, the geometric triangular inlays of the frames were missing at both ends of the furrow, at the top and at the bottom.⁴⁵ The most important datum offered by the setting of the inlays in the western furrow is the regular alternance between a register with soldiers and one with lion-headed eagles, with the exception of the two last registers, the eleventh and twelfth ones, both decorated with military scenes.⁴⁶

On the basis of these evidences, in order to reconstruct the original aspect of the panel, one must ask oneself the question if in the western furrow of the west unit of Palace G they had placed one long wooden plank only, or rather several shorter planks of similar height. In this last case it is clear that if in the original panel military and mythical subjects did not alternate confusedly in the same register three possibilities only may be accepted: the panel, which evidently had a horizontal development, could not have had but six, four or two registers. However, as nowhere in the furrow two bands of geometric elements of division were found side by side, the only possible explanation must be that the original panel was composed of vertical planks side by side, limited at the top and the bottom by a horizontal beam, to which they had fixed the geometric frieze of the frame.⁴⁷ But this

⁴⁵ It is evident that this element is strongly in favour of the hypothesis that in the furrow there had been placed only one long wooden plank and not several planks, as it would be rather peculiar that, by chance in the latter instance, it never happened that two sectors of the geometric framing were to be found side by side.

⁴⁶ It must be pointed out that in no sector of the horizontal registers preserved there are fragments of military figures in the registers with divine figures or vice versa: this element makes us certain that in ten registers the two kinds of representations, triumphal and mythical, were strictly separated.

⁴⁷ Due to the regular alternance, in the west furrow, of figurative registers and geometric framings, if the planks were more than one, one should presume that none of the individual vertical planks had the decorative triangles at the top, and that the upper geometric framing were applied on the upper horizontal

hypothesis of reconstruction seems quite improbable for several reasons. First, if the panel really had a horizontal development it would have had a much more solid structure if it were composed of horizontal planks. Second, the military subjects repeated in the eleventh and twelfth registers would anyhow have interrupted the mythical themes of the last register. Third, the eventual short vertical planks re-employed could not be originally set all side by side in one of the three proposed hypotheses (two, four or six registers), because there is not one combination where, for the registers with mythical subjects, there is enough room for the completely or partially missing figures of man-headed bulls.⁴⁸

Thus, the most likely hypothesis of reconstruction is that in the furrow they had placed one wooden plank only, which therefore belonged to an original panel with a vertical development with twelve registers, limited at the top end and at the bottom by horizontal beams, now lost, where the inlays of the outer frame were applied, which were probably different from those of the inner divisions of the preserved registers.⁴⁹ This panel with a vertical development had the figures of all the registers with military subjects turned to the left and was composed by three at least, and quite probably more, vertical planks, because the preserved plank has inlays broken on both sides. The difficulty of every reconstruction is made stronger by the finding in the middle of the room with the two furrows of a large limestone skirt (Pl. VIa), identical to those of the inlays, which was probably a part of a composite figure in relief, certainly made of limestone and gold, whose height was at least three times that of the inlays.⁵⁰

beam; at the bottom on the other hand, the geometric framing was made from the juxtaposition of individual sectors of decorative triangles applied at the base of the vertical planks.

⁴⁸ This descends from the fact that, unlike the individual military figurative groups, which are always narrower than the width of the plank or planks, the mythical figurative groups are always larger than the width of the plank.

⁴⁹ The outer framings in the 'Standard of Ur' and in the cultual panels from the Temple of Dagan at Mari are the same as the inner framings: C. L. Woolley, *Ur Excavations II, The Royal Cemetery* (Oxford, 1934), pp. 225-7, pls 91-2; A. Parrot, *Mari, capitale fabuleuse* (Paris, 1974), pp. 48-9, fig. 18. On the other hand, in the not dismembered few panels of inlays, the outer and inner framings are different in a piece of Ur, U.12435, from PG/1332 of the Meskalamdug's period: C. L. Woolley, *Ur Excavations II*, p. 279, pl. 116.

⁵⁰ This piece TM.88.G.560, already mentioned at note 40, is certainly made of the same beautiful limestone as the inlays and is the largest skirt found in Palace G: P. Matthiae, *Ebla*, p. 100, pls 44, 52.

It seems undoubted that the skirt is the only remain of a king's figure, approximately corresponding to three or four registers, towards which advance the soldiers coming back from a military triumph. The very strong vertical development of the panel, which was probably slightly higher than 3 m, leads us to believe that it was the decorative covering of a sector, probably quite a large one, of a wall, unless it were a kind of high stele for which, however, there seems to be no parallel. It seems certain, anyhow, that in this peculiar celebration monument they have used both the techniques usually employed in the pictorial friezes of the high Early Syrian Royal Palace of Ebla: the incrustation of carved *ajouré* inlays over a flat wooden core and the composite relief made of limestone, steatite and lapis lazuli sculptured sectors applied over a carved timber background.⁵¹

Very fragmentary pieces from inlays with similar symbolic-mythical subjects had been found scattered in the excavation of the Administrative Quarter of Palace G, and sometimes they had not even been originally identified and are now comprehensible through the comparison with the complete ones.⁵² Two fragments, certainly belonging to the same series of inlays, were collected in the first years of work at Tell Mardikh out of the original archaeological context, in Area B, in front of the Court of Audience of Palace G, in the lower town.⁵³ Another fragment of limestone inlay with a large part of a soldier showing similar technical, iconographic and stylistic characteristics, which entered the British Museum by the end of the sixties and was published by T. C. Mitchell,⁵⁴ certainly comes from the surface of Tell Mardikh and undoubtedly belongs to the same large dismembered panel in the west unit of Palace G. It is probable that such a dispersal of remains, which are totally homogeneous as concerns their working, subjects and stylistic rendering, descends from the

⁵¹ For a reconstruction of one figure of this kind belonging to one of these composite panels, now at the Archaeological Museum of Aleppo, s. P. Matthiae, *I tesori*, fig. 39, pl. 36b.

⁵² R. Dolce, *SEb*, 2 (1980), pp. 108–14, 120, figs 47, 52, 54–5, 67.

⁵³ M. Liverani, in *Missione archeologica italiana in Siria, 1965* (Roma, 1966), pp. 50–1, pl. LXXX 7; P. Matthiae, *Ebla*, p. 111, pl. 48.

⁵⁴ BM.135154; T. C. Mitchell, *BMQ*, 34 (1969–70), p. 194 and 36 (1971–2), p. 132; R. Dolce, *Gli intarsi mesopotamici dell'epoca protodinastica* (Roma, 1978), Vol. 2, p. 164, n.MA 4, pl. XVII. The presumed provenance from Kish is based only on the material (stone). The height of 8.5 cm of the fragment, preserved from the head to the base of the skirt, corresponds well to the general size of the Ebla inlays.

reuse of wooden planks in several regions of the west sectors of Palace G, but it is sure that these fragments come all from one large panel only, or from complementary panels with the same subject.⁵⁵

Of the themes traditionally dealt with in southern Mesopotamia since Early Dynastic II–III, concerning on the one hand cult and, on the other hand, war, only the military and triumphal subjects are represented in the large Ebla panel.⁵⁶ A figurative representation of the military triumph, typical of the Early Dynastic IIIB ideology in Sumer, is expressed in a clear way in the Stele of the Vultures of Eannatum of Lagash⁵⁷ where, according to H. Frankfort's interpretation, one side records the events as they have been observed to occur and the other side reveals the hidden forces which brought them about.⁵⁸ In the Ebla panel, which is approximately contemporary with Eannatum, the same notion is expressed in a not less explicit way as concerns the composition with the alternating military scenes and mythical figures and in a more synthetic way as concerns the symbolic language. It is the classical Mesopotamian figure of Imdugud, the flying lion-headed eagle, which is the certain representation of the thunderstorm and spring flood gods of the kind of Ninurta of Nippur and of Ningirsu of Lagash⁵⁹ which, through the dominion over the mythical bulls (Pl. VI*b*), symbolizes in the natural and divine spheres the victory over the negative forces as is represented in history by the annihilation of enemies in war. Since the end of the IIIrd millennium BC, in Mesopotamia, as Th. Jacobsen pointed out, Ninurta/Ningirsu's role as bringer of rain, floods and fertility receded into the background.⁶⁰ The god who in Gudea of

⁵⁵ Among the scattered fragments, discovered before 1988 in several rooms of the Palace G, particularly in the region of the Administrative Quarter, not one of those which have the same technique as those found in the west unit presents a subject different from those attested in the west unit itself.

⁵⁶ The mythical representation of lion-headed eagles is clearly complementary to the military theme of the panel.

⁵⁷ A. Moortgat, *Die Kunst des alten Mesopotamien* (Köln, 1967), pp. 48–9, pls 118–21; M.-Th. Barrelet, *JNES*, 29 (1970), 233–58; J. Börker-Klähn, *Alt-vorderasiatische Bildstelen und vergleichbare Felsreliefs* (Mainz a. R.), pp. 9, 16–17, 124–5, fig. 17.

⁵⁸ H. Frankfort, *The Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient* (Harmondsworth, 1954), pp. 33–4.

⁵⁹ D. O. Edzard, in *Wörterbuch der Mythologie, I, Götter und Mythen im Vorderen Orient* (Stuttgart, 1965), pp. 80–1.

⁶⁰ Th. Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness. A History of Mesopotamian Religion* (New Haven-London, 1976), pp. 127–34.

Lagash's dream appeared with Imdugud's wings and whose lower parts ended in a flood stood out as victorious charioteer, as war leader, as triumphant god.⁶¹

If these elements explain the association, in the high Early Syrian Ebla, of the figure of Imdugud, the representation of the war-god, with the military victory celebrated in the panel from Palace G, on the one hand it is impossible to say which Early Syrian god corresponded to Ninurta and, on the other hand, it is certain that the figurative connection of Imdugud with the military victory is an Eblaic innovation which is known in Mesopotamia only at Lagash, where, however, Ningirsu was the city-god. But, in the well established Early Dynastic figurative tradition not only at Lagash but also in Sumer, Imdugud always grasps a pair of lions, of goats, or of oxen.⁶² P. Amiet rightly pointed out that in the Mesopotamian tradition it never dominates a pair of man-headed bulls, and the only apparent exception is a cylinder seal from Ur which joins the twice repeated frequent Mesopotamian motif of the mythical bull, carrying on its back the eagle in profile with the frontal flying Imdugud between and not over the bulls.⁶³ The autonomous compositive rendering of the subject in this Ur cylinder where the very peculiar detail of the double middle ring at the base of the body of the eagle also appears, which is found only in the Ebla panel, and the presence of the figuratively distorted theme only in very rare Old Akkadian seals of Lagash, of Sargon's time,⁶⁴ lead us to believe that the Sumerian engravers of these seals had adopted the Eblaic re-elaboration of the subject in the years around the destruction of the great Early Syrian town.

As concerns material and dimensions, the inlays of the Ebla panel do not have comparisons in the contemporary Mesopotamian inlays, which are usually carved in shell and whose height is half or two thirds at maximum the height of the Ebla carvings.⁶⁵ However, partially as regards technique and com-

⁶¹ Id., *JNES*, 12 (1963), p. 167.

⁶² I. Fuhr-Jaepfelt, *Materialien zur Ikonographie des Löwenadlers Anzu-Imdugud* (München, 1972), pp. 120–58.

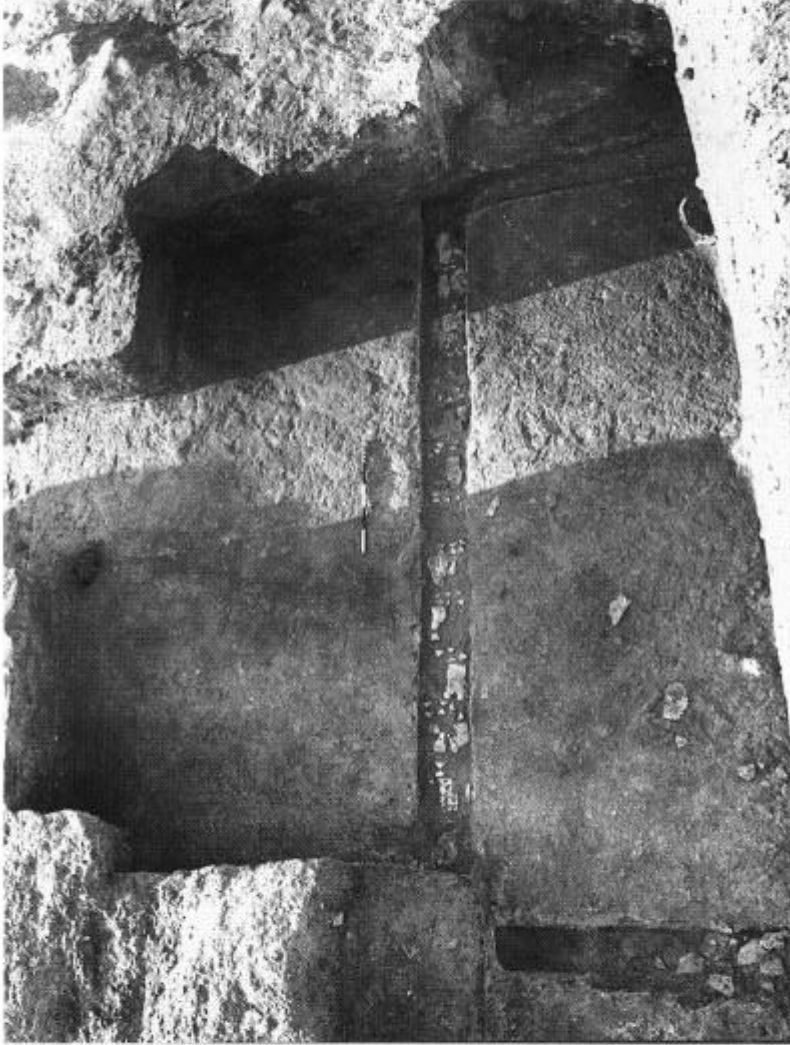
⁶³ P. Amiet, *La glyptique mésopotamienne archaïque* (Paris, 1960), pp. 140–2, fig. 1271.

⁶⁴ L. Delaporte, *Musée du Louvre. Catalogue des cylindres de style oriental* (Paris, 1920), Vol. 1, pp. 7–8, n.T.83, pl. IV 1.

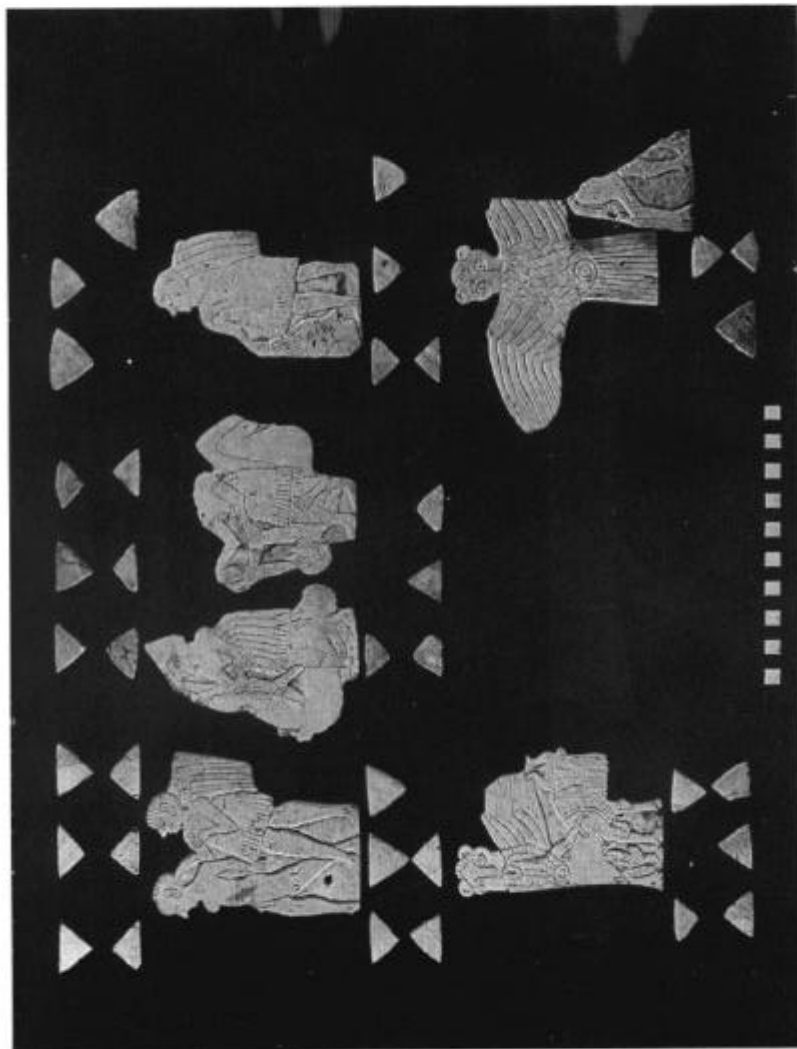
⁶⁵ D. P. Hansen, in *Propyläen Kunstgeschichte, XIV, Der Alte Orient* (Berlin, 1975), pp. 180–1; R. Dolce, *Gli intarsi*, Vol. 1, pp. 276–9, Vol. 2, pp. 134–5; the height of the figures in the 'Standard of Mari' from Ishtar's Temple is not more than 11.5cm.



Ebla, Royal Palace G, west unit: the central room L.4436, from the east; Mardikh IIB1, c.2400-2300 BC.



Ebla, Royal Palace G, west unit: the west furrow S.4443 in the room L.4436 with the inlays *in situ*, from the east; Mardikh IIB1, c.2400-2300 BC.



Ebla, Royal Palace G, west unit: a hypothetical reconstruction of a sector of the original panel, limestone inlays; Mardikh 11B1, c.2400 BC.

PLATE IV



a



b



c



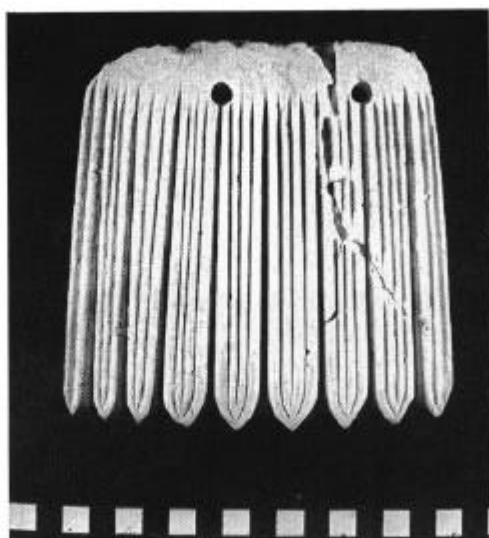
d

a, Ebla, Royal Palace G, west unit: inlay TM.88.G.229 with an Eblaic soldier pushing a prisoner with tied hands, limestone; Mardikh IIB₁, c.2400 BC (Idlib, Archaeological Museum of Ebla). *b*, Ebla, Royal Palace G, west unit: inlay TM.88.G.191 with an Eblaic soldier and a renversed naked enemy, limestone; Mardikh IIB₁, c.2400 BC (Idlib, Archaeological Museum of Ebla). *c*, Ebla, Royal Palace G, west unit: inlay TM.88.G.300 with an Eblaic soldier carrying the cut-off heads of the enemies, limestone; Mardikh IIB₁, c.2400 BC (Idlib, Archaeological Museum of Ebla). *d*, Ebla, Royal Palace G, west unit: inlay TM.88.G.235 with the figures of the lion-headed eagle and the man-headed bull, limestone; Mardikh IIB₁, c.2400 BC (Idlib, Archaeological Museum of Ebla).



Ebla, Royal Palace G, west unit: the west furrow S-4443 in the room L-4436 with the inlays *in situ*, detail of the central sector; Mardikh IIB1, c.2400-2300 BC.

PLATE VI



a



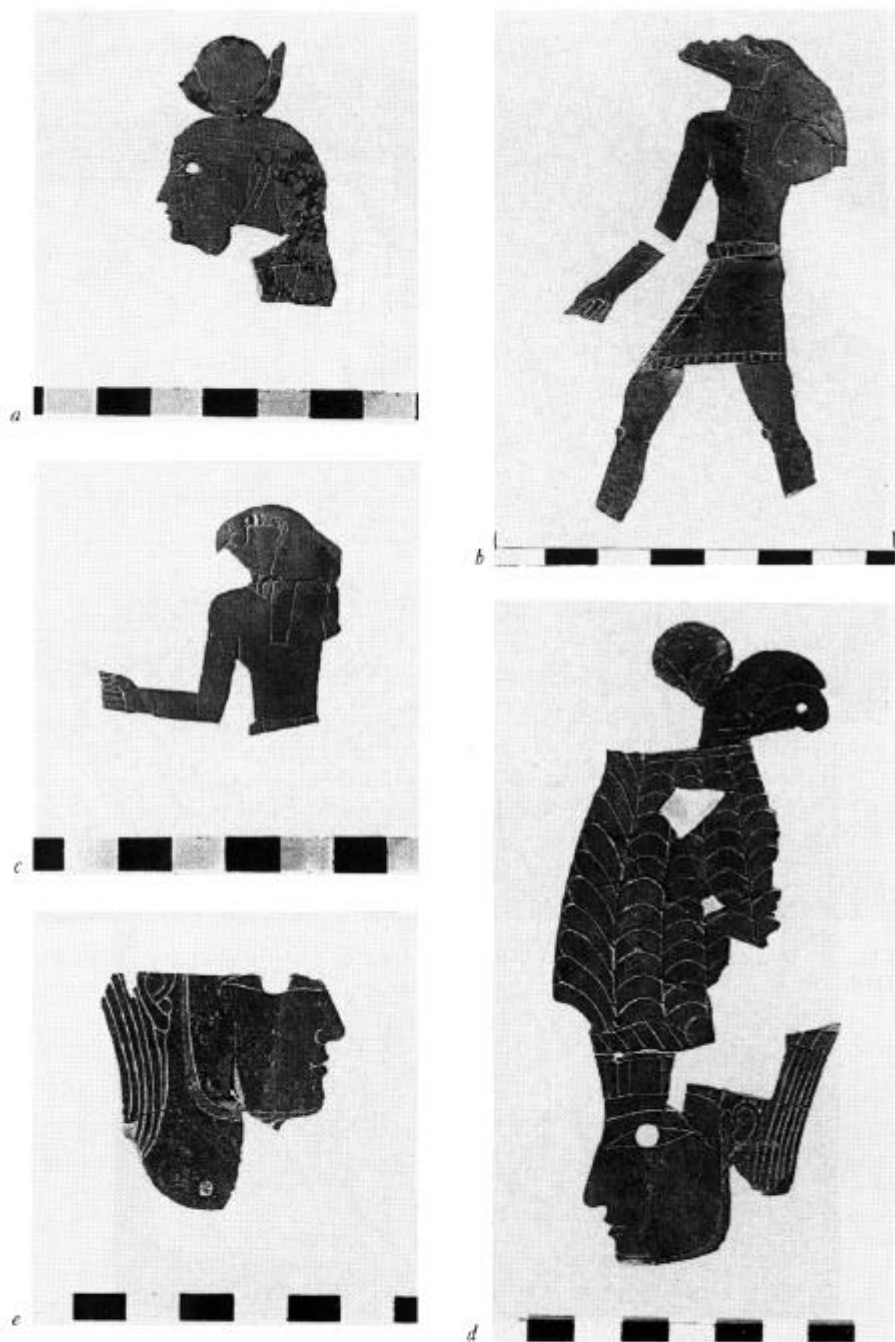
b

a, Ebla, Royal Palace G, west unit: skirt TM.88.G.520 from a composite figure probably of a king, limestone; Mardikh IIB1, c.2400 BC (Idlib, Archaeological Museum of Ebla).
b, Ebla, Royal Palace G, west unit: inlay TM.88.G.281 with a figure of man-headed bull, limestone; Mardikh IIB1, c.2400 BC (Idlib, Archaeological Museum of Ebla).



Ebla, Northern Palace, east wing: the storeroom L.4070, from the south-east; Mardikh III B, c.1800-1600 BC.

PLATE VIII



a, Ebla, Northern Palace, L.4070: inlay TM.88.P.532 with a Hathoric head, ivory; Mardikh IIIB, c.1750-1700 BC (Idlib, Archaeological Museum of Ebla). *b*, Ebla, Northern Palace, L.4070: inlay TM.88.P.538 + 539 + 540 + 551 + 551 with the figure of the crocodile-god Sobek, ivory; Mardikh IIIB, c.1750-1700 BC (Idlib, Archaeological Museum of Ebla). *c*, Ebla, Northern Palace, L.4070: inlay TM.88.P.536 with the figure of the falcon-god Horus, ivory; Mardikh IIIB, c.1750-1700 BC (Idlib, Archaeological Museum of Ebla). *d*, Ebla, Northern Palace, L.4070: inlay TM.88.P.535a + b with the royal (?) head wearing an *gyl*-crown, ivory; Mardikh IIIB, c.1750-1700 BC (Idlib, Archaeological Museum of Ebla). *e*, Ebla, Northern Palace, L.4070: inlay TM.88.P.534 with a probably royal head, ivory; Mardikh IIIB, c.1750-1700 BC (Idlib, Archaeological Museum of Ebla).

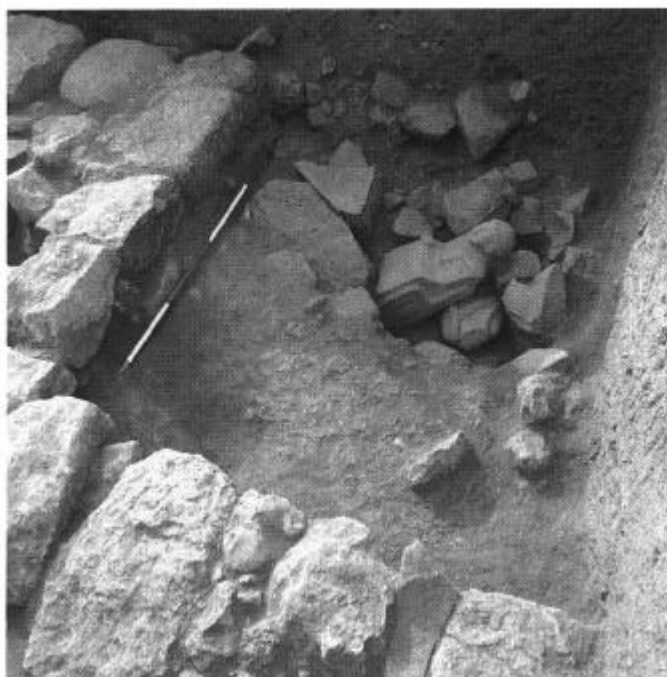


a



b

a, Ebla, Temple P2: the north-west corner of the cella L.4304, from the south-east; Mardikh IIIB, c.1800-1600 BC. *b*, Ebla, Temple P2: the east perimetrical wall M.4302, from the south, with, in foreground, the east front tower; Mardikh IIIB, c.1800-1600 BC.



a

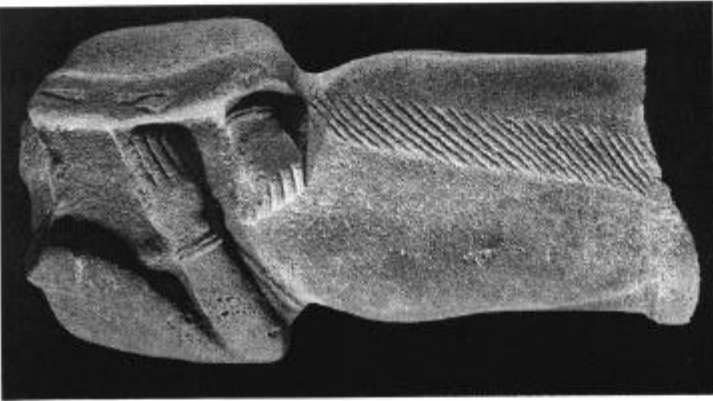


b

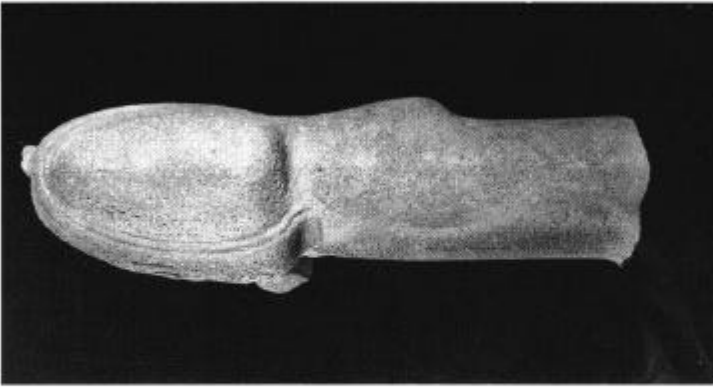
a, Ebla, 'Temple P2: the 'cchette' of the three statues in the east corner of the vestibule L.4600, from the south; Persian-Hellenistic period (?), c.535-150 BC. *b*, Ebla, Temple P2: detail of the 'cchette' of the three statues in the east corner of the vestibule L.4600, from the east; Persian-Hellenistic period (?), c.535-150 BC.



a



b



c

a, Ebla, Temple P2: the male statue TM.88.P.627 of a sitting dignitary, basalt; Mardikh IIIA-B, around 1800 BC (Idlib, Archaecological Museum of Ebla). *b*, Ebla, Temple P2: the female statue TM.88.P.628 of a standing queen, basalt, front view; Mardikh IIIB, c.1750-1700 BC (Idlib, Archaecological Museum of Ebla). *c*, Ebla, Temple P2: the female statue T.88.P.628 of a standing queen, basalt, side view; Mardikh IIIB, c.1750-1700 BC (Idlib, Archaecological Museum of Ebla).



Ebla, Temple P2: the royal torso. I.M. 88. P. 500 before final restoration, basalt; Mardikh III B, c. 1750-1700 BC. (Idlib, Archaeological Museum of Ebla).

pletely as regards iconography and style, the Ebla inlays are fully comparable to the Mari inlays with a similar subject. In particular, there are minor differences from the panels, certainly slightly older, of Dagan's and Ishtar's Temples at Mari;⁶⁶ the contacts with the scattered remains of the inlays with military theme from the Prae-Sargonid Palace I at Mari, the latest palatial building of Early Dynastic IIIB of the great Middle Euphrates centre, are important.⁶⁷ As concerns the antiquarian details, the helmets, the armours, the knapsacks are identical, and, as concerns the compositional aspects, the position of the prisoners pushed and grasped by the nape of the neck, is closely similar.⁶⁸ However, other compositional elements, like the killing of the enemies and the presentation of the cut off heads, stylistic characteristics, like the proportions of the soldiers' figures, and iconographic details, like the rendering of the hair, are typical of the Ebla production.

The inlays from the dismembered panel of Palace G, although undoubtedly contemporary with the more recent shell inlays from the Prae-Sargonid Palace at Mari which, according to A. Parrot, were also set into wall panels, but with the background made of irregular skist tesserae⁶⁹ and were certainly produced by Eblaic workshops around 2400 BC in a local style strongly influenced by the Mari productions in the so-called style of the I Dynasty of Ur.⁷⁰ In this phase of the Early Dynastic IIIB art, the production of the inlaid figurative decorations knew a special development in two centres essentially, at Ur, with the attached cult-centre of the goddess Ninkhursag at el-^cObeyd, and at Mari, and there is no doubt that the great tradition of Ur of the inlaid ornament for precious objects of the previous, so-called Meskalamdug's period, certainly due to the close relations between Ur and Mari as are now known through the Mari Treasure,⁷¹ led the royal purchasers at Mari to rival the lords of the great Sumerian town,

⁶⁶ R. Dolce, *Gli intarsi*, Vol. 2, pp. 131-4, pls XXXIX-XL.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, pp. 149-50, 152, pl. XXXVI.

⁶⁸ On these characters s. *ibid.* Vol. 1, pp. 225-9.

⁶⁹ A. Parrot, *AAAS*, 19 (1969), pp. 18-19.

⁷⁰ In relation to the stylistic evaluation proposed by R. Dolce, *Gli intarsi*, Vol. 1, pp. 255-76, the Ebla inlays must be dated from a period corresponding to a certainly not final phase of the style of the I Dynasty of Ur. Anyhow, obviously any chronologic consideration is made difficult by the geographic distance of Ebla not only from the centres of Sumer, but also from Mari.

⁷¹ M. Liverani, *Antico Oriente, Storia, società, economia* (Roma-Bari, 1988), pp. 205-7.

when the most important centre on the Middle Euphrates took the leadership on the Upper Land.⁷²

Following an ancient tradition, probably typical of the land of Agade, documented by the wall panels with inlays from Palace A at Kish⁷³ and imitating the works made at Mari in the same years, the kings of Ebla also celebrated their military deeds through similar and perhaps larger figurative panels in limestone and timber, and not in shell, skist, lapis lazuli and bitumen. This is an art genre aiming at exalting kingship in the palatial milieu and at illustrating, through the mythical-symbolic representations, the total agreement of the divine sphere with the royal sphere.⁷⁴ The divine will is fulfilled through the king's works and in the Eblaic panels the communication of this visual message is accomplished through explicit and repeated symbolic references to the mythical world, which seem to be innovative when compared to the Sumerian tradition which had used them only in the decoration of pieces of furniture unrelated with historical themes.⁷⁵ Notwithstanding the apparent analogy of the expressive means and of the compositive formulas they employed, as concerns the sphere of communication, the meaning of the Early Dynastic IIIB and Old Akkadian royal triumph stelae from Lagash and Agade is different. Thus, Eannatum of Lagash's stele, presumably dedicated to the god Ningirsu in a temple, and not palatial milieu as I. J. Winter recently pointed out,⁷⁶ bears the witness to the god, and puts under his guarantee a punctual and specific new political situation resulting from military campaigns approved by the god. The historical value of the original wall panels of Ebla, where history and myth are juxtaposed, is of great relevance also

⁷² Th. Jacobsen, *The Sumerian King List* (Chicago, 1939), pp. 102–5. Cfr. also M. J. Geller, in *Eblaitica* (Winona Lake, 1987), Vol. 1, pp. 141–5, whose conclusions about the reconstruction of the relations between Mari and Ebla in the time of the Ebla archives are, however, unfounded.

⁷³ P. R. S. Moorey, *Kish Excavations 1923–1933* (Oxford, 1978), pp. 57–61; R. Dolce, *Or*, 47 (1978), 37–49.

⁷⁴ H. A. Groenewegen-Frankfort, *Arrest and Movement. An Essay on Space and Time in the Representational Art of the Ancient Near East* (London, 1951), pp. 158–62.

⁷⁵ Only in the 'Standard of Ur', whose original function is however doubtful and might have been connected with a musical instrument, they employed subjects related to historical events. A. Moortgat's opinion (*Die Kunst*, pp. 49–50) that, being decorations of pieces of furniture, it is of minor arts, the inlays would be of a modest quality certainly does not correspond to the Early Dynastic conceptual categories and does not have a base in reality.

⁷⁶ I. J. Winter, *Studies in the History of Art*, 16 (1985), 11–28.

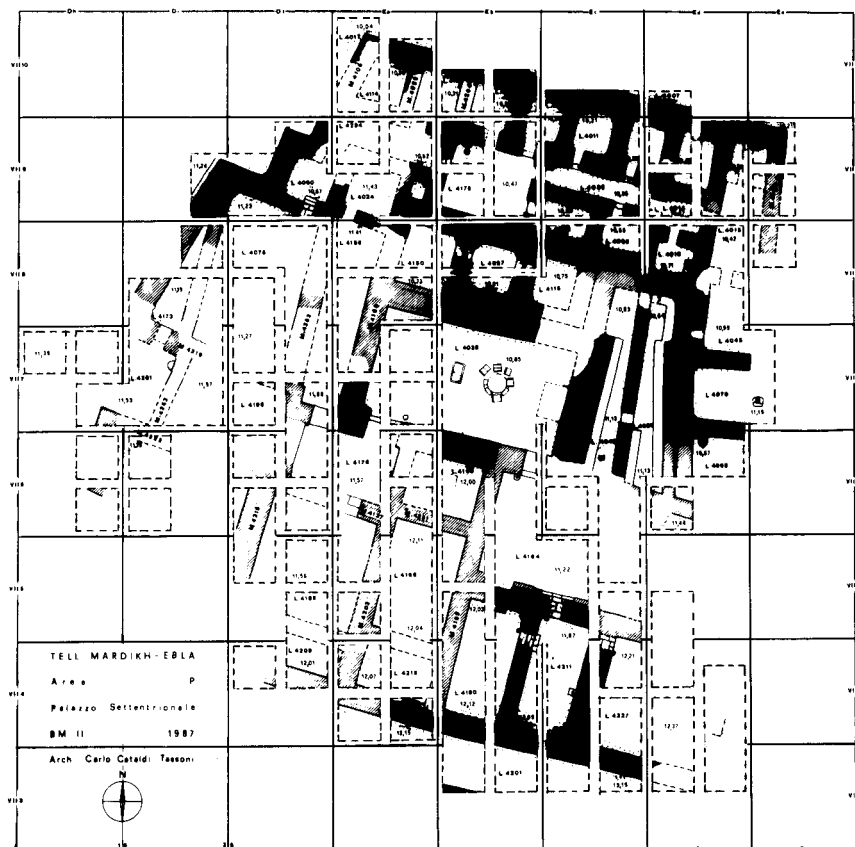


FIG. 4. Tell Mardikh—Ebla, Northern Palace: schematic plan (1987); Mardikh III B, c. 1800–1600 BC.

because they foreshadow, at a long distance of time, in the wall decoration of the palace, the typical way of doing followed in the conception of one of the most grandiose figurative programmes of exaltation of kingship of the ancient Near East, accomplished by Ashurnasirpal II in the North-West palace at Nimrud in the first half of the IXth century BC.⁷⁷

The second particularly important group of artefacts discovered in 1988 is made of a large amount of seriously damaged Old Syrian ivory *ajouré* inlays of Egyptianizing style, found in a storeroom of the large Northern Palace P1 (Fig. 4), in the lower

⁷⁷ J. E. Reade, *BaM*, 10 (1979), 57–64; I. J. Winter, in *Essays on Near Eastern Art and Archaeology in Honor of Ch. K. Wilkinson* (New York, 1983), pp. 15–31; P. Matthiae, *Scienze dell'Antichità*, 2 (1988), 347–76.

town, destroyed by the end of Mardikh IIIB, around 1600 BC.⁷⁸ These inlays, recovered in very fragmentary conditions, notwithstanding the very accurate system of collecting them, could not be reconstructed in a satisfactory way but in a few instances (Pl. VII). This leads us to presume that the piece of furniture they decorated, a bed or more likely a throne, had been stored because it was in a serious condition of decay, such that it could no more be used.⁷⁹ For this reason it is no more possible to offer sound hypotheses of reconstruction of the original compositions. All the figurative inlays belong only to divine or royal figures, while several fragments were parts of vegetable decorative elements—sacred plants, papyruses, lilies—or of geometric ornaments, or are related with hieroglyphic signs—particularly guilloches, small arches and *dd* pillars.⁸⁰

The divine or royal figures may be classified into two categories according to size: the bigger figures probably reached 30 cm in height, while the smaller ones did not exceed 15 cm. It is probable, therefore, that the first figures decorated the back of a throne and the second ones its sides. The figures of smaller size are easily identifiable. A head of Hathor, the great goddess of Denderah, is well preserved (Pl. VIIIa),⁸¹ whose iconography, certainly at least since the Old Syrian period in the Levant, had been adopted for the great goddess of Byblos, the Ba'alat, to whom the Pharaohs of the Old Kingdom sent offerings since the

⁷⁸ A preliminary study about these inlays is presented by G. Scandone Matthiae, *Scienze dell'Antichità*, 4 (1990) in press. The room where the ivory inlays have been found is L.4070, already singled out and limited in its perimetrical walls in 1985, but excavated only in 1988: P. Matthiae, *CRAI* (1987), p. 157, figs 10 and 12.

⁷⁹ The room L.4070 was a storeroom which contained, almost exclusively, provision jars; thus, it was not the suitable place for such a precious piece of furniture of display if it was being normally used. Moreover, a certain scattering of the fragments of inlays, which was not observed for the jars, leads us to believe that dismembered parts of the object, which had already lost quite a number of the pieces of incrustation, were left in the storeroom, against the west and north walls.

⁸⁰ G. Scandone Matthiae, *Scienze dell'Antichità*, 4 (1990), in press, believes that the small arches and the guilloches were parts of the framings of the scenes with smaller figures and she observes that some fragments must belong to the wings of a winged sun which quite likely, as in well known scenes of the Old Syrian cylinders, was perhaps the upper part of the framing: s. specially L. Delaporte, *Catalogue des cylindres orientaux de la Bibliothèque Nationale* (Paris, 1910), pp. 227–8, n. 491, pl. XXXII, where the Egyptianizing winged sun appears over a personage wearing the two-plumed crown, like in these ivories from Ebla.

⁸¹ TM.88.P.532: height 5 cm; width 3.2 cm.

first half of the IIIrd millennium BC as they considered her an Asiatic form of Hathor herself.⁸² If Hathor's iconography may have been used in Asia, also outside Byblos, in order to represent other great goddesses, also perhaps in inner Syria, we cannot maintain the same as regards the crocodile-god (Pl. VIIIb) and the falcon-god, Sobek and Horus (Pl. VIIIc).⁸³ These Egyptian iconographies of the Fayyum god, particularly adored by the Pharaohs of the XIIth and XIIIth Dynasties of the Middle Kingdom,⁸⁴ and of the great dynastic god of the royal Egyptian tradition, are unique evidences in the great art of Syria, even though Horus's figure appears in very rare contemporary cylinder seals in the Old Syrian style.⁸⁵ Probably related with the divine figures of Sobek, Horus and Hathor are some objects which might appear as divine attributes or insignia, like a disk with the handle in the shape of a lotus-flower, while it is impossible to reconstruct the compositive context of a beautiful figure of a falcon.⁸⁶

Only very small remains of probably three or four figures of bigger sizes are preserved. They have excellent formal qualities and seem to be characterized by a strong homogeneity in the faces features. The fragment of a bearded face turned to the left, of which only a lower sector of the tiara is kept, might be a divine figure wearing the two plumes *šwtj*-crown.⁸⁷ Of a second figure apparently turned to the right, only a large part of a second two

⁸² The Hathoric iconography, which is used for the Ba'alat of Byblos in king Yehawmilk's stela, is documented, for an apparently secondary deity, in several Old Syrian seals, some of which certainly dating from around 1700 BC because they are kept in impressions from Alalakh VII: D. Collon, *The Seal Impressions from Tell Atchanal/Alalakh* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1975), pp. 80–2, n. 147, 148, 150.

⁸³ The Sobek figure is almost completely reconstructed from fragments which keep the bust, the kilt, one of the forearms and the legs: TM.88.P.538+539+540+551+552: height of the bust (538) 4.4 cm. TM.88.P.536 and 537 are two mirror-like figures of the god Horus, high respectively 4.2 cm and 3.7 cm.

⁸⁴ F. Goma', in *Studia W. Westendorf* (Göttingen, 1984), Vol. 2, pp. 787–803.

⁸⁵ D. Collon, *The Seal Impressions*, p. 78, n. 144. For a probably later cylinder with two figures of Horus s. G. A. Eisen, *Ancient Oriental Cylinders of the Collection of Mrs. W. H. Moore* (Chicago, 1940), p. 65, n. 180, pl. XVII.

⁸⁶ While the falcon, TM.88.P.558, is 3.5 cm high and 1.7 cm wide, the disk with lotus flower TM.88.P.563, 3.7 cm high, according to G. Scandone Matthiae, *Scienze dell'Antichità*, 4 (1990) in press, could very probably belong to the goddess figure with Hathoric iconography.

⁸⁷ TM.88.P.533: h. 5.7 cm. This fragment of a face with base of a tiara, was quite certainly in combination with the plaque TM.88.P.562, reconstructed from eight fragments and 6.0 cm high, in which was preserved a large part of two plumes of a *šwtj* crown worn by a personage turned to the left.

plumes *šwtj*-crown was reconstructed.⁸⁸ Some parts of the body of a third figure, turned to the left, apparently belong to a beardless figure, wearing the Osiris *gṯf*-crown (Pl. VIII*d*).⁸⁹ The wonderful head of this figure, with a large part of the Osirian tiara is admirable for the drawing pattern and for the fineness of the drawing. A fourth head of an exceptional artistic value (Pl. VIII*e*), whose tiara is lost, has a juvenile aspect, is turned to the right and seems to be a part of a figure placed mirror-like with the previous one wearing the *gṯf*-crown.⁹⁰

The workmanship of these extraordinary works, which are the most ancient figurative ivories from the Syro-Palestinian region,⁹¹ on the one hand is the same as that of a very beautiful inlay with the typical figure of an Old Syrian king, discovered in 1986 in the throne room of the same Northern Palace at Ebla,⁹² and, on the other hand, it is not different at all from the workmanship of a group of inlays, whose quality is slightly inferior, found in 1935 in a tomb at Jisr, near Jaffa.⁹³ The ivory inlays from the Palestinian tomb at Jisr were probably also inserted in the decoration of a remarkable not royal piece of furniture in the tradition of a much coarser, and relatively quite frequent production of geometric inlays, particularly used for ornamental boxes, widely attested in the Middle Bronze IIB-C tombs at Jericho.⁹⁴ The same technique is used for the figurative decorations of the beds from the Nubian milieu, attested in the early and middle XIIIth Dynasty ivory and

⁸⁸ TM.88.P.560: h. 6.0 cm, reconstructed from eleven fragments. The inclination of the two plumes, slightly to the left, leads us to believe for certain that the personage was turned to the right.

⁸⁹ The head with a large part of the *gṯf*-crown is preserved by TM.88.P.535a+b, greyish ivory, originally made of four separate plaques, worked separately, and reconstructed from twenty-four fragments: the total height is 13.4 cm. About this head, s. G. Scandone Matthiae, *La parola del passato* (1990), in press.

⁹⁰ TM.88.P.534; h. 4.3 cm: this head is almost identical, from the stylistic point of view, to TM.88.P.535, and thus might also have worn a *gṯf*-crown, but it cannot be excluded that the second *šwtj*-crown, belonging to a face turned to the right and with the head missing, belonged just to this head.

⁹¹ About the ivories from the Syro-Palestinian area in general, s. now R. D. Barnett, *Ancient Ivories in the Middle East and Adjacent Countries* (Jerusalem, 1982), pp. 23–31.

⁹² TM.86.P.86a+b: h. 7.3 cm, published by P. Matthiae, *CRAI* (1987), pp. 158–60, fig. 14; a detailed study about this ivory will appear in *Afo*.

⁹³ J. Ory, *QDAP*, **12** (1945), 31–42; R. Amiran, *Israel Museum News*, **12** (1977), pp. 65–9.

⁹⁴ H. A. Liebowitz, *IEJ*, **27** (1977), 89–97; id., *BASOR*, **265** (1987), 3–24.

mica inlays from Kerma, where Egyptian, Asiatic and African themes are documented.⁹⁵

Although any reconstruction of the compositive motifs of the Ebla inlays is only very tentative it is not unlikely that the two mirror-like Horus figures were part of a *sm3 t3wj* pattern, which is attested in an Old Syrian cylinder seal of the same period in the Egyptianizing style.⁹⁶ This theme, descending from the frequent presence on the sides of the thrones of the Middle Kingdom royal statues, recently studied by J. Baines,⁹⁷ and presumably diffused in Asia through the pharaonic gifts documented by the pectorals from the contemporary Byblos royal tombs, was adopted in Syria for its connection with kingship.⁹⁸ In the Old Syrian cylinder seals, in fact, the mirror-like repetition of the royal figure was certainly inspired by the similar Egyptian motifs appearing in the XIIth Dynasty pharaonic pectorals.⁹⁹ It is the same pattern of the royal figures repeated mirror-like at both sides of a sacred tree, which may be reconstructed with the two beardless figures, one at least of whom wears the *3tf*-crown, the tiara the dead Pharaohs took in their quality of Osiris. It is likely that the two royal figures on the back of the Ebla throne were repeated mirror-like at both sides of a sacred tree, partially reconstructed from very small fragments, and quite similar to the tree on a late Old Syrian cylinder seal found at Damanhur in the Delta, where, of the two kings, one wears the *3tf*-crown and the other one a rare and special kind of divine tiara.¹⁰⁰ It is likely that the two king figures,

⁹⁵ G. A. Reisner, *Excavations at Kerma* (Cambridge, Mass., 1923), Vol. 4-5, pp. 274-6, pls 54-60; W. Stevenson Smith, *The Art and Architecture of Ancient Egypt* (Harmondsworth, 1958), pp. 121-7, pls 82B-83B.

⁹⁶ E. Porada, *Corpus of Ancient Near Eastern Seals, I, The Collection of the Pierpont Morgan Library* (Washington, 1948), p. 136, n. 1000, pl. CLI.

⁹⁷ J. Baines, *Fecundity Figures. Egyptian Personification and the Iconology of a Genre* (Warminster, 1985), pp. 236-57, 261-5.

⁹⁸ P. Montet, *Byblos et l'Égypte. Quatre campagnes de fouilles à Gebeil* (Paris, 1929), pp. 162-3, n. 617, pl. XIV; M. Chéhab, *BMB*, 1 (1937), pp. 7-8, n. 1, pl. X. Cfr. also E. Feucht-Putz, *Die königlichen Pektore* (Hamburg, 1976), pp. 22-4.

⁹⁹ P. Matthiae, in *Archaeologia iranica et orientalis. Miscellanea in honorem L. Vanden Berghe* (Gent, 1989), Vol. 1, pp. 370-2.

¹⁰⁰ TM.88.P.564, h. 4.8 cm. The seal of Damanhur was published by H. Frankfort, *Cylinder Seals* (London, 1939), pl XLIVu and was studied again by W. Stevenson Smith, *Interconnections in the Ancient Near East* (New Haven-London, 1965), p. 105, fig. 140b. Due to the reduced size of this fragment and to the graving technique, however, G. Scandone Matthiae, *Scienze dell'Antichità*, 4 (1990), in press, believes, probably rightly, that this sacred tree should be reconstructed between two mirror-like figures of smaller size. If these considerations are correct one might believe that the central vegetable element, between

which quite probably were representations of royal ancestors, the Ugaritic *rapi'uma* adored in the Old Babylonian period from Mesopotamia to Syria,¹⁰¹ were followed by two divine figures, wearing the two plumes tiara, facing each other.

If the heavily fragmentary condition of the ivory inlays of the piece of furniture from the Northern Palace at Ebla makes any reconstruction of the original compositions uncertain, the contribution they give to the historical reconstruction of the high Old Syrian figurative culture is very remarkable both in the ideologic sphere and in the formal one. On the one hand, in fact, these inlays finally prove that the royal milieu of Middle Bronze II Syria, around 1700 BC, took over pharaonic schemes for re-elaborations and adaptations aiming at the exaltation of the Old Syrian kingship. This certainly took place for the extraordinary expressive force in the visual communication of the Egyptian compositive formulas and for the high prestige of the very ancient royal institution of the Nile Valley. On the other hand, the exceptional formal quality of the Egyptianizing Old Syrian inlays provides evidence of how deep and pervasive was the study of the Middle Kingdom statuary, relief and minor arts in the Syrian urban centres, of how effective might have been the spur they gave to the ripening of the great late Old Syrian artistic taste¹⁰² and of the formal quality and variety of the artefacts produced in the different artistic genres by the palatial workshops of the central and final Middle Bronze II in inner or coastal Syria.¹⁰³

the larger size figures wearing the *3tf* crown, were composed by a plant with papyrus flowers, of which several fragments are preserved of thickness and size comparable with those of the larger figures: TM.88.P.576a-1.

¹⁰¹ A. Caquot, *Syria*, 37 (1960), 75-93; A. Jirku, *ZAW*, 77 (1965), pp. 82-3; S. Parker, *UF*, 4 (1970), 97-104; M. H. Pope, in *Studies in Honor of W. F. Stinespring* (Durham, 1972), pp. 170-203; C. E. L'Heureux, *HTR*, 67 (1974), 265-74; J. C. de Moor, *ZAW*, 88 (1976), 323-45; M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, J. Sanmartin, *UF*, 8 (1976), 45-52; J. F. Healey, *UF*, 10 (1978), 83-91; P. Matthiae, *UF*, 11 (1979), 563-9; M. H. Pope, in *Ugarit in Retrospect* (Winona Lake, 1981), pp. 168-7; P. Xella, in *La soteriologia dei culti orientali nell'impero romano* (Leiden, 1982), pp. 614-32; B. A. Levine, J.-M. de Tarragon, *JAOS* (1984), pp. 649-59; G. del Olmo Lete, *SEL*, 3 (1986), 55-71. However, the problem of the uses of the *3tf*-crown in the religious iconography of Syria in the XVIIIth-XIIIth centuries BC is complicated, because it was used, as is known, at Ugarit in a form almost identical to that of the Ebla ivory, also for a great god sitting on a throne in whom is usually recognized El: C. F. A. Schaeffer, *Syria*, 18 (1937), 128-34, pl. XVII, fig. 1.

¹⁰² P. Matthiae, *Ars Syria. Contributi alla storia dell'arte figurativa siriana nelle età del Medio e Tardo Bronzo* (Roma, 1962), pp. 133-8.

¹⁰³ The problem of the place of production of the Egyptianizing ivory inlays of Mardikh IIIB cannot be dealt with here: it is enough to say that, while we can

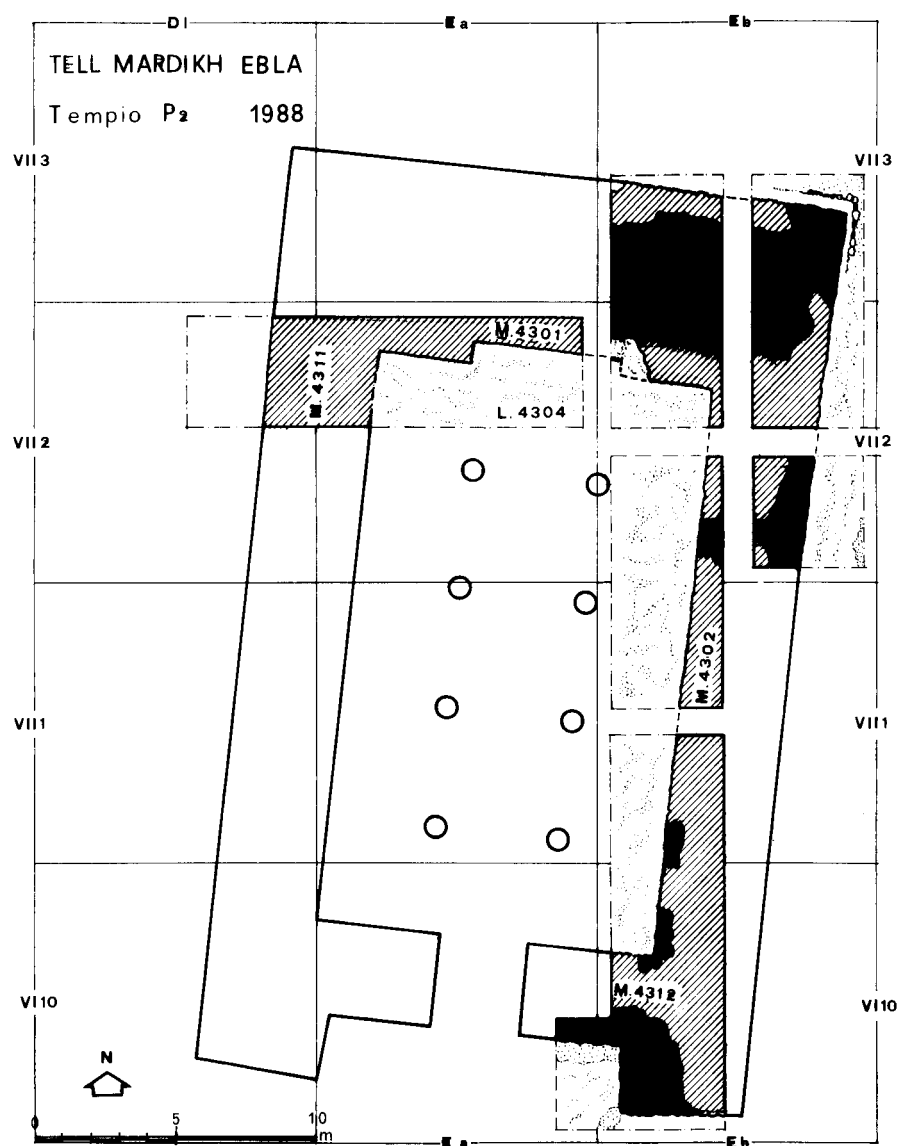


FIG. 5. Tell Mardikh—Ebla, Temple P2: schematic plan (1988); Mardikh IIIB, c. 1800–1600 BC.

exclude their import from Egypt, we believe it possible, and even probable, that they were made by a workshop of a centre of coastal Syria where the knowledge of Egyptian works had to be quite larger than at Ebla.

The primary role of the cultural elaboration that Ebla had during Middle Bronze II is also proved, in architectural culture, by the identification during the 1988 excavation season of a new sacred building in the lower town north, just south of the Northern Palace P₁, in the region of a large terrace, slightly higher than the level of the lower town (Fig. 5).¹⁰⁴ The Temple P₂ has thus far been excavated only along two of the very thick perimetrical walls, the east and north ones.¹⁰⁵ It is an imposing building with a marked longitudinal development, belonging to the typology of the so-called Long-Room Sanctuary.¹⁰⁶ In its outer perimeter it is 33.50 m long and 19.80 m wide. The monumental cella 20.50 m long and 12.10 m large, whose flooring is apparently not preserved because the deep foundations, 7.00 m thick in the back north wall and 3.90 m thick in the side walls, had been taken away for several courses of stone (Pl. IXa) was preceded by a vestibule flanked by two towers in the front of the building.¹⁰⁷ Notwithstanding the condition of strong decay of the severely sacked structures, the Temple P₂ at Ebla, probably founded during Middle Bronze I around 1900 BC on Early Bronze IVA foundations,¹⁰⁸ is the biggest sacred building of

¹⁰⁴ Although this slightly higher region is apparently limited to the north by a poor enclosure wall, almost certainly dating from the late Roman period, it seems probable that it coincided largely with an ancient, wide sacred region at the foot of the acropolis, where there perhaps were other religious buildings with various functions, besides the Temple P₂: this hypothesis, which will be tested by systematically enlarging the excavations to the east, south and west of the Temple P₂, seems to be supported, in the meantime, by the presence on the surface of other remains of stone foundations of peculiar thickness.

¹⁰⁵ P. Matthiae, *AAAS*, 39 (1989), in press.

¹⁰⁶ G. R. H. Wright, *PEQ*, 103 (1971), 17–32; P. Matthiae, *XXe RAI* (Leiden, 1975), pp. 43–72; A. Kuschke, in *Biblisches Reallexikon* (Tübingen, 1977), pp. 336–7; M. Ottosson, *Temples and Cult Places in Palestine* (Uppsala, 1980), pp. 27–32; Ch. J. Davey, *Tyndale Bulletin*, 31 (1980), pp. 131–4; J. Cl. Margueron, in *Sanctuaires et clergés* (Paris, 1986), pp. 11–38.

¹⁰⁷ Thus a large part of the foundation has been brought to light only for the east tower, and certainly it is slightly thicker than the width of the perimetrical wall east: as it has not yet been possible to control if this thickening was present also in the west tower, and if it was purposeful, it is still difficult to assert if the Temple P₂ must be simply classified as a sacred building of the type *in antis*.

¹⁰⁸ Not rare sherds of Early Bronze IVA were found among the several upset stones brought to light in the area of the cella immediately to the south of the imposing perimetrical north wall, where the deep sacks of the foundation stones have not left intact any original stratigraphic situation. However, just for this situation of serious degradation in depth of the cella, it has not yet been possible to identify for certain foundation courses of Early Bronze IVA.

Middle Bronze II in the Syro-Palestinian region as a whole, and is an impressive historical precedent for the two major contemporary sanctuaries of Palestine, the Temple Ia at Shechem¹⁰⁹ and the Temple 2048 in Area BB of Megiddo X.¹¹⁰ The longitudinal structure with presumable columns lined up in two rows,¹¹¹ as in the famous *migdal* sanctuary at Shechem, the wide and not very deep niche in the back wall, like in the older plan of the Temple of Megiddo X, the symmetric towers in the front (Pl. IXb) flanking the axial entrance,¹¹² the imposing thickness of the perimetrical structure, which hint at a notable original height,¹¹³ point to a unity of the architectural culture which inspired the achievements in the monumental centres of the major towns of Syria and Palestine in Middle Bronze II.¹¹⁴

Just in front of the entrance to Temple P2 at the time of one of the highest peaks of the sack of the large stones from the perimetrical structures of the sanctuary probably during and surely not before the Persian period, the remains of three votive basalt statues, which certainly originally stood in the sacred building, were collected in a kind of *cachette* (Pl. Xa). The complete

¹⁰⁹ G. E. Wright, *Shechem. The Biography of a Biblical City* (New York-Toronto, 1965), pp. 87–91, 94–5, figs 40–1.

¹¹⁰ G. Loud, *Megiddo II, Seasons of 1935–39* (Chicago, 1949), pp. 102–4 fig. 248. After the observations by G. E. Wright, *Shechem*, p. 94, who believed that the Temple 2048 might be ascribed already to Megiddo X or XI, and those by K. J. Kenyon, *ErIs*, 5 (1958), 51–60, I. Dunayevsky, A. Kempinski, *ErIs*, II (1973), pp. 22–4 have soundly reattributed the original structure of the Temple 2048 to the time of Megiddo X.

¹¹¹ G. E. Wright, *Shechem*, p. 90, fig. 43.

¹¹² These front towers were certainly slightly thicker than the side perimetrical walls, and anyhow in their inner faces they were not merely the projections of the east and west walls: for this reason they cannot be considered simply antae of a temple *in antis*.

¹¹³ The thickness of the side walls is only slightly larger than that of the Temple Ia of Shechem, c. 3.85 m, but that of the back wall is definitely larger than the thickness of any other sacred building of Syria and Palestine, while the depth of the stone socles of the basements, although certainly irregular, as they are placed on the rock, should have been more than 1.50 m.

¹¹⁴ The special importance of the Temple P2 at Ebla is its position on the tradition of the North-Syrian building *in antis* of the type of the Temple L of Tell Halawa, and of the 'Nordtempel' of Tell Khuera in Early Bronze IVA, and in its forewarning, as happens also with the Temple of Area C at Tuttul in the Euphrates valley, of the realization of Middle Bronze IIB–C of Megiddo and Shechem: W. Orthmann, *Halawa 1980 bis 1986* (Bonn, 1989), pp. 63–8, figs 34–6 pl. 11; A. Moortgat, *Tell Chuera in Nordost-Syrien, 1960* (Köln, 1962), pp. 9–14, fig. 11, pls II–III; E. Strommenger *et al.*, *MDOG*, II8 (1986), 29–36, fig. 16 and II9 (1987), 40–6, fig. 22.

statue of a sitting bare-headed personage was then laid down obliquely, leaning it on the torso of the statue of a standing woman set orthogonally with the previous one,¹¹⁵ and then they collected all round several fragments of a third sitting statue which allowed us to reconstruct completely its torso (Pl. Xb).¹¹⁶ The statue of the sitting personage (Pl. XIa),¹¹⁷ which is the most ancient one completely preserved from the Syrian area, was certainly the votive figure of a high dignitary, holding in his left hand a bowl, according to a pattern typical of the votive statuary of Syria, from the archaic Old Syrian period at Ebla itself,¹¹⁸ to the Neo-Syrian period in the Aramaean statuary.¹¹⁹ The marked flattening of depth in the plastic rendering of this work, which has a modest stylistic quality, foreshadows in the years around 1800 BC the formal characteristic of statues, also of royal ones of the central period of Late Bronze I in upper Syria, like Idrimi of

¹¹⁵ The definitely intentional nature of the cachette appears clearly from the positions of the complete non-royal statue, and of the standing female statue, because the latter, already broken, was employed as a simple support in order to lay piously the intact statue. The dating of this particular cachette not earlier than the Persian period depends from the fact that ceramic fragments from that period have been found in the related level, but the cachette may, of course, be later. Therefore, there is no possible comparison, notwithstanding some apparent analogy with the cachette of the pit in the eastern annex of the Temple of Alalakh IB, where Idrimi's statue was found: C. L. Woolley, *Alalakh. An Account of the Excavations at Tell Atchana in the Hatay, 1937-1949* (Oxford, 1955) pp. 88-9, pl. XIIb.

¹¹⁶ As concerns this third statue, certainly the largest of the three as regards their size and the only one which surely represents a king, one must point out that, first, the numerous fragments found around the two first statues belonged only to it; second, these fragments were not scattered, but rather they were accurately collected as if in order to limit the small pit of the cachette. Also these elements related to the third statue confirm that, as regards the complete statue, although in a period distant from that of the late Old Syrian culture, they proceeded to a real burial, probably more superstitious than ritual, according to a well documented usage of the Neo-Syrian period: D. Ussishkin, *JNES*, 29 (1970), pp. 124-8.

¹¹⁷ TM.88.P.627: height 1.08 m; width 0.42 m.

¹¹⁸ P. Matthiae, in *Missione archeologica italiana in Siria, 1965*, pp. 104-16, pls XXXVIII-XLII. According to D. Ussishkin, in *Anatolia and the Ancient Near East. Studies in Honor of T. Ozgüç* (Ankara, 1989), pp. 485-86, 491, this statue TM.65.A.234 of Ebla might have been standing not far from the finding place, immediately beside the city gate A.

