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## ASSYRIANS AND ARAMAEANS IN THE EUPHRATES VALLEY VIEWED FROM THE CEMETERY OF TELL SHIUKH FAWQÂNI (SYRIA)

Aline TENU  
UMR 7041 - ArScAn (Nanterre)  
Department of Archaeology  
University of Cambridge

**Résumé** – Tell Shiukh Fawqâni (Syrie) est situé sur la rive est de l’Euphrate près de l’actuelle frontière avec la Turquie. Des niveaux de l’âge du Fer ont été trouvés dans trois secteurs : un quartier domestique (F), un quartier artisanal (G) et un cimetière à crémation (H). Ce cimetière partage de nombreuses caractéristiques avec ceux autour de Karkemiš et surtout ceux de Hama. Presque 150 tombes y ont été découvertes, permettant ainsi un nouvel éclairage sur la pratique de la crémation. Les premières études, y compris des dates C14, montrent sa longue durée d’utilisation depuis le tout début de l’âge du Fer jusqu’au VIII<sup>e</sup> siècle av. J.-C. Trois faits majeurs peuvent y être observés : la pratique de la crémation en elle-même, le choix d’un espace funéraire spécifique, hors de la zone habitée, et enfin le nombre important d’objets en fer dans les dépôts funéraires. Cet article vise à examiner les données de Tell Shiukh Fawqâni en étudiant chacun de ces aspects, développés dans un milieu syro-hittite sous les dominations assyrienne et araméenne.

**Abstract** – Tell Shiukh Fawqâni (Syria) is located on the east bank of the Euphrates near the Turkish-Syrian border. Iron Age levels have been excavated in three areas: a dwelling quarter (F), a productive area (G) and a cremation cemetery (H). This cemetery shares many characteristics with those of Karkemiš and especially of Hama. Almost 150 tombs have been found, shedding new light on cremation practice. The first studies, including radiocarbon dating, show its long-time use, from the beginning of the Iron Age to the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC. Three main features can be seen: the practice of cremation in itself, the choice of a specific area as necropolis, outside the city, and the increase in the number of iron objects as burial goods. The paper aims at an examination of Tell Shiukh Fawqâni data, focused on the development of these characteristics in a Syro-Hittite *milieu*, under the domination of Arameans and Assyrians.

خلاصة – يقع تلّ الشيوخ الفوقاني (سورية) على الضّفة الشرقية للفرات قرب الحدود التركية الحالية. تمّ الكشف على سوّيّات من العصر الحديدي في قطاعات ثلاثة: حيّ سكني (ف)، حيّ حرفيّ (ج) ومدافن لإحراق الجثث (ح). تظهر في هذه المدافن بعض النقاط المشتركة مع المدافن المحيطة بكرمي خاصة تلك التي في حماه حيث اكتشف مئة وخمسون مدفناً أظهروا طرق إحراق الجثث. لقد كشفت الدراسات الأولى ومن ضمنها التأريخ بواسطة الكربون C14 أنها قد استعملت لمدة طويلة منذ بداية العصر الحديدي حتى القرن الثامن ق.م. أظهرت ثلاث نقاط أساسية: عادة إحراق الجثث في حدّ ذاتها، إختيار مساحة مدفنية (جنائزية) خارج المنطقة المأهولة، وأخيراً العدد الكبير لأدوات من الحديد وجدت في المستودعات الجنائزية. تهدف هذه المقالة إلى دراسة المعطيات الأثