



Syria
Archéologie, art et histoire

86 | 2009

Dossier : Interaction entre Assyriens et Araméens

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Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/syria/518>

DOI: 10.4000/syria.518

ISSN: 2076-8435

Publisher

IFPO - Institut français du Proche-Orient

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 November 2009

Number of pages: 119-132

ISBN: 9782351591512

ISSN: 0039-7946

Electronic reference

Daniele Morandi Bonacossi, « Continuity and Change in the Town Planning and Material Culture of Iron Age II and III Mishrifeh, Central Syria », *Syria* [Online], 86 | 2009, Online since 01 July 2016, connection on 23 May 2020. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/syria/518> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/syria.518>

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN THE TOWN PLANNING AND MATERIAL CULTURE OF IRON AGE II AND III MISHRIFEH, CENTRAL SYRIA*

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Résumé – Cet article présente les découvertes archéologiques, relatives à l'âge du Fer II-III sur le site de Mishrifeh, faites par la partie italienne de la mission syro-italienne. Les données obtenues au cours de neuf campagnes de fouille seront exposées conjointement aux résultats déjà publiés afin de présenter les différents aspects (urbanisme, architecture résidentielle, activités artisanales et industrielles, pratiques funéraires, organisation administrative, culture matérielle et fonction du site) de Mishrifeh entre le IX^e et le milieu du VI^e siècle av. J.-C. On abordera ensuite la question des ruptures et des continuités sur cet important site de Syrie centrale au temps des principautés louvito-araméennes et de la domination assyrienne.

Abstract – The paper presents the archaeological evidence concerning the Iron Age II and III from the excavations conducted at Mishrifeh by the Italian component of the joint Syrian-Italian mission. The archaeological data excavated in nine years of archaeological exploration will be surveyed and integrated with data already published from the site so as to permit a brief discussion of the different types of evidence (town planning, residential architecture, craft and productive activities, funerary practices, administration patterns, material culture, site function) obtained from Mishrifeh from the 9th to the mid 6th century BC and an exploration of the “continuity and change” issue in this important site of Central Syria at the time of the Luwian-Aramaean principalities and the Assyrian domination.

خلاصة – تعرض هذه المقالة الإكتشافات الأثرية المتعلقة بالعصر الحديدي الثاني والثالث التي قام بها القسم الإيطالي للبعثة السورية الإيطالية لموقع المشرفة. سوف تُشرح معطيات تسع حملات تنقيبية ومسح أثري مع النتائج التي كانت قد نُشرت سابقاً، وذلك بغية إظهار الجوانب المختلفة للمشرفة، ما بين القرن التاسع ومنتصف السادس ق.م.: (تنظيم المدن، هندسة سكنية، نشاطات حرفية وصناعية، العادات الجنائزية، تنظيم إداري، ثقافة مادية ودور الموقع آنذاك). من ثمَّ تُعرض مسألة الهجرات أو الإستقرار السكني في هذا الموقع المهم من سورية الوسطى إبَّان الإمارات Louvito-Araméennes والهيمنة الأشورية.

At the beginning of the Iron Age the Middle Orontes valley was part of the highly fragmented and “Balkanized” political landscape fostered by the vacuum created by the collapse of the Hittite empire, which was filled by the emergence of the Neo-Hittite “rump” states¹. As has convincingly been demonstrated by Harrison and Hawkins in recent times, in this period the Middle Orontes valley was probably part of the Neo-Hittite kingdom of Padasatini or Wadasatini, with its capital at Tell Ta’ynat

* Our work at Mishrifeh would not have been possible without the precious support of the Director General of Antiquities and Museums, Dr. Bassam Jamous, and especially of the Director of Excavations and Archaeological Studies and co-director of the project, Dr. Michel Al-Maqqdissi, to whom we are greatly indebted. Furthermore I would like to thank Christine Kepinski and Aline Tenu for inviting me to take part in the workshop “Assyrian and Aramaean Interaction” held at the 6th ICAANE in Rome.

1. HARRISON 2007.

in the ‘Amuq Plain². Royal Luwian inscriptions from Hama, Restan, Qal‘at el-Mudiq, Sheyzar and Meharde, recently presented by Hawkins in his *Corpus of Hieroglyphic Luwian Inscriptions*, are hitherto the only material evidence of the Neo-Hittite presence in the region. This Luwian kingdom must have had a multiethnic composition, including a significant Aramaean linguistic component, which, during the Iron Age II, around 800 BC, emerged when a certain Zakkur of Lu‘ash and Hamath put an end to the local Neo-Hittite dynasty, thus becoming the first Aramaean ruler in Hama³. The Hamath kingdom soon had to defend itself against Assyrian westward expansion, which had already manifested itself during the reign of Shalmaneser III, who, in the battle of Qarqar in 853, confronted a Syrian coalition led by Damascus. In 720 BC, again in Qarqar, Sargon II defeated a coalition led this time by Yau-bi‘di of Hamath⁴. Yau-bi‘di was deported to Assyria, Hamath was destroyed, its inhabitants enlisted in the Assyrian army and their land assigned to 6,300 deportees. A heavy tribute and fatigue duty were imposed on the new Assyrian province of Šubutu, which included the Middle Orontes valley. The province, corresponding to the Homs and Biqaa regions⁵, became in this period one of the richest areas of the Assyrian empire⁶. As a passageway for men and goods from the southern Levant to northern Syria, Central Syria was certainly of great strategic importance for the economy of the empire, so that its internal security was a primary requirement, as is indicated by a group of letters dealing with this region written during Sargon’s reign⁷.

This is the broader geo-political background against which we have to view the archaeological evidence from Mishrifeh, whose name in the first millennium BC is as yet unknown. After a period of about three centuries, corresponding to the Iron Age I, during which Mishrifeh was probably deserted⁸, in the Late Iron Age I and especially the Iron Age II, the site witnessed a dramatic change in its urban and functional layout within a totally new political and socio-economic context.

Archaeological evidence relating to the terminal phase of the Iron Age I (Iron Age IC) is rather scarce and has been found only in two excavation areas, located in the central part of Mishrifeh’s upper town and in the northern lower town. The data concerning the late tenth/early ninth century settlement allow us to estimate that the Iron Age IC “Aramaean” settlement most probably occupied a fairly small area. The occupation hitherto investigated does not attest to the existence of specialisation or public architecture, but consists rather of quite sizeable buildings which covered a small rise in the northern lower town (Operation K; **fig. 1**).⁹ These buildings seem to have combined residential and production functions under one roof, as is shown by the so-called “Jeweller’s House”. The presence inside it of installations and finds that point to activities related to domestic food preparation and storage and also to metal craftwork indicate that within this residential building, household activities and the production of precious objects and tools were jointly carried out.

In Operation H, in what had been the eastern portion of the Royal Palace, sporadic traces were uncovered of an activity which is difficult to interpret, consisting of pits cut into the razed second millennium palace walls, without buildings of any kind.

The Iron Age II witnesses a vigorous return to urban life on the site. Occupation dating especially to the 8th century BC has been uncovered in almost all excavation areas explored so far, thus indicating that the Aramaean settlement encompassed the entire site, with an estimated surface roughly corresponding to that of the 2nd millennium city.

2. HARRISON 2007; HAWKINS 2000.

3. COOPER & FORTIN 2004; DION 1997 and 2006; FORTIN 2007; GRAYSON 2001; LIPÍŃSKI 2000a; SADER 1987.

4. COOPER & FORTIN 2004; FORTIN 2007; FRAME 2006; GRAYSON 2001.

5. PARPOLA & PORTIER 2001; RADNER 2006, p. 62–63.

6. NA‘AMAN 1995.

7. FALES 2002.

8. A LBA IIB dwelling built in Area T1 on the levelled destruction debris of the Royal Palace immediately to the east of it and four contemporary houses in Area Q at the western foot of the *Coupole de Loth* in the city’s south-eastern corner (AL-MAQDISSI 2007, 22) comprise the latest 2nd millennium occupation so far found at Mishrifeh.

9. LUCIANI 2003, p. 159–161.

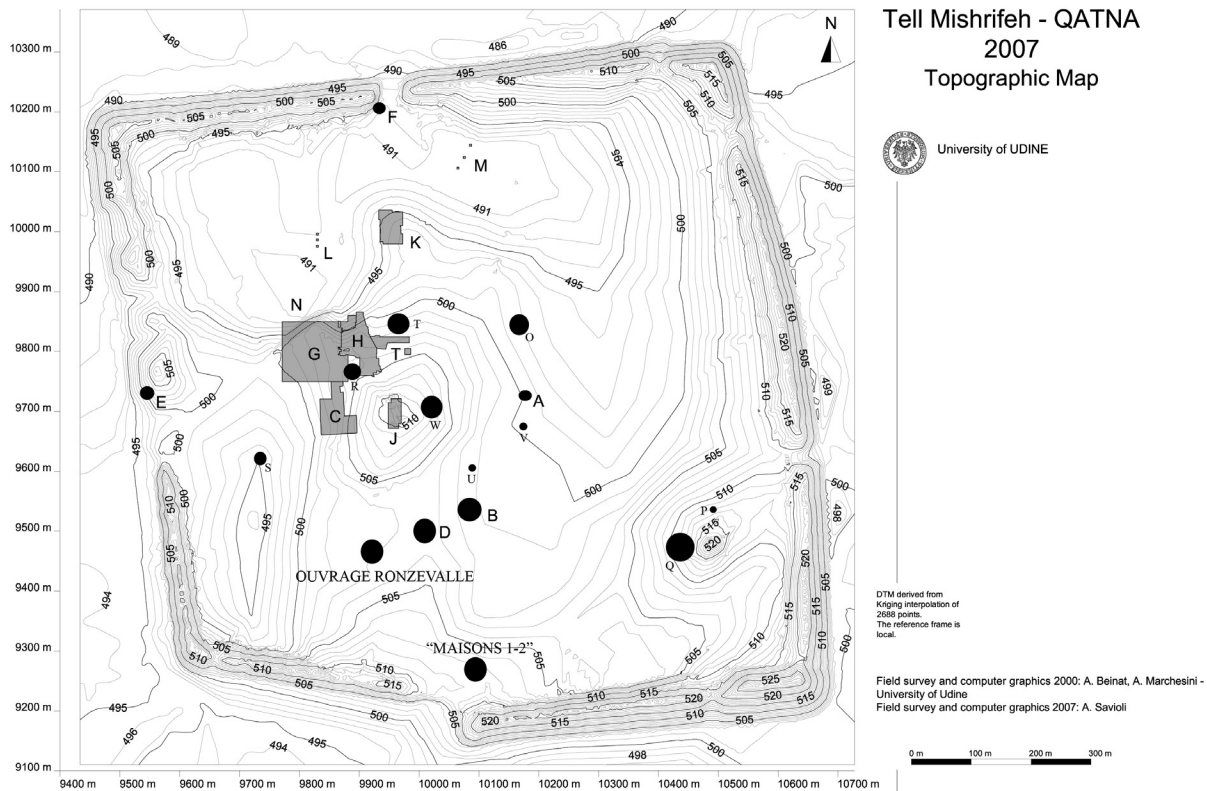


Figure 1: Topographic map of Mishrifeh with excavation areas (excavation areas of the Syrian mission, AL-MAQDISSI 2007, fig. 2).

With respect to layout, organisation, size and function, the Iron Age II settlement, which, on the basis of the pottery assemblages and some radiocarbon determinations¹⁰, spans the 8th century BC, seems to have been profoundly different from the smaller late 10th to early 9th century site.

After having been used for centuries as a pottery mass production area during the Middle and Late Bronze ages, the summit of the upper town was reconverted to a stockpiling zone, a function which it had had during the Early Bronze Age IV. Intensive food storage in Operation J involved more than a hundred storage pits and at least one large and one small granary¹¹.

In Operations G, H and T, above the abandoned Royal Palace and immediately to the east of it a large semicircular crafts quarter was constructed (**fig. 2**). This artisans' quarter, which consisted of at least five buildings arranged in an oval layout, was specialised in the processing and storage of food and agricultural produce and in the weaving and dyeing of textiles¹². A deposit of 137 clay "spool" weights for a vertical loom, associated with pierced conical weights (**fig. 3a-b**), was found in a large multi-roomed building (Buildings 1, 5, 7-8) related to textile production in the quarter's northern part, where also other tools related to the manufacturing of fabrics were uncovered, such as different types of clay loom weights, spindle whorls (**fig. 3c**), spindle/distaff fragments (**fig. 3d**), and finished and unfinished bone spatulas (**fig. 3e**).

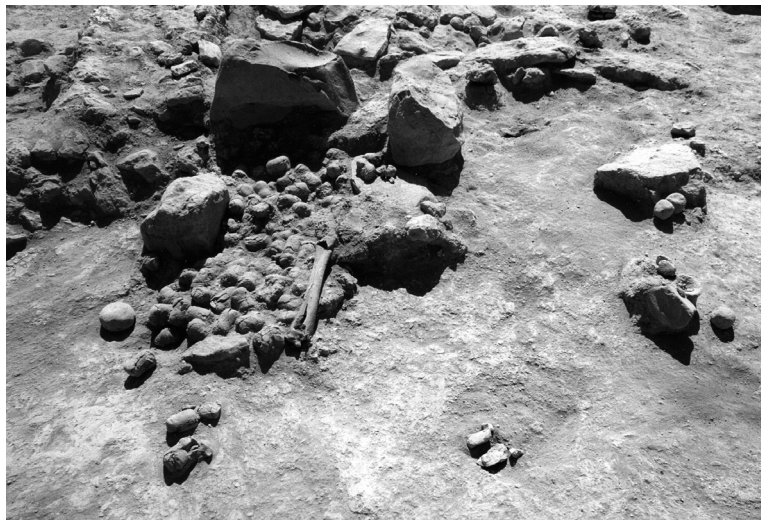
10. MORANDI BONACOSSO 2008; BESANA, DA ROS & IAMONI 2008.

11. MORANDI BONACOSSO 2008, p. 65-68.

12. Spinning is also attested to by the recovery of several spindle whorls and a few bone spindle/distaff fragments, even though the amount of tools related to spinning is relatively low if compared with that of clay looms, thus suggesting that a rather occasional spinning activity took place in this quarter. It is possible however that large-scale wool spinning was carried out in other parts of the crafts area or of the site (I am grateful to Riccardo Besana for calling my attention to this problem).



Figure 2: Plan of the artisans' quarter, Area H.



a



b



c



d



e

Figure 3a: Deposit of clay 'spool' weights seen from the north, b: pierced conical clay loom weight, c: spindle whorl, d: spindle/distaff fragment, e: finished and unfinished bone spatulas from the building specialized in textile production, crafts quarter, Area H, © Tell Mishrifeh - Qatna 2007.



Figure 4: View of the *pithoi* room before their excavation seen from the north and a restored *pithos* (H. 1.05 m, Diam. 0.35 m) possibly used to dye textiles.

The northern part of this building was occupied by a room where fabrics were probably dyed in several large *pithoi* which lay on a lime-plastered floor with a circular 20 cm deep depression at its centre (fig. 2, top right, and 4). Fragments of ochre probably used as a pigment were also found. It is possible that dyeing was performed by means of a cold-working process, immersing the textiles in the *pithoi* containing the colouring solution and wringing them to expel the excess dye, which was then collected in the circular depression in the floor in order to be reused. Other contemporary dyeing installations identical to and also larger than those excavated in the crafts quarter had already been discovered—though misunderstood—by the first excavator of the site, Robert du Mesnil du Buisson, in the so-called ‘maisons’ area near the southern city gate, in the “Ouvrage Ronzevalle” and in the western part of our crafts quarter (fig. 5)¹³.

The artisans’ quarter, which during the 8th century BC manufactured coloured textiles and processed foodstuffs on a large scale (mainly cereals, grapes, olives and almonds), and the intensive stockpiling area of Area J with its storage pits were possibly connected to and dependent on the adjacent and contemporary administrative building excavated by the Syrian team in Area C, which was equipped with a large central courtyard and storage rooms packed with conservation jars¹⁴.

A large, multipurpose official building with large storage rooms for agricultural produce, cellars, a grape press, and installations for pottery and textile production has recently been discovered in Area O by the Syrian team at the north-eastern foot of the upper town¹⁵.

Finally, Iron Age II residential areas were identified in the eastern lower town (Area A)¹⁶ and in the upper city in Area T, where a large house with domestic and storage rooms and an attached shelter with

13. DU MESNIL DU BUISSON 1935, p. 49–53, pl. VIII–IX and 1927, p. 290, pl. LXX:5, LXXIV. The two buildings near the southern city gate interpreted by Du Mesnil du Buisson as public baths or constructions for ablutions may be better explained as workshops specialised in the manufacture and colouring of textiles (cf. MORANDI BONACOSSÌ 2006, p. 83–84).

14. For this building, see MAQDISSI 2003a, p. 1495–1500 and 2003b, p. 225–235; MAQDISSI & MORANDI BONACOSSÌ 2005, p. 19–20.

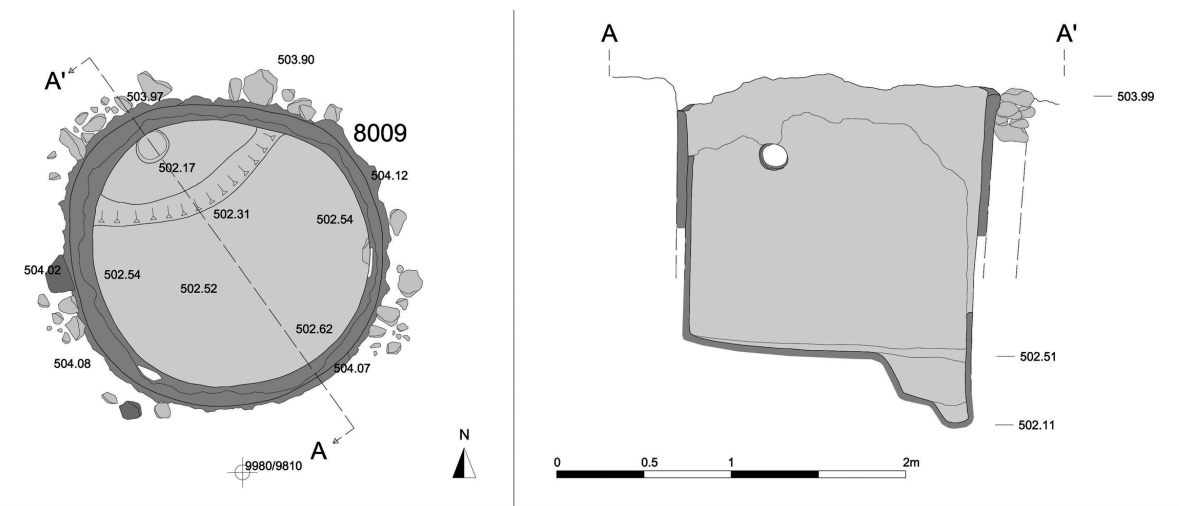
15. MAQDISSI 2008, p. 13.

16. MAQDISSI 1996, p. 3.



a

Figure 5a: View (seen from the east), b: plan and section of a textile dyeing installation found in Area T2.



Legend

- Lime plaster
- Stone
- Lime plaster
- Basalt



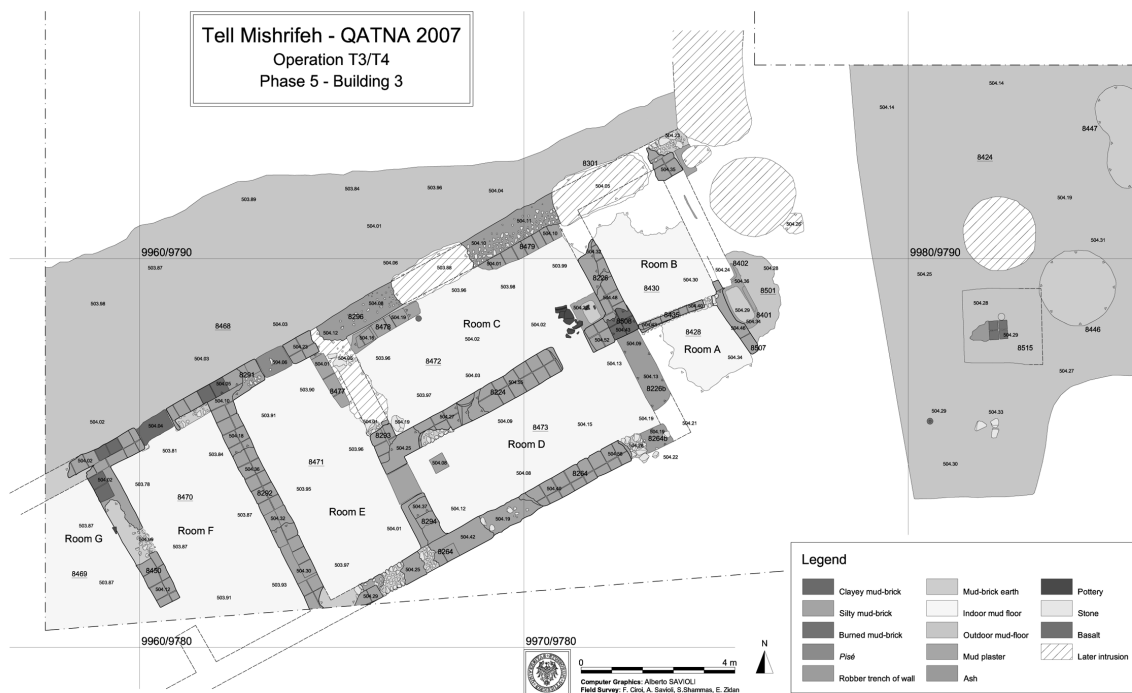
QATNA 2008
Operation T

Field Survey and Computer Graphics: Alberto Savioli

b



Figure 6: View and plan of House 3 seen from the west, Area T3-4.



a possible fodder-trough for animals were brought to light (**fig. 6**). Moreover, a pottery production area was discovered in the southern lower city (Area D)¹⁷.

The archaeological evidence summarised above provides information concerning the urban and functional layout of the upper and lower towns of Mishrifeh in the Iron Age II, where distinct living, production, storage and official buildings coexisted. A significant number of these production areas and buildings were related to pottery manufacture and the wool industry. The Iron Age II site of Mishrifeh seems to have been an important textile producer, an economic specialisation which was certainly related both to its geographic location and the interface role played by the site since the Bronze Age between the Orontes Valley on the west and the semi-arid steppe on the east.

17. MAQDISSI 2003b, p. 239–242.

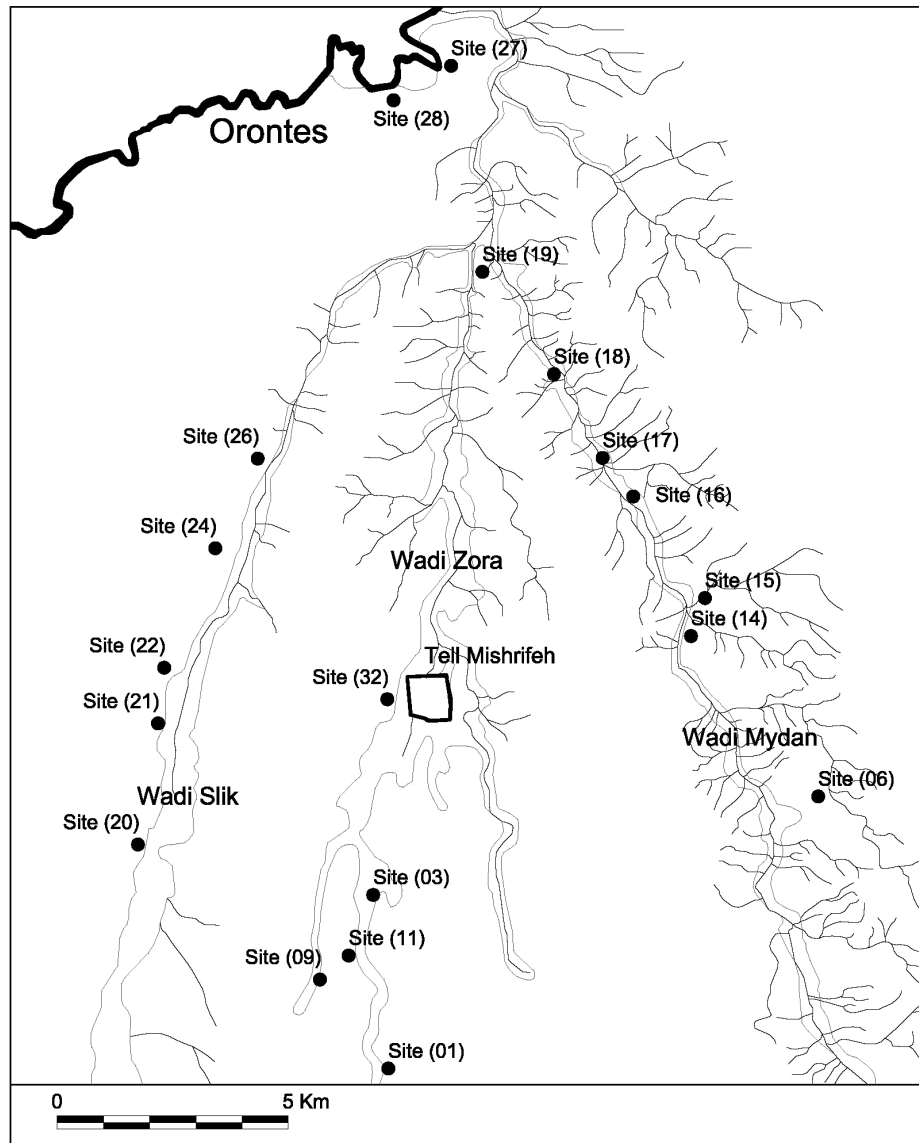


Figure 7: Distribution map of Iron Age II archaeological sites in the Mishrifeh region.

The Iron Age II corresponds to the period of greatest and most widespread development in the occupation of the region surrounding Mishrifeh, where 20 sites were inhabited (fig. 7). During the 8th century BC the archaeological evidence illustrates the diffusion throughout the countryside around Mishrifeh of dispersed rural settlements dependant on a larger central site located at the centre of the system, following a “scattered” settlement pattern also found in this period in the Syrian and Iraqi Jazireh¹⁸.

In sum, the presence on Mishrifeh’s acropolis during the “Aramaean” period of an administrative building, which probably exercised direct control over important sectors of the city devoted to the wool industry and the specialised production of coloured textiles, the warehousing and processing of crops on a larger-than-domestic scale, the vast size of the city and its location at the centre of a local settlement pattern, composed of rural villages spaced at regular intervals throughout the surrounding countryside, are all evidence that during the Iron Age II Mishrifeh played the role of an important local urban centre in the region situated to the south of Hamath, capital of a major Aramaean kingdom, and was possibly under its political control.

18. For Upper Mesopotamia, see MORANDI BONACOSSO 1996 and 2000; WILKINSON & BARBANES 2000.

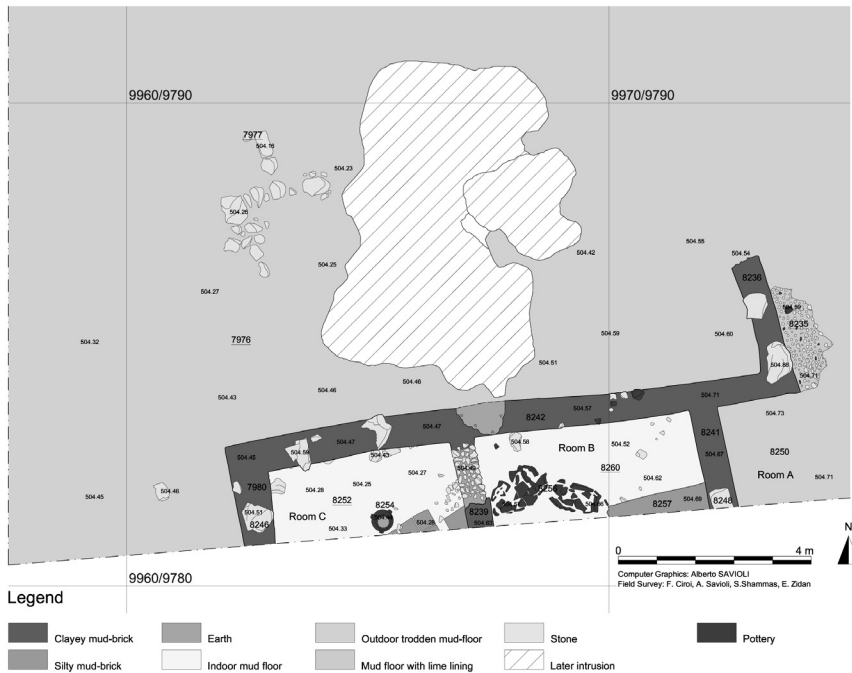


Figure 8: Plan of House 1, Area T4, and three-handled *pithos* originally embedded in the floor of Room C.

The archaeological evidence hitherto presented dates especially from the second half of the 8th century BC, that is from the last phase of the history of the Aramaean kingdom of Hamath until its destruction in 720 BC by the Assyrians and up to the end of Sargon's reign. The end of the 8th–beginning of the 7th centuries BC is marked at Mishrifeh by a dramatic change in the site's layout and function within a context which seems not to be distinguished by any archaeological evidence indicating that some kind of extensive, violent destruction took place, but which might be related to the upheavals associated with the fall of Hamath to Sargon. The size of the "Assyrian" period settlement seems to shrink considerably, since an Iron Age III occupation has so far been found only in Areas C, J and T (fig. 1) and would appear therefore to have been limited to the central part of the upper town. On the basis of the pottery assemblages and radiocarbon determinations, this settlement covers the time span from the early 7th to the mid 6th century BC approximately, that is the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian periods in Central Syria¹⁹.

According to the rather meagre archaeological evidence available at present, during this period the summit of the central mound of the acropolis (Area J) seems to have been occupied by dwellings with internal and open-air installations for the processing, transformation and storage of agricultural produce and textile weaving and possibly also dyeing on a domestic scale²⁰. A similar pattern of occupation has been found not only on the summit of the upper town, but also in its northern part, where, for this period in Area T, the exploration of a vast area has revealed the same kind of scattered domestic occupation found in Area J, distinguished by a house with domestic installations and characteristic three-handled storage *pithoi* (fig. 8). Finally, above the Area C administrative building, a Late Iron Age II–Iron Age III pottery production area was built after the abandonment of this major building²¹.

The archaeological evidence available to date suggests an interpretation of the Iron Age III settlement as an open rural occupation, which was distinguished by the presence of small scattered houses or farmsteads interspersed with extensive open areas equipped with installations used for crop processing and transformation, and food production within a clearly domestic context. Furthermore, other finds, such

19. MORANDI BONACOSSÌ 2008; BESANA, DA ROS & IAMONI 2008.

20. MORANDI BONACOSSÌ 2003, p. 84 and 2008, p. 68–71.

21. MAQDISSI 2003b, p. 223–225.

as clay loom weights, bone spatulas and spindle-whorls, point to a small-scale domestic textile industry which was conducted in the external areas associated with the small farmhouses. No evidence has yet emerged of textile manufacture which was “industrial” in character, as during the Aramaean period.

In sum, after the upheavals that marked the fall of the Aramaean kingdom of Hamath, of which the city of Mishrifeh was possibly an important administrative centre controlling its southern region, this urban centre continued to be occupied without any major disruption in its settlement and cultural continuity for a few decades. A major period of crisis seems to have arisen at the beginning of the 7th century, when the site may have lost its urban character and former administrative role within the new political set-up, emerging from the destruction of Hamath. The archaeological evidence seems to suggest that during the 7th century BC the settlement became a low-rank site within the region of Central Syria, which, under the Assyrian domination, flourished as one of the richest areas of the empire especially as a consequence of its strategic location along a major north-south communication route.

But is this drastic change mirrored by the site’s material culture? It has already been pointed out that the layout and function of the site underwent a radical transformation. Though the change seems to have occurred sometime after the Assyrian conquest, two entirely different townscapes characterised the site of the Aramaean and Assyrian periods. The large urban centre with residential areas, crafts quarters specialised in the wool industry, large intensive storage areas, and administrative and productive buildings turned into a smaller settlement characterised by scattered households engaged in productive activities on a domestic scale.

Cultural innovation is often mirrored by changes in burial practices. Unfortunately until now Iron Age graves at Mishrifeh are represented only by the little 8th century BC graveyard of Phase J6 on the summit of the upper town (**fig. 9**)²². Anthropological analysis conducted by Canci shows that the graves might have been used to bury a small group of low-ranking individuals²³ linked by possible consanguinity-affiliation. The fact that the funerary rite is that of inhumation in a period in which cremation is dominant in most of the western Syrian cemeteries is rather unusual²⁴. Unfortunately graves from Iron Age III levels, which would allow us to follow the development of burial customs during the 7th and 6th centuries, have not been found so far at Mishrifeh.

The Iron Age II ceramic assemblage is distinguished by characteristic Central and northern Syrian types, such as red-slipped plates and bowls²⁵, jars with grooved rim²⁶, large *pithoi*, red-slipped fruit stands, and double-handled jars (**fig. 10–11**)²⁷. Several *pithoi* have stamped Aramaic inscriptions on the rims (**fig. 12**). Characteristic of the Neo-Assyrian pottery repertoires are the hammer-headed bowls and bottles with narrow incised necks and triangular rims²⁸. Both types are introduced in the western Syrian ceramic horizon during the Late Iron Age II, probably as a result of the diffusion of Assyrian vessel types which followed the conquests of the kings of the second half of the 8th century, and persist during

22. The cemetery has been extensively discussed in MORANDI BONACOSSÌ 2002, p. 125–127 and 2003, p. 107–108; CANCI 2002 and 2003; CANCI & MORANDI BONACOSSÌ 2006.

23. All burials were devoid of grave goods.

24. See for example the cemeteries of Periods III–IV discovered at the site of Hama (RIS 1948), the first cemetery of Deve Höyük (MOOREY 1980), the burials in the cemeteries of Yunus and Karkemiš (WOOLLEY 1914 and 1939–1940), Tell Shiukh Fawqâni, Area H (BAHLOUL, BARRO & D’ALFONSO 2005), and Ras el-Bassit (COURBIN 1993), and the graves found at Tell Arqa (THALMANN 1978, p. 73, 77).

25. BESANA, DA ROS & IAMONI 2008, fig. 11: 3, 8, 10.

26. *Ibid.*, fig. 11: 16–17.

27. *Ibid.*, fig. 12: 1–5.

28. *Ibid.*, fig. 11: 15, 22 and 13: 10–11.

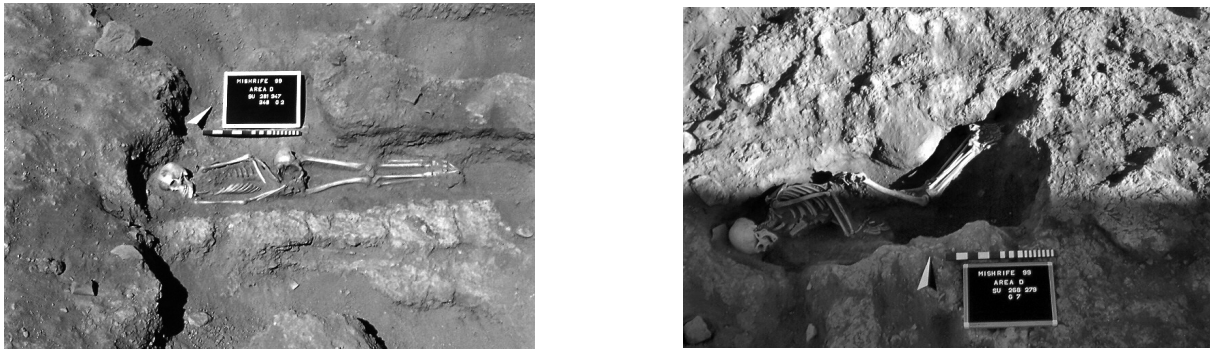


Figure 9: View of graves G. 2 and G. 7, Area J.



Figure 10: Iron Age II red-slipped fruit stands from Area H.



Figure 11 (above): Iron Age II double-handled jar from Area H;
Figure 12: Iron Age II *pithos* rims with stamped Aramaic inscriptions, Area H.

the Iron Age III. These vessels, mainly table ware shapes such as bowls, bottles and jugs, were probably prestige objects used by the local Late Iron Age II and III elites copying the Assyrian lifestyle and went out of use after the destruction of the Assyrian empire²⁹. Not a single specimen of Assyrian Palace Ware has been found so far at Mishrifeh.

A very strong continuity marks the following Iron Age III pottery horizon, where, however, new diagnostic types also appear, such as the red-slipped bowls with a ridge on the side, bowls with thick everted triangular rim or jars with modelled rim³⁰.

The few examples of monumental and miniaturistic sculpture of the Aramaean period found at the site allow us to cast a glance at Mishrifeh's Iron Age II artistic production and its cultural character. A small group of basalt human heads of diverse sizes was recovered from different parts of the site. The smallest example is sculpted in an extremely schematic, though very powerful and expressive way and has a sketchy hairstyle with curls (**fig. 13**)³¹. The second Aramaean head, which is slightly bigger than

29. LEHMANN 1998, p. 19.

30. BESANA, DA ROS & IAMONI 2008, fig. 13: 7, 8, 12.

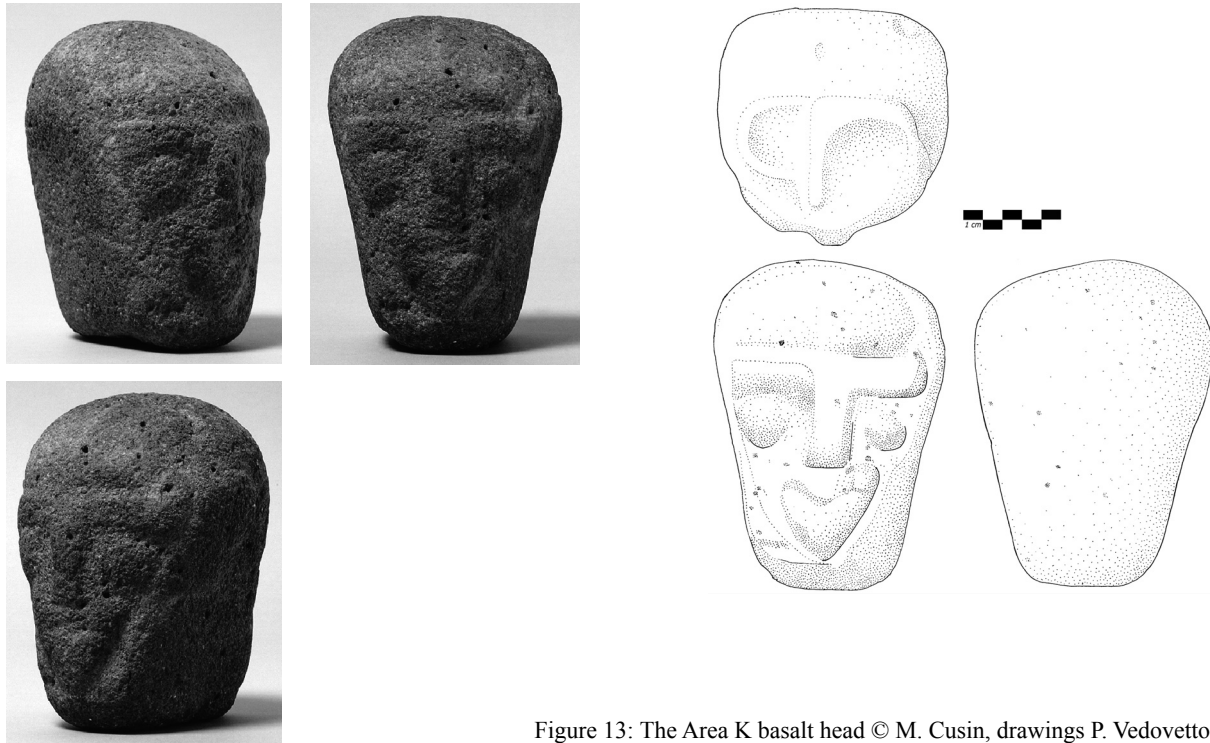


Figure 13: The Area K basalt head © M. Cusin, drawings P. Vedovetto.

natural size³², belongs to a finer and more delicate statue wearing a cap-shaped headdress with curls³³ and was retrieved at the end of the 19th century from the debris in the north-western part of the Royal Palace (**fig. 14**). The stylistic characters of the face, its expressiveness and overall structure are very close to those of the first head to which it seems approximately contemporary. A third similar though less well preserved basalt head was found by the villagers at the site after Du Mesnil du Buisson's excavations and is preserved in the Hama Museum.

A very fragmentary, tiny hematite lion head in Aramaean style is probably dated to slightly later in the Iron Age II and, in spite of its miniaturistic character, fits well within the plastic art tradition of the Aramaean states of the 9th and 8th centuries BC, which is better known through its more monumental achievements (**fig. 15**). The fragment, which measures 2.9 x 2.8 x 3.3 cm and was found in an Iron Age II pit in Area K (Phases K 3–2) that cut Rooms U and AA of the underlying Late Bronze Age “Lower City Palace”, was probably part of a ‘lion bowl’ (**fig. 16**)³⁴. The lion is fashioned in a very expressive way: the mane, eyes (which were probably inlaid with a different material), and nose are emphasised and the mouth is open wide, showing impressive teeth. The whiskers are deeply engraved with horizontal stripes and the overall

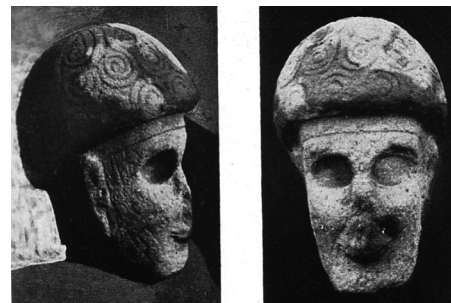


Figure 14: The basalt head in the Aleppo National Museum (from PLOIX DE ROTROU 1932, fig. 8).

31. This basalt head (MSH 02 K 2946.701, dimensions: 16 x 12 x 12 cm) was found in an Area K pit (Phase K 10) dating to the Iron Age IC (late 9th century BC). The head is illustrated also in MAQDISSI & MORANDI BONACOSSO 2005, p. 31.

32. H. 46 cm. CLERMONT-GANNEAU 1898, p. 26; see also PLOIX DE ROTROU 1932, p. 6, n° 10 and fig. 8.

33. Which appear also in the first head.

34. A photograph of the lion head (MSH 02 K 3240.703) has already been published in MAQDISSI & MORANDI BONACOSSO 2005, p. 55.

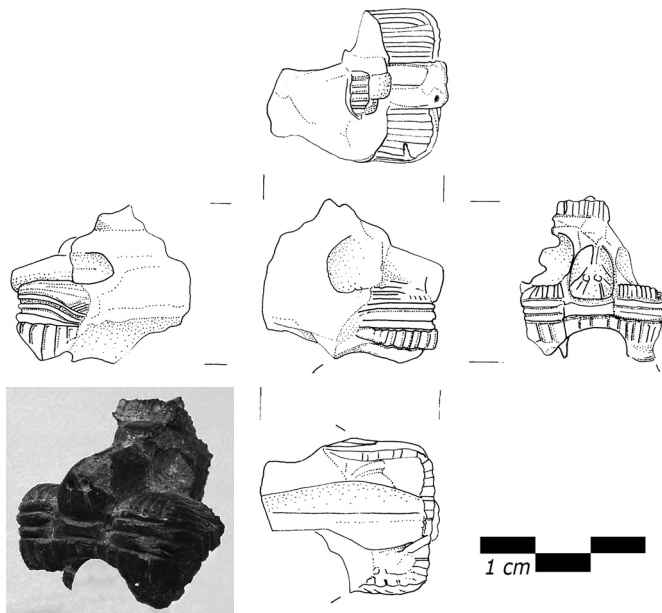


Figure 15: The Area K lion head © photograph M. Cusin, drawings S. Tinazzo, inking P. Vedovetto.

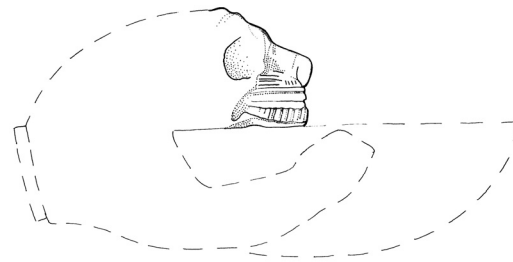


Figure 16: Reconstruction of the “lion bowl”.
© P. Vedovetto.

execution of the muzzle features makes a rather clumsy impression, which moves our lion head away from the more naturalistic depictions that characterise the “lion bowls” in Neo-Assyrian style.

“Lion bowls”, a specimen of which the Mishrifeh head was probably a broken part, have been variously interpreted as cosmetic containers, incense arms, libation vessels or ointment bowls³⁵. The Mishrifeh ‘lion bowl’ fragment, which in the wide corpus of known specimens hitherto published is the only exemplar in hematite, represents a very distinctive example of the artistic production in Aramaean style of Central Syria preceding the late 8th century BC and the Neo-Assyrian conquest of the region. Whether our lion head was produced at the site itself or imported from a North Syrian manufacturing centre must remain an open question³⁶.

Finally, a few cylinder and stamp seals in Assyrian style attest to the existence at the site of Assyrian administrative practices at the end of the 8th century BC³⁷.

To conclude this short overview of the Iron Age II and III occupation and material culture of the first millennium BC Mishrifeh, the available archaeological evidence suggests, on one hand, that the change from Aramaean to Assyrian authority in the Late Iron Age II was followed by a profound change in the urban planning and function of the site, the role of which was apparently significantly scaled down, but, on the other hand, that this political shift seems not to have determined any marked transformation in Mishrifeh’s material culture, which instead shows a gradual development during the Iron Age II and III, characterised by a strong continuity. This can probably be traced back to the fact that the population inhabiting the site remained basically unchanged and was probably not affected by the mass deportation of the native inhabitants and the forced resettlement of newcomers that affected nearby Hamath. At the same time, however, this fundamental continuity shows how major political upheavals are not necessarily mirrored by parallel drastic transformations and repercussions in the material culture.

35. A review of the different interpretations can be found in AMIRAN 1962, p. 170–174 and 1972, p. 67–77; FRITZ 1987, p. 237–238; KOZLOFF 1973; MUSCARELLA 1974, p. 26; PARROT 1964, p. 237–240.

36. On the North Syrian origin of the “lion bowls”, see BARNETT 1982, p. 46 and especially MUSCARELLA 1974, p. 25–26.

37. See for example MAQDISSI & MORANDI BONACOSSÌ 2005, 56.