

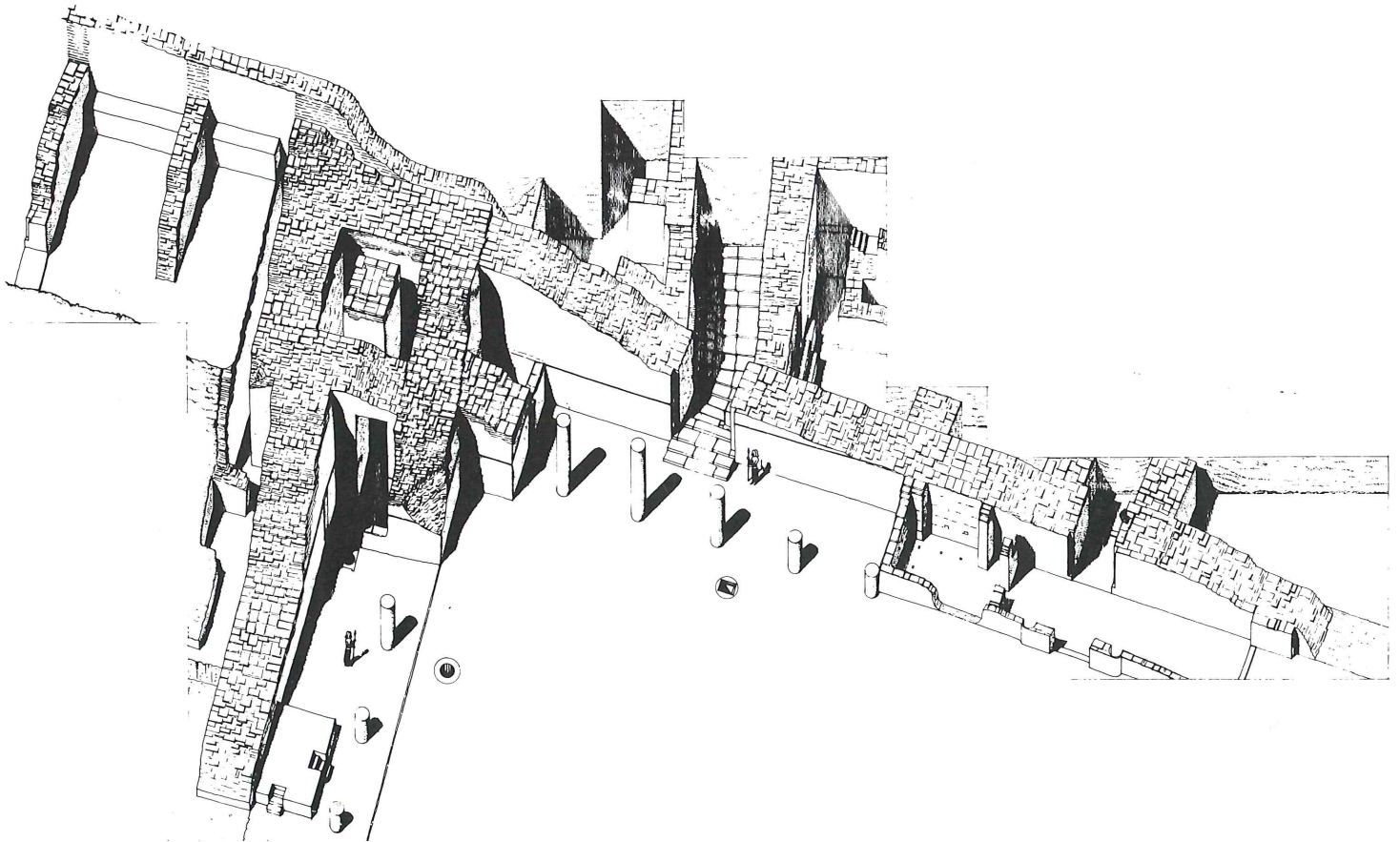
The Mature Early Syrian Culture of Ebla and the Development of Early Bronze Civilization of Jordan

The culture revealed in an untouched archaeological context by the Royal Palace G and by the State Archives of Ebla is the final accomplishment, and probably the apex of the development of the great urban culture of North Syria in the third millennium BC. The definition 'mature Early Syrian culture' for this phase aims at underlining its typically Syrian aspect, and the apogee of its development, with the terminologic parallelism also making an allusion to the last phase of the Early Dynastic culture of Mesopotamia.

1. Royal Palace G: isometric view of the ruins of the Audience Court (c. 2400–2250 BC) drawn by Arch. Carlo Cataldi Tassoni.

The complex of evidence of *Mardikh II B1* is exceptional as its context is limited to the Palace at Ebla. In Syria there are no parallels with such a context. For this reason, however, the evidence of *Mardikh II B1* illustrates in a very representative way the mature Early Syrian culture of which Ebla probably was the centre of political power. In a historical perspective, the high urban culture of Ebla is better characterized in comparison with Early Dynastic Mesopotamia, with which, according to the indications of the Archives, there must have been quite frequent interactions.

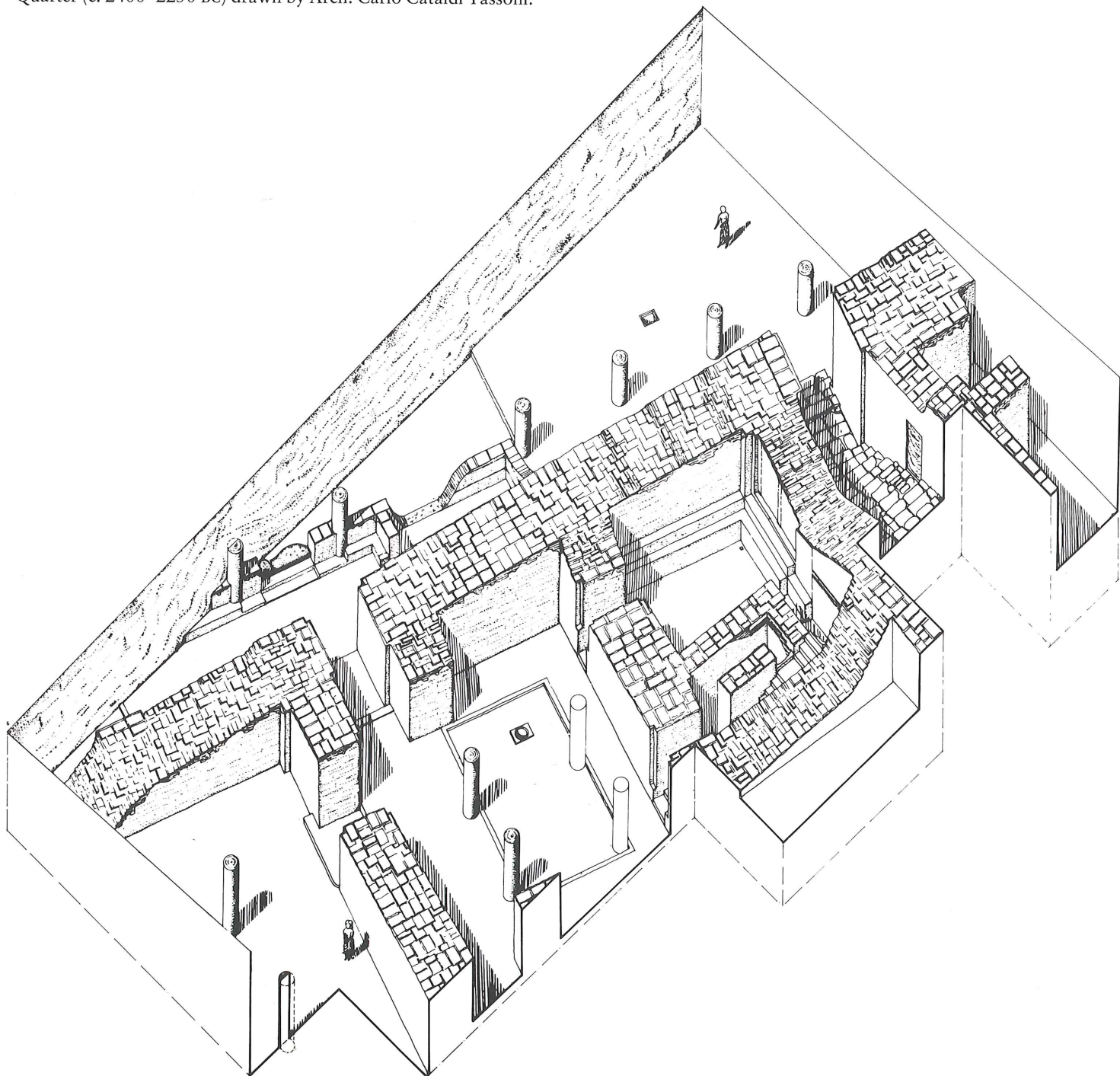
In the architecture of Palace G (FIG. 1) the technical elements, but particularly the planimetrical aspects and the



characteristics of the planning project, are quite significant. The massive foundations with stone bases are a peculiar North-Syrian element. In the palatial complex, the large Court of Audience outside the core of the Palace, devoted to the collection of tributes, the organization of caravans, and the expedition of messengers, is an organic planimetric structure linking the palatial quarters of the Acropolis with the Lower City. If single features of the Court may find parallels

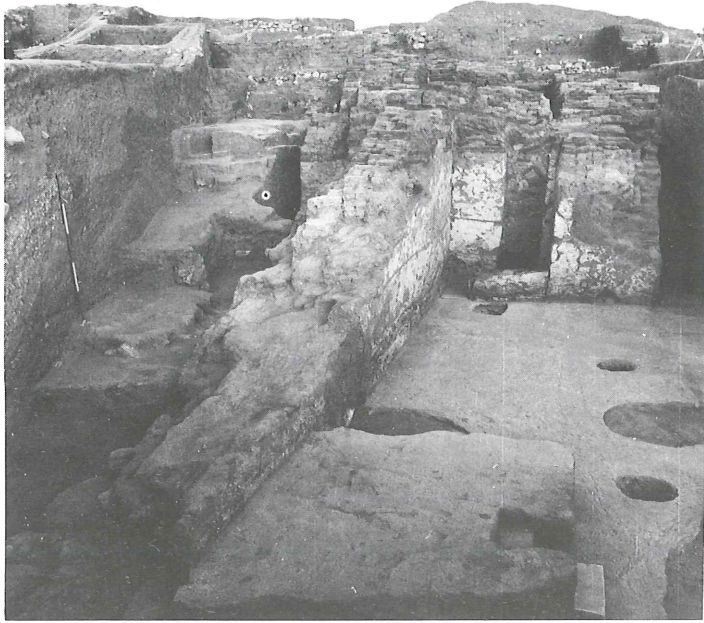
in Palace A of Kish, the urbanistic conception of the large Eblaite court is a peculiarly Syrian one. The organization of the inner spaces of the Administrative Quarter of Palace G at Ebla (FIG. 2) around the smaller inner court with portico is also a typical element of the beginning of the architectural tradition of Syria that has its foundations in the Early Syrian period. The originality of the method of architectural planning in the mature Early Syrian culture is again quite clear when considering pre-existing landscape elements and

2. Royal Palace G: isometric view of the ruins of the Administrative Quarter (c. 2400–2250 BC) drawn by Arch. Carlo Cataldi Tassoni.

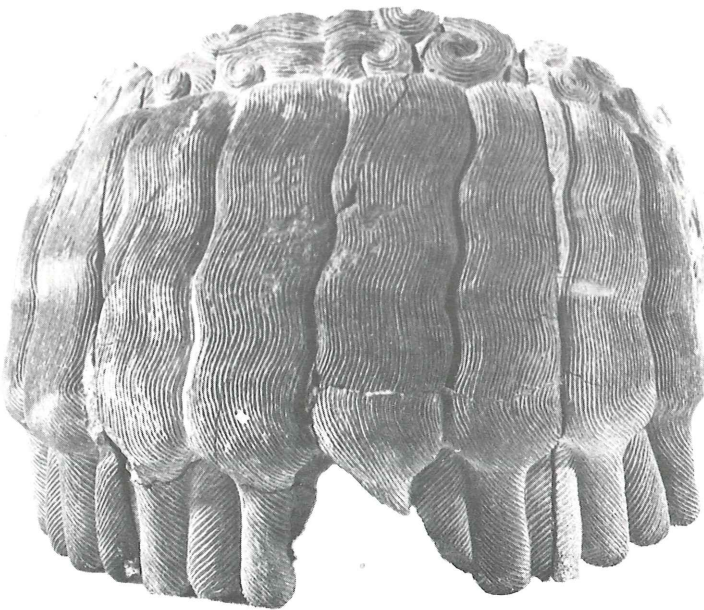


architectural structures. This can be found in the taste for scenographic effects mostly in the North façade (FIG. 3) of the Court of Audience in contrast with the aggregational system of the palatial buildings of Mesopotamia. Lastly, while the open plan of the palace at Ebla may perhaps descend from an inspiration from the Proto-historical Period of Mesopotamia, it is surely the opposite of the enclosed plan of the

3. Royal Palace G: the North façade of the Audience Court from the South; in the foreground, the royal dais (c. 2400–2250 BC).



4. Aleppo, Archaeological Museum: hairdress of male head; steatite; from the Royal Palace G, L. 2913 (c. 2400–2300 BC).



pre-Sargonid palace of Mesopotamia, from Kish to Mari, and of the fortress-palace of the Akkad dynasty, at Tell Brak and maybe at Assur.

The sculpture of Palace G at Ebla, which remains in scattered but significant fragments, is characterized by the composite structure of wood, steatite, gold and limestone, used together in making works in the round, and also reliefs. This is the case with two admirable remains of heads, a male (FIG. 4) and a female one (FIG. 5), almost life-size, of which only the steatite plaques composing the two hairdresses are almost completely preserved: the faces of these heads were

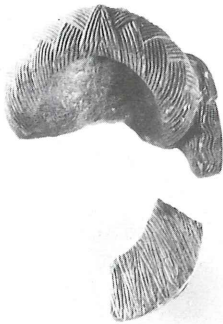
5. Aleppo, Archaeological Museum: hairdress of female head, steatite, from the Royal Palace G, L. 2913 (c. 2400–2300 BC).



quite probably carved in wood covered with gold, employing a technique that should date back, though with differences in the details, to the tradition of the Proto-historical period of the late Uruk phase.

One of the most typical kinds of works kept in the Administrative Quarter of Palace G were certainly the composite panels (FIG. 6) in high relief showing figures of kings in full-face. In these reliefs, the bare parts of the bodies were in wood covered with gold, as is proved by the discovery of gold

6. Aleppo, Archaeological Museum: composite panel representing a probably royal figure wearing the turban, limestone, from the Royal Palace G, L. 2913 (c. 2400–2300 BC).



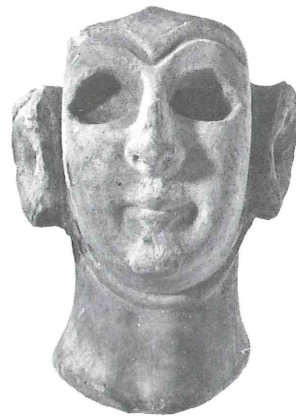
leaf in the shape of a foot or of a leg, while skirts, belts, turbans and beards were in limestone, and the hairdresses in steatite or lapis lazuli. These composite reliefs seem to be valuable palatial artifacts, with more celebratory than dedicatory aims, similar to works used in Mesopotamia during the Early Dynastic II and III Periods, and known by the name of 'Weihplatten'. The frequency with which the technique of wooden sculpture covered with gold leaf occurs in mature Early Syrian Ebla, is proved by figurines like that of the completely reconstructed human-headed bull (FIG. 7), with the fleece represented by two plaques of steatite, or by figurative knobs like that in the shape of a miniature lion head, always from the Administrative Quarter. Though the high quality and the valuable materials employed make comparison difficult for this kind of artifacts, it is certain that the tradition of sophisticated artistic craftsmanship (FIG. 8) of *Mardikh II B1* is parallel with that documented by some works of the royal tombs of Ur, where the conventions in the use of the materials are the same.

The open-work carvings in wood, rich in figurative themes and showing an extraordinary fineness in execution, were, on

7. Aleppo, Archaeological Museum: human headed bull, wood, gold and steatite, from the Royal Palace G, L. 2764 (c. 2400–2300 BC).



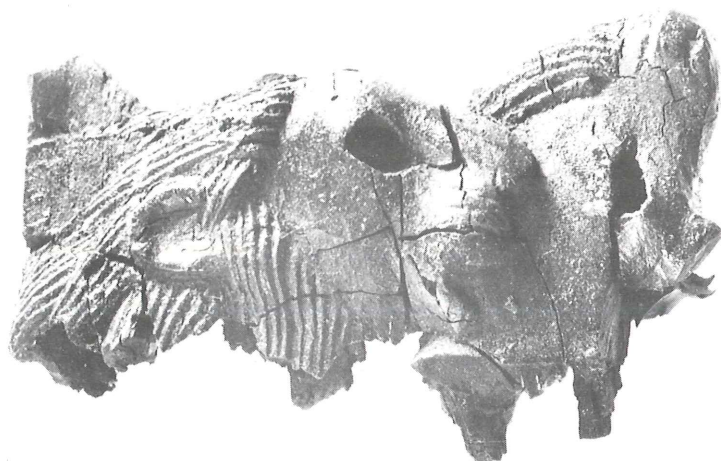
8. Aleppo, Archaeological Museum: miniature male head, limestone, from the Royal Palace G, L. 2913 (c. 2400–2300 BC).



9. Aleppo, Archaeological Museum: lion attacking a bull, wooden carving, from the Royal Palace G, L. 2601 (c. 2400–2250 BC).



10. Aleppo, Archaeological Museum: lion biting a goat, wooden carving, from the Royal Palace G, L. 2601 (c. 2400–2250 BC).



the contrary, a peculiarity typical of Ebla in the production of furniture of a very high value. The friezes on these pieces of furniture alternated scenes of a local conception, such as the lion attacking the bull (FIG. 9), with traditional motives. The latter are derived from the iconographic repertory of the glyptics of the late Early Dynastic culture of Mesopotamia, such as the standing lion that tears to pieces the goat standing with backturned head (FIG. 10). But several, sometimes quite fragmentary, remains of figures, like the naked hero piercing the belly of the lion with his sword, the royal full-face figure wearing the Eblaite turban (FIG. 11), flounced woollen cloak and holding an axe, or the warriors piercing each other with their swords, are works of a school of Eblaite artists, that cannot be considered a provincial one. Both some antiquarian elements, like the helmets and skirts of the warriors, and the stylistic characteristics which follow a strict naturalism, as in an admirable female figure (FIG. 12), show that this art of Mardikh 11B1 is very near the experiences of the dynasty of Akkad.

11. Damascus, National Museum: figure of a king wearing the cloak and the turban, and holding an axe, wooden inlay, from the Royal Palace G, L. 2601 (c. 2250 BC).



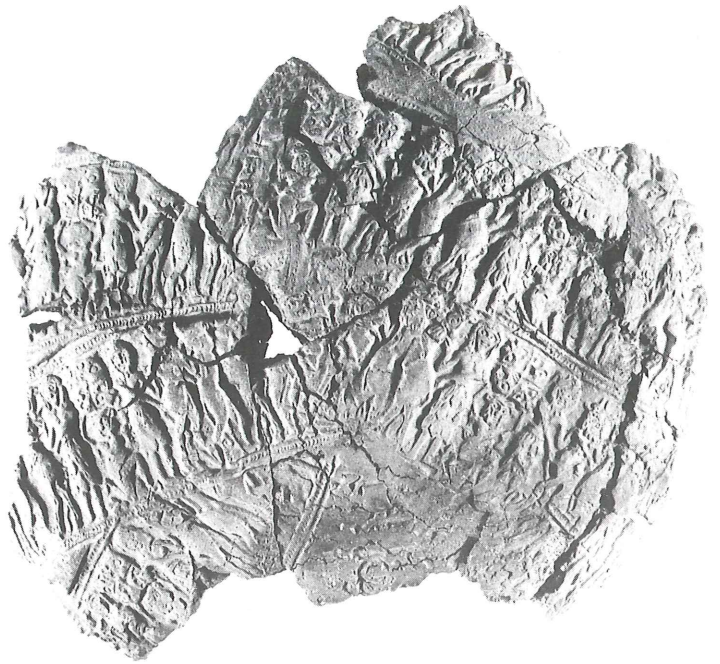
The glyptic of the high officials of Ebla of the State Archives is found in several impressions on clay bullae, which allow us to reconstruct about fifteen cylinder seals of high quality. The cylinders of Mardikh 11B1 constantly depict friezes of figures with animals, lions and bulls, standing according to the models of the classical Mesopotamian glyptic of the Early Dynastic III Period. In the light of more general considerations we must also point out that the composition of the scenes depicted in the glyptic of Royal Palace G never shows the uninterrupted chain of oblique figures found in the seals of Early Dynastic IIIa, but groups of two, three or up to five rigidly vertical figures typical of the earliest tradition of Early Dynastic 11b in the so-called Lugalanda style. But figures from the iconographic repertory and of the stylistic structure of the mature Early Syrian Ebla are the result of a typically Eblaite development, and probably in a more general way, of

12. Aleppo, Archaeological Museum: female figurine, wooden carving, from the Royal Palace G, L. 2601 (c. 2400–2250 BC).



the urban culture of northern Syria of Early Bronze III–IV; for example, the full-face goddess, dominating the wild animals; the cow-goddess that seems to be the parallel deity of the bull-man; the kneeling Atlas supporting a quadripartite symbol of the cosmos; the mythical being with a lion's head fighting the animals; the bearded male figure, probably royal, wearing the Eblaite turban; the female figure with long hair that, symmetrical to the preceding one, could also be a royal image. The stylistical structure of the seals corresponds to a strict naturalism that is certainly a different artistic achievement from the synthetic naturalism that gradually prevails in the art of Akkad from the end of Sargon's reign. In the glyptic, the palace culture of Ebla acted in a figurative patrimony following the Early Dynastic tradition, introducing a series of figures that reflect typically Syrian ideologies (FIG. 13). The goddess dominating the wild animals belongs to the religious

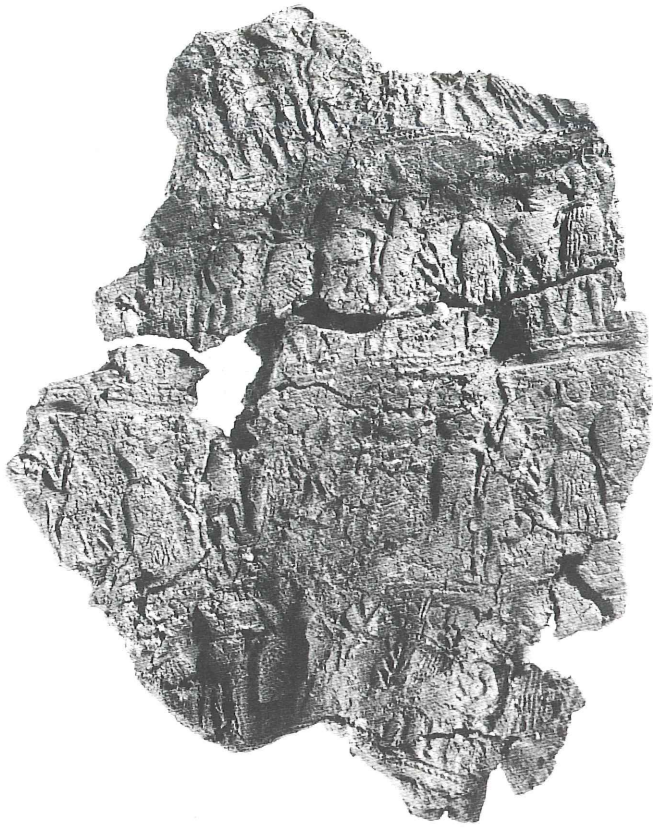
13. Aleppo, Archaeological Museum: bulla with cylinder seal impressions, from the Royal Palace G, L. 2716 (c. 2300/2250 BC).



type of deity of the pre-Sargonid glyptic friezes, but it is unknown in the Early Dynastic Mesopotamian world and it must have later produced a divine type in the Syrian area of the Middle and Late Bronze Age. The quadripartite symbol of the cosmos supported by the kneeling Atlas could not be foreign to the quadripartite conception of the universe that is first documented in the title 'king of the four regions', meaningfully taken for the first time by Naram-Sin of Akkad, who boasts of the conquest of Ebla. The presence of the male and female presumed royal figures (FIG. 14) in the friezes illustrating some aspects of the balance of nature, is certainly related to the important role of the royal ancestors in the cult of Syria of the Middle and Late Bronze Age.

The ceramic horizon of *Mardikh II B1* (FIGS 15–17) is defined by its close relation with the ceramic culture of Hama J8–6 and by the notable, albeit not completely corresponding elements of the culture of Amuq I. The most distinctive ceramic type of the culture of *Mardikh II B1*, as at Hama J8–6 and Amuq I, is the goblet with corrugated surface (FIG. 15: 1–3); the bowl type with swollen rim, that rarely has a corrugated wall, is also quite characteristic; the bowls with rims moulded on the outside originate from this phase (FIG. 15: 4–6). In these small vases with thin walls, there are two major types of ware: the first one has quite porous and mealy grain, very light green or white in colour, with a low firing; the second one has compact grain and a metallic sound, light grey, light brown or pink in colour, with a quite high firing. To the latter kind of pottery belong the rare small jars with red decoration painted in thin horizontal bands (FIG. 15: 7–9), that are quite distinctive forerunners of the classical

14. Aleppo, Archaeological Museum: bulla with cylinder seal impressions, from the Royal Palace G, L. 2716 (c. 2300/2250 BC).



'Painted Simple Ware' of the following phase of Mardikh II B2. Another rare, though quite distinctive specimen of painted ware is the hand-made juglet with oval base and monochrome painting with vertical plaits on the body (FIG. 15: 10–11). Among the large vessels, several kinds of jars are known; these probably had different functions, though it is now quite difficult to single out their use, except in a hypothetical way (FIG. 16: 1–6, 8–9). The most common kind is a water jar, of quite porous ware, grey or light green in colour, often with a white wash and large base: the rim of this jar is turned out with the outer face vertical and moulded (FIGS 16: 7; 19: 1–2). Another hand-made jar of medium to large size for liquids, has a typical egg-like shape, large base, and a flaring, rounded rim with a sharp edge in the lower part (FIG. 17: 3–4). Other jars, probably provision-jars for cereals, have a rounded shape with a short pointed vertical rim. As regards the wares of the final phases of the third millennium BC of upper Syria, some presences and some absences are quite meaningful: the 'Red-Black Burnished Ware', the so-called Khirbet Kêrak ware, appearing frequently in Amuq I, is completely absent from Mardikh II B1; the 'Reserved-Slip Ware' appears, although in a small amount, with a smaller percentage in Mardikh II B1 than in Amuq I; the 'Smear-Wash Ware' is completely absent from Mardikh II B1, while it is well documented in the late phase of Mardikh II B2, as is

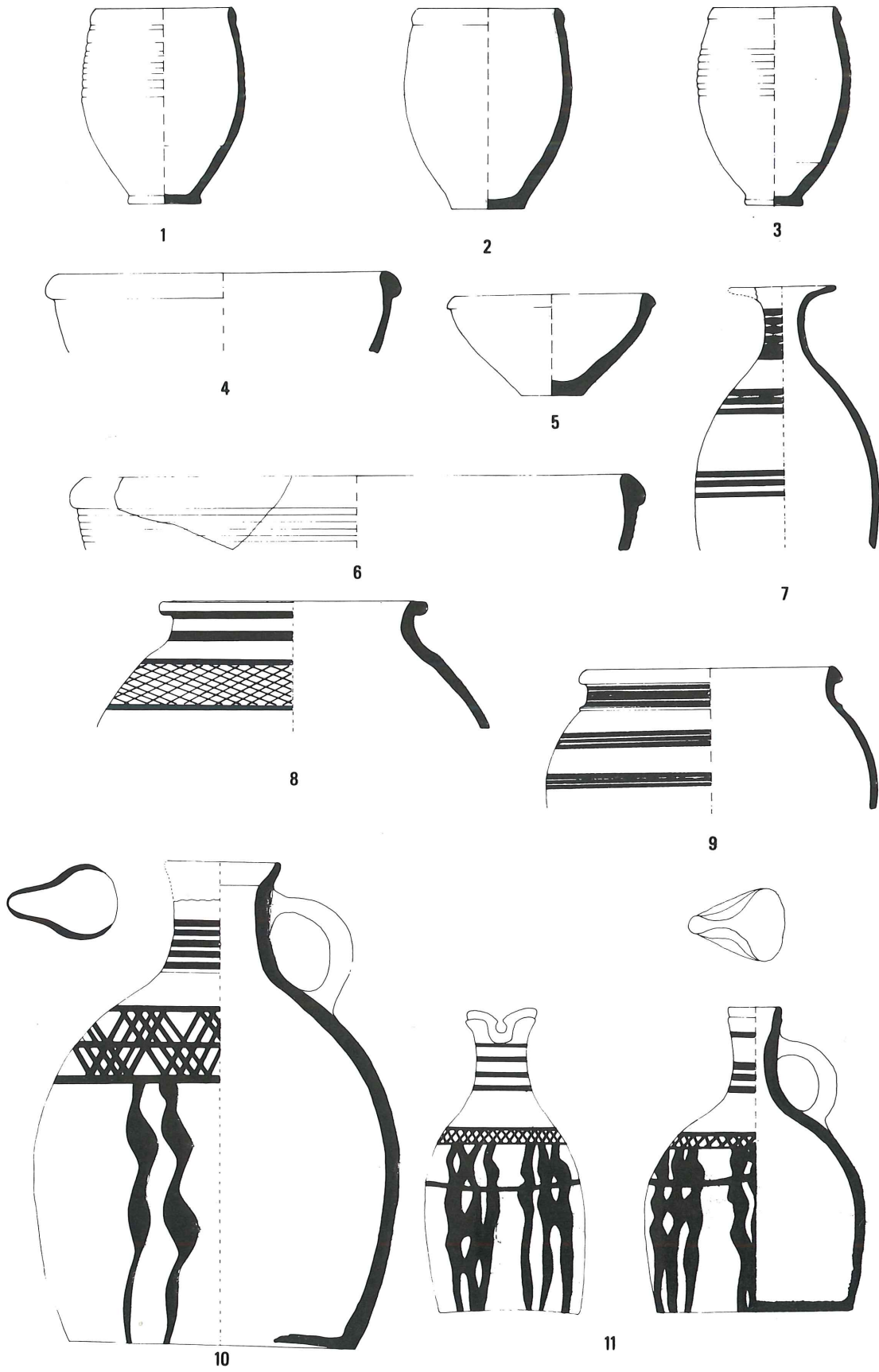
also the case in Amuq I in comparison with Amuq J; the 'Painted Simple Ware', absent from Amuq I and widely present in Amuq J, is almost completely absent from Mardikh II B1 as regards the goblets, while it is quite frequent and typical of Mardikh II B2.

The evaluation of the pottery of Mardikh II B1 allows us to consider the problem of the diffusion of the culture we call 'mature Early Syrian', which probably had its political and cultural centre at Ebla. It is certain that this unitarian and homogeneous culture was attested to in the region of Homs towards the South, up to the region of Karkemish and perhaps to the feet of the Taurus mountains in the North, from the chain of the Jebel Zawiyah in the West, towards the Euphrates valley in the East. The rich plains of the Orontes in the West, the Ghab and the Rujj and in the North-West the plains of the Afrin and the lower course of the Orontes, the Amuq region, were quite probably peripheral within the same culture with distinctive characteristics, namely, at least in the North, the strong presence of the 'Red-Black Burnished Ware', almost completely absent from inland Syria. A similar problem occurs in the Euphrates valley: along the middle course of the Euphrates, from Karkemish to Mari, only local variants of this culture that probably had its major centres mostly in the inner region between Aleppo and Homs are attested to. Above all, the ceramic materials from the necropolis of Tell Halawah and from the settlements of Tell Selenkahiyyah in the region of Lake Assad Along the Euphrates, show notable parallels with Mardikh II B1.

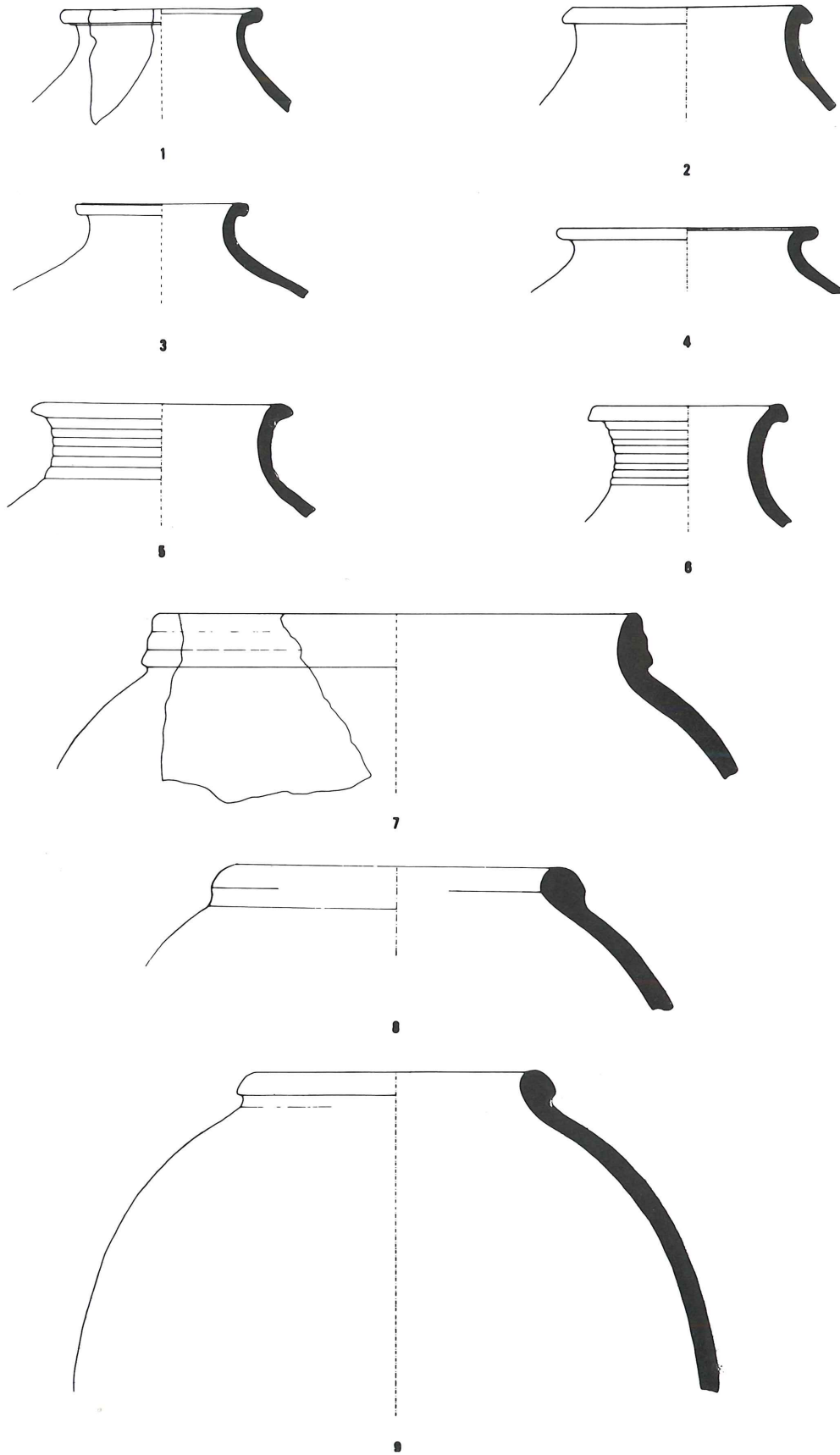
After pointing out the regional differences particularly with the Amuq phases, as the comparison with Hama is actually quite close, we may say that Mardikh II B1, the culture of the Royal Palace G and the State Archives, corresponds to Hama J8–6, i.e. to the ancient levels of Hama J, and to Amuq I. The phase of Mardikh II B2 that followed the destruction of the Royal Palace G and the end of the political pre-eminence of Ebla, corresponds, on the other hand, to Hama J5–2, i.e. to the late levels of Hama J, and to Amuq J. From the beginning we must point out clearly that, exactly like the whole phase of Hama J and between Amuq I and Amuq J, there is a fully continuous development between Mardikh II B1 and II B2. They show, therefore, the continuous development of the north Syrian culture, defined several years ago as the 'caliciform culture', which at Ebla, and most probably in other important centres of the northern regions, but perhaps not significantly at Hama, was fiercely destroyed at the end of Mardikh II B1. Ebla was destroyed and its political hegemony probably came to an end, but in the same centre cultural development continued: the destruction put an end to the political pre-eminence of Ebla, but not to the Early Syrian culture that goes on into the phase we call late Early Syrian culture.

The historical role of the culture of Ebla in the time of the Royal Palace G and of the State Archives of Mardikh II B1 for the history of the culture of the Mesopotamian area, on the

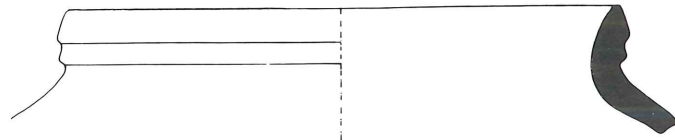
15. Royal Palace G: pottery from the destruction of the building (c. 2300/2250 BC).



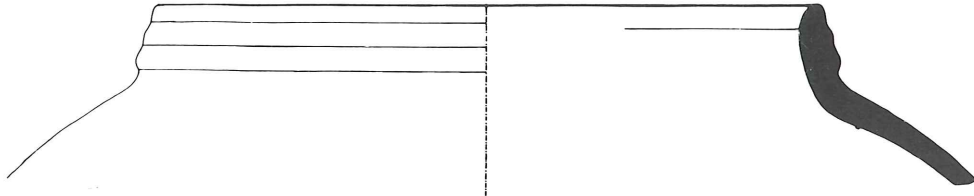
16. Royal Palace G, pottery from the destruction of the building (c. 2300/2250 BC).



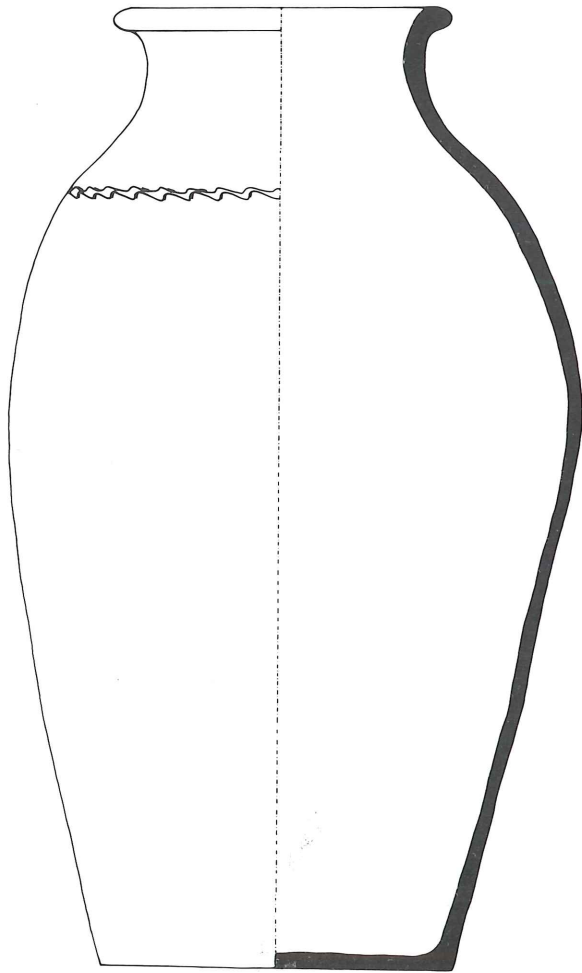
17. Royal Palace G, pottery from the destruction of the building
(c. 2300/2250 BC).



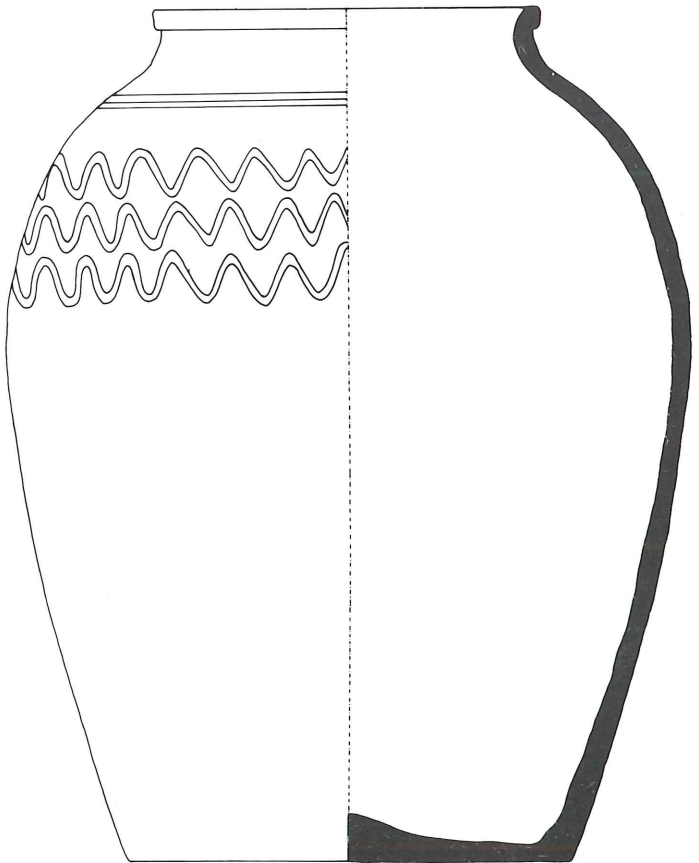
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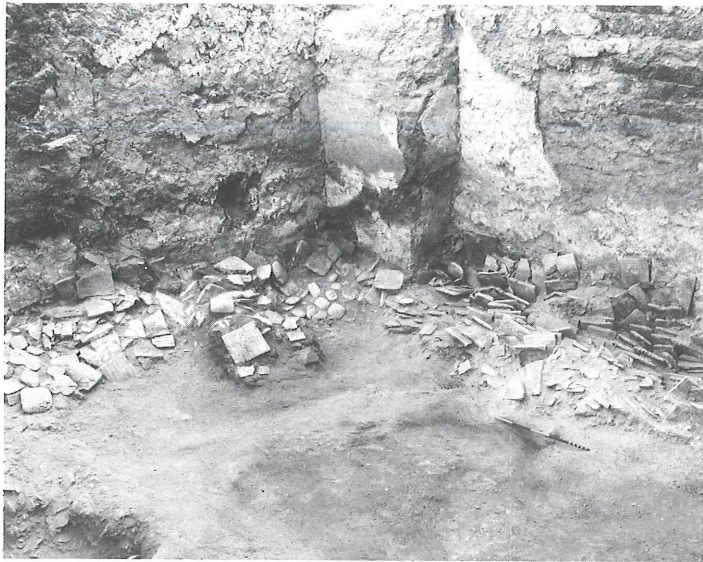


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18. Royal Palace G: the tablets in situ against the North and East walls of the archive room L. 2769 from the South-West (c. 2400–2250 BC).



19. Royal Palace G: the archive room L. 2769 from the South (c. 2400–2250 BC).

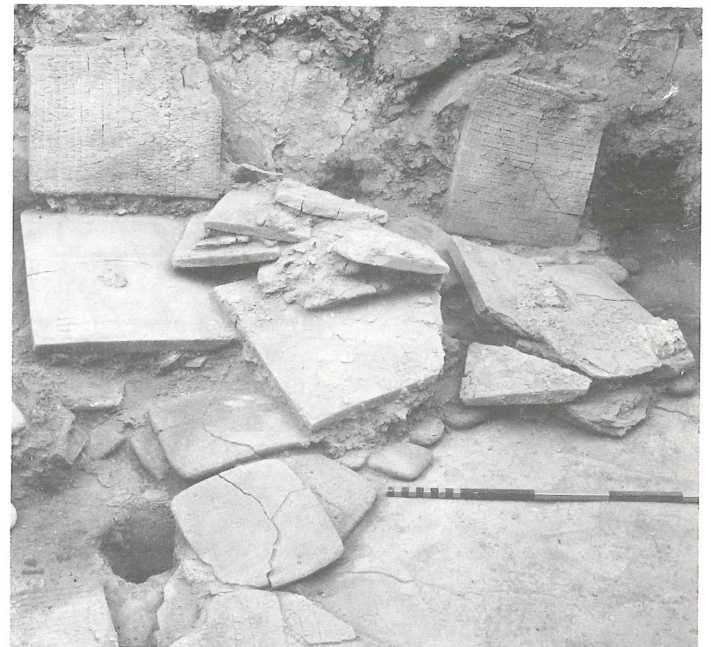


one hand, and of the Palestinian area, on the other, largely depends on the chronology that can be attributed to the phase of Mardikh II B1. Immediately after the discovery of the first rooms of Palace G and of the first tablets (FIGS 18–21) in 1974, the chronology I proposed for Mardikh II B1 was 2400/2350 BC for the beginning of the phase and 2250 BC for its end: these absolute dates were conventionally proposed using the middle chronology which dates the advent of Hammurabi of Babylon to 1792 BC and the advent of Sargon of Akkad around 2335 BC. This chronological hypothesis attributed the

20. Royal Palace G: the lexical tablets in situ against the North wall of the archive room L. 2769 from the South (c. 2400–2250 BC).



21. Royal Palace G: the large tablets of the administrative records of textiles on the floor of L. 2769, against the North wall, from the South (c. 2400–2250 BC).



destruction of the Royal Palace G of Ebla to Naram-Sin of Akkad, during the first years of his reign, and was based on the following considerations. In the first place, the archaeological correspondence between Mardikh II B1 and Amuq I, with the exception of the presence of the 'Red-Black Burnished Ware', which may probably be explained in the light of geographical diffusion; this agrees with M. J. Mellink's idea,

of Amuq I being contemporary with the dynasty of Akkad. In the second place, the characteristics of the mature Early Syrian culture of *Mardikh 11B1*, that, compared with the Mesopotamian Early Dynastic world, appeared contemporary with the later phases of Early Dynastic Mesopotamia and with the first years of the dynasty of Akkad. In the third place, the consideration that the paleography of the first texts discovered in 1974 in Palace G was considered contemporary with the first years of the dynasty of Akkad and, in any case, older than the period of Naram-Sin of Akkad. In the fourth place, the data given in inscriptions of Naram-Sin, in which he defines himself as the conqueror of the cities of Armanum and Ebla, and points out that no one except himself succeeded in conquering those cities since the creation of mankind. The attribution of the destruction of the Royal Palace G of *Mardikh 11B1* around 2250 BC to the first years of the reign of Naram-Sin of Akkad seemed to be finally confirmed by the presumed mention of the city of Akkad and of a personal name interpreted as a peculiar writing of Sargon's name in the texts of the Archives discovered in 1975: it is now certain that neither Akkad nor Sargon are mentioned in the Archive texts.

In October 1976 G. Pettinato proposed a dating of the Archives around 2500 BC, that, in his opinion, must probably be interpreted as the date of the destruction of the period of *Mardikh 11B1*, the duration of which should be considered as not exceeding seventy years. The bases of this chronological attribution are as follows: in the first place, the texts of the Archives should be attributed not only to Fara tradition, but to the same period as Fara texts, that is, between the end of Early Dynastic II and the beginning of Early Dynastic III of Mesopotamia; in the second place, this hypothesis would be confirmed by the presumed complete correspondence in the paleography between the texts of Ebla and the texts of Abu Salabikh in southern Mesopotamia, which are dated to Early Dynastic IIIa in Mesopotamian chronology; in the third place, the frequent and positive mention in the texts of Ebla of the city of Kish, together with the presence of the personal name Mesalima, without title and not connected in any way with Kish, which was thought to be proof of the presence of the king of Kish who gave his name to the so-called 'Mesilim Period'; in the fourth place, the absence in the texts of Ebla of mention of the city of Akkad and the single mention of the name of the city of Khamazi, the seat, according to the Sumerian King-List of a dynasty that should have followed the second dynasty of Kish, would lead us to think that the Ebla Archives are contemporary with the passage of political pre-eminence from the second dynasty of Kish to that of Khamazi noted in the King-List.

Against these preliminary considerations about some data of the texts of Ebla, an objective evaluation of the main aspects of the archaeological evidence may be summed up as follows. The antiquarian elements of the wooden carvings—the helmets of the warriors, the fringed shawls of the women's costume—point to a period that should correspond to the first or the second generations of the dynasty of Akkad. The style

of these carvings, defined as a severe naturalism, of the composite reliefs with figures of dignitaries and royal frontal figures, and of the heads, of which only the wonderful hairdresses in steatite were left, is an artistic expression that has definite parallels with the latest phases of the analytical naturalism of Early Dynastic IIIb and with the beginning of the synthetic naturalism of the dynasty of Akkad. The cylinder seals of *Mardikh 11B1* have compositional elements that may be considered on the same level of development as the cylinders of the Lugalanda style of the end of Early Dynastic IIIb. The pottery of *Mardikh 11B1* must be considered parallel with Amuq I and, if chronological and not geographical considerations are to explain the absence at Ebla of the 'Red-Black Burnished Ware', we must conclude that *Mardikh 11B1* dates back to the end of Amuq I, usually connected with the end of Early Dynastic III and with the dynasty of Akkad. The comparison with Tell Selenkahiyah III, from where a cylinder in the Akkadian style comes, points to the same period.

The only evidence found in the texts of the Archives of Ebla, that may be useful in solving the chronological problem, is the mention of king Iblul-II of Mari, the enemy defeated by Enna-Dagan, general of the king of Ebla Ar-Ennum, in a letter reporting the conquest of Mari. This evidence allows us to fix a synchronism between Ar-Ennum, probably the third among the five kings of Ebla, and Iblul-II, king of Mari known from some votive inscriptions of his officials, discovered in the excavation of the temples of Ishtar and Ninni-zaza at Mari. However, the chronological position of Iblul-II is not certain: this king, attributed by A. Moortgat to the beginning of Early Dynastic IIIa, was dated by P. Amiet and M. Lambert to the period immediately before Sargon of Akkad. We must add that Ebla is apparently never mentioned in the pre-Sargonid texts of Mesopotamia, while Sargon of Akkad notes in an inscription of his that he had received Mari, Tuttul, Yarmuti and Ebla from the god of the West Dagan, and that a little later, Naram-Sin of Akkad boasts of the conquest of Armanum and Ebla. After this quotation, Ebla appears in the peculiar sentence on Statue B of Gudea of Lagash, where it is inscribed that he had obtained precious wood 'from the mountain of Ebla, from the city of Urshu'. This leads us to believe that in the time of Gudea, the land of Ebla was dominated by Urshu.

Although the problem of the absolute chronology of *Mardikh 11B1* is a complex problem and quite difficult to evaluate, some basic points which cannot be avoided must be kept in mind for its solution. In the first place, as regards paleography, while waiting for an exhaustive analytical examination, we must not forget, as I. J. Gelb has also rightly said, that the writing system of Ebla descends from the tradition of Kish, and not from that of Nippur. Moreover, it is quite probable that, because of its peripheral position, the chancellery of Ebla kept for a longer period archaic forms that are, therefore, not necessarily the proofs of a high absolute chronology. In the second place, as regards the historical data,

it is most unlikely that the news given by the inscriptions of Sargon and Naram-Sin are lacking any foundation, as would be the case if the destruction of Palace G were to be dated to Early Dynastic IIIA. This is because then there would be no trace of the city subdued by Sargon and conquered by Naram-Sin in the stratigraphy of the western slopes of the Acropolis of Tell Mardikh, covering a wide area. Over the Royal Palace G of Mardikh II B1 there are only waste deposits of Mardikh IIIA, namely of the Isin and Larsa period. In the third place, the 'argumentum ex silentio' of the absence of the mention of Akkad in the texts of Ebla must be very carefully evaluated, as the geographic horizon of the Archives is more limited than was supposed in a first phase of the reading of the texts. Besides, if Mari is quite frequently mentioned, the most southern Mesopotamian city of Kish is rarely mentioned, and it is certain to-day that the administrative texts only mention cities directly dependent or under the indirect hegemony of Ebla. They do not, for example, mention Byblos, which was certainly an important centre in the age of the Archives of Ebla. In the fourth place, in a general evaluation of the archaeological and epigraphic cultural evidence from the Royal Palace G, only some and perhaps rare innovative elements may be found for the distant and peripheral position of Ebla in comparison with Sumer and Akkad, and therefore they come late in a cultural horizon, most likely archaic when compared with the culture of contemporary Mesopotamia: from a methodological point of view, these are the only elements, that may be used to contribute in defining the absolute chronology, not the archaic and conservative elements of the cultural tradition of Ebla.

Therefore taking into consideration all the evidence, most of which has been assessed before a detailed palaeographic analysis allows well-based judgements, the following chronological interpretation of the Royal Palace G may be given to-day. The period of Mardikh II B1, which does not perhaps exceed one century, according to the conventional middle chronology, should be dated as ending more probably around 2250 BC during the first years of Naram-Sin, or, less probably, around 2300 BC in the central period of the reign of Sargon of Akkad. In fact, the generic sentence employed by Sargon leads us to think that he obtained only a tribute from Ebla, while Naram-Sin's explicit reference obliges us to think that the latter positively conquered and destroyed the city. If Naram-Sin destroyed Mardikh II B1 at the beginning of his reign, when Ibbi-Sipish, the last king of Ebla, was already old, Iblul-II of Mari, contemporary with Ar-Ennum of Ebla, would have lived during the generation before Sargon; if Sargon destroyed Mardikh II B1, Iblul-II would have lived between two and three generations before him. Both hypotheses are possible, though the second one is more probable. The name Mesalima does not hint at any relation between the texts of Ebla and the king of Kish; the absence of Akkad in the texts, that are administrative texts and do not concern matters of foreign cities except in a very few cases, does not at all prove that in the time of Mardikh II B1 Akkad had not been

founded; even the rare mention of Kish is only evidence of the cultural and perhaps political importance of that city in the age of Ebla, importance that was still great in the time of the dynasty of Akkad. Moreover, it is sure that Sargon does not seem to have firmly dominated upper Mesopotamia either, while Naram-Sin left notable traces of his presence from Assur to Nineveh, Tell Brak and Pir Hussein.

But if these considerations demonstrate that there are no serious difficulties against a date during the reign of Naram-Sin or Sargon for the end of Mardikh II B1, a decisive element is the finding in 1977 of the lid of an Egyptian alabaster vase with the cartouche of pharaoh Pepi I (FIG. 22), who reigned forty-nine years. The inscription must date to the first twenty-five years of the reign of this pharaoh, who probably started to reign, according to the current middle chronologies, around 2330 or 2310 BC. Thus a date around 2300 is the *terminus post quem* for the destruction of the Royal Palace G. If in consequence we use a corresponding Mesopotamian chronological system, this indication leads us to consider possibly both the destruction by Sargon and by Naram-Sin. It definitely excludes, on the contrary, a dating before the reign of Sargon. Between the two possibilities there is a difference of forty or fifty years. Neither solution overcomes all the difficulties, but a date early in Naram-Sin's reign seems more probable.

The destruction of Ebla around 2300 or 2250 BC does not break the development of the mature Early Syrian culture of

22. Aleppo, Archaeological Museum: Egyptian lid bearing the hieroglyphic inscription with the name of Pepi I, alabaster, from the Royal Palace G, L. 2913 (c. 2400–2250 BC).



Mardikh II B1. In fact, it continues with the late Early Syrian culture of Mardikh II B2, that we conventionally put around 2000 BC. We believe with R. J. Braidwood that this end is somehow related with the end of the culture of the Third Dynasty of Ur in Mesopotamia. There is, in fact, a very clear break between the culture we call late Early Syrian and the culture we call archaic Old Syrian, or if we prefer between Early Bronze IV B and Middle Bronze I. Ebla took a pre-eminent role in upper Syria again in Middle Bronze I, that according to our chronological hypothesis corresponds to the period of Isin and Larsa. After it, in 1800 BC, followed a phase of decadence that must be connected with the rise of Yamkhad in the role of great power of the Syrian area in the age of Hammurabi of Babylon. To this period belong the hypogea of the 'Tomb of the Princess', of the 'Tomb of the Lord of the Goats', and of the 'Tomb of the Cisterns' discovered in 1978 and 1979 below the floors of the Administrative Palace Q. In September 1979 legal documents of Mardikh II B were found in this building. They are certainly contemporary with Alalakh VII, as J.-R. Kupper, to whom the study of these texts is entrusted, kindly communicated to me. The important funerary furniture of the three tombs, unfortunately partly violated, that probably belongs to the period between 1825 and 1650 BC, is very important, in particular for the presence of the jewels left by the plunderers. The richest tomb, that of the 'Lord of the Goats', is dated by the discovery of an Egyptian ceremonial mace with the golden hieroglyphic inscription of Hetepibrē Harnejheryotef, ninth pharaoh of the XIII Dynasty, who reigned around 1770 BC.

The problem of the influence of the mature Early Syrian culture of Mardikh II B1 on the culture of the so-called Intermediate Early Bronze–Middle Bronze Age of Jordan, that has been recently discussed chiefly by P. Lapp, K. Prag and W. G. Dever, cannot be dealt with by me in a satisfactory way because I do not have any direct experience of the materials, and, most of all, of the pottery of the Jordanian area. But it seems to me necessary to say, as a general point, that in a possible evaluation it is quite important to take into consideration, both the complete cultural picture of northern Syria and of northern and southern Transjordan, and the geographical definition of the limits of each culture. In this sense the archaeological exploration of Mardikh II B1 gives some preliminary conclusions. These must be the fundamentals of a comparative evaluation that will be established in future years. In the first place, the mature Early Syrian culture of Mardikh II B1 appears to be the local development of an archaic urban culture generated by the influence of the Proto-historical and Early Dynastic cultures of southern Mesopotamia. For this reason it seems opportune to give the name Early Bronze IV A to this phase. The wars in northern Syria of the great kings of Akkad were responsible for the end of this phase. In the second place, the mature Early Syrian culture of Mardikh II B1 is a high urban culture spreading to the South at least up to Homs with quite uniform ceramic characteristics. In the third place, the succeeding late Early Syrian culture is an urban culture that in every sense

continues the preceding tradition though there is, on the one hand, a crisis in some settlements, and, on the other hand, a spreading of urban settlements in northern Syria. For this reason, it seems opportune to give the name Early Bronze IV B to this phase, that should end around 2000 BC.

In conclusion, in very general terms, we want to draw attention to two points. On the one hand, it seems difficult to maintain, as has been done, that the relations of Transjordan during the so-called Intermediate Early Bronze–Middle Bronze Period were concerned more with the centres of Middle Euphrates than with the urban culture of northern Syria. On the other hand, we must take note that the proved continuity of the high urban culture of Early Bronze IV A–B of northern Syria also corresponds in chronology with the period that W. G. Dever lately significantly proposed to define Early Bronze IV A–C of Jordan.

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