¹¹⁹ The two statues from Tell Halaf, perhaps of Kapara's period, A1 and A2, as H. Frankfort had already proposed (*The Art*, p. 176), were considered funerary statues by A. Moortgat, *Tell Halaf* (Berlin, 1955) Vol. 3, pp. 10-14, 35-7, pls 1-9. Certainly votive is, on the other hand, the sitting statuette of Late Bronze from Temple in Area C at Hazor: Y. Yadin *et al.*, *Hazor* (Jerusalem, 1958), Vol. 1, pp. 87-8, pl. XXXI 1.

Alalakh's statue¹²⁰ whose artistic quality is not of the same level as the historical importance descending from the royal inscription. It is likely that the plastic schematism and stiffness descend from the not royal commitment, rather than from a chronologic placement in a not advanced phase of the Old Syrian artistic development. In fact, the artistic value of the two other statues is completely different, even if they are not complete.¹²¹ In particular, the female figure is quite noteworthy.¹²² It probably represents a queen (Pl. XI*b*), slightly smaller than life-size, with excellent formal qualities. In this statue where, to the accurate modulation of the surfaces corresponds a minute, albeit not pedantic, care in the representation of the details of the attire, of the bracelets and duck-headed pin on the edge of the cloak, one may recognize a variant of the sumptuous female costume, well known from the Old Syrian glyptics of the great companion goddess of the weather-god Hadad.¹²³ This is the first evidence of the great votive statuary where the admirable formal values are attested (Pl. XI*c*), thus far known basically from a wonderful series of cylinder seals, recently rightly attributed by D. Collon to the Aleppo

¹²⁰ C. L. Woolley, in S. Smith, *The Statue of Idrimi* (London, 1949), pp. 1–9, pl. 1; id., *Alalakh*, p. 240, pl. XLVI.

¹²¹ The type and consumption of the breakings, very consumed, make it quite probable that the breakings at the base of the necks of the two statues, as well as that at the base of the cloak of the female figure, date back from the sack and destruction of Temple P2, by the end of the Middle Bronze II; on the other hand, the quite neat and not consumed breakings of the male sitting statue, lead us to arbitrate these secondary fractures of the remains of royal statue to the later period when the cachette was created. The complete state of the male sitting statue of a dignitary or priest is certainly due to the fact that it was saved because it was not royal, as the mutilation of the royal images was, in the sacks of towns, a rule perhaps without exceptions: C. Nylander, *AJA*, **84** (1980), 329–33 and recently D. Ussishkin, in *Anatolia and Ancient Near East*, p. 491.

¹²² TM.88.P.628: height 72.7 cm; width 36.2 cm; thickness 18.3 cm.

¹²³ For the iconography of the great goddess s. A. Moortgat, *Vorderasiatische Rollsiegel* (Berlin, 1940), n. 523, p. 132, pl. 62; B. Teissier, *Ancient Near Eastern Cylinder Seals from the Marcopoli Collection* (Berkeley-Los Angeles-London, 1984), n. 474, 476, pp. 240–3, and at Ebla itself P. Matthiae, *I tesori*, pp. 124–5, pl. 87. The same costume is documented also for a veiled female dignitary, perhaps a high priestess, accompanying frequently the goddess: H. H. von der Osten, *Ancient Oriental Seals in the Collection of Mr. E. T. Newell* (Chicago, 1934), p. 50, n. 321, pl. XXIII; E. Porada, *Corpus*, n. 956, 973, p. 127, 132, pls CXLV, CXLVII; B. Buchanan, *Early Near Eastern Seals in the Yale Babylonian Collection* (New Haven-London, 1981), p. 434, n. 1270.

carvers' workshops.¹²⁴ The circumstance that the statue is certainly an artefact produced by a royal workshop at Ebla points to the basic contribution offered by the great centre of inner Syria to the accomplishments of the more mature developments of the Old Syrian tradition, which probably had its greatest centre in Aleppo.¹²⁵

An expression of the same artistic milieu and a work of sure royal commitment is the very fragmentary and quite remarkable sitting statue of a king (Pl. XII)¹²⁶ which must be dated from between 1750 and 1700 BC, immediately before or in the ancient phase of the cylinder seals production of Alalakh VII.¹²⁷ The fringed cloak which wraps up the powerful torso is one of the two typical royal costumes of this mature period of the Old Syrian glyptics,¹²⁸ while the sober linearity of the seat, on which the arm of the personage is represented with a peculiar realism, does not have any comparison. The contrast between the austere volumes limited by curved lines of the throne and the florid obesity of the torso, and between the naturalistic undulation of the edges of the cloak and the firm definition of the surfaces of the breast muscles reveals how far the art of these Old Syrian masters is, in a very remarkable stylistic autonomy, from the stiff formal schematism of the contemporary Old Babylonian schools of Eshnunna and Mari in central Mesopotamia.¹²⁹

In conclusion, the contributions offered by the 1988 excavation campaign at Ebla for the reconstruction of the development of the artistic tradition of Syria between 2400 and 1600 BC are basic for the high formal level of the artefacts discovered, and for the cultural orientations of the symbolic and stylistic languages used. In the high Early Syrian period the limestone inlaid panels with historical-military and mythical-symbolic subjects assert, in the wall decoration of the palatial milieu, a kind of epic celebration of the military triumphs which probably descends from the ancient tradition of Kish and from the contemporary accomplishments of Mari, and reveals in the figurative arts the same court taste as the

¹²⁴ D. Collon, *UF*, **13** (1981), 33-43.

¹²⁵ P. Matthiae, in *Propyläen Kunstgeschichte*, **14**, pp. 470-1.

¹²⁶ TM.88.P.500: height 0.85 m.

¹²⁷ D. Collon, *Seal Impressions*, pp. 146-61.

¹²⁸ W. Nagel, E. Strommenger, *JCS*, **12** (1958), pp. 120-2; D. Collon, *Seal Impressions*, pp. 186-9.

¹²⁹ A. Moortgat, *Die Kunst*, pp. 92-6; W. Orthmann, in *Propyläen Kunstgeschichte*, **14**, pp. 228-91, pls 154-6, 159-62. A. Spycket, *La statuaire du Proche-Orient ancien* (Leiden-Köln, 1981), pp. 237-45.

epic songs of the Early Dynastic tradition of Uruk related to Lugalbanda's and Enmerkar's deeds. These are the years when, as the Eblaic royal archives show with evidence, the economy of Ebla and of northern Syria is strongly integrated within the northern Mesopotamian one, as concerns agricultural products, particularly oil and wine, precious raw materials, especially timber and silver, handicraft products, essentially textiles and furniture,¹³⁰ while the relations with Babylonia and Egypt were probably limited to the long distance trade, concerning most of all the lapis lazuli from Badakhshan, probably controlled by the royal monopoly.¹³¹ The seat of the best known and one of the most ancient centres of the secondary urban culture, which developed in the central centuries of the IIIrd millennium BC in the ecologic environment typical of the dry agriculture, Ebla probably was, with Tell Leylan-Shekhna and Tell Brak in upper Mesopotamia¹³² and not quite unlike Tall i-Malyan-Anshan in western Iran,¹³³ a city-state which exerted a wide territorial control over the peripheral regions of the great urban culture of Babylonia, and took part, with a well characterized ethnic, economic, social and religious autonomy, in the cultural unity created by the major centres of Sumer and Akkad.

In the following Old Syrian period, during the first centuries of the IIInd millennium BC after the collapses of the southern Mesopotamian centralized empires of Agade and Ur III, Ebla was again one of the most important centres of the renewed high urban culture of Middle Bronze II, which this time involved in a unitary way Syria and Palestine as a whole, from the Taurus to the Sinai and from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates. During the two first centuries of the IIInd millennium BC Ebla played a primary role in the establishment of the foundations of this North-West Semitic culture of the age of the Amorite dynasties,¹³⁴ which took a strong inspiration from the Egyptian

¹³⁰ P. Matthiae, in *Wirtschaft*, pp. 75–80; id., *Ebla*, pp. 266–75.

¹³¹ G. Scandone Matthiae, *SEb*, 4 (1981), pp. 99–127; F. Pinnock, *MARI*, 4 (1985), pp. 85–92; H. Klengel, in *Wirtschaft*, pp. 245–51.

¹³² H. Weiss, in *The Origins of Cities in Dry-Farming Syria and Mesopotamia in the Third Millennium B.C.* (Guilford, 1986), pp. 71–98.

¹³³ J. L. Nickerson, *Intrasite Variability during the Kaftari Period at Tal-e Malyan (Anshan), Iran* (Ann Arbor, 1983); W. M. Sumner, in *Ĝamdat Nasr: Period or Regional Style?* (Tübingen, 1986), pp. 199–211; id., in *Archaeologia iranica*, I, 135–61.

¹³⁴ P. Matthiae, *Ebla*, pp. 310–20.

world of the Middle Kingdom within ideology and art, in order to form an autonomous cultural tradition, which, against H. Frankfort's interpretation of the recurring influences,¹³⁵ asserted itself with unsuspected continuity and vitality, lasting until the destructions provoked, in the second half of the VIIIth century BC, by the expansion of the Assyrian empire. As concerns the classical phase of the high Old Syrian period, between 1800 and 1700 BC, the archaeological discoveries of 1988 at Ebla opened a new chapter for a critical revision of the historical process.

¹³⁵ H. Frankfort, *The Art*, pp. 133–63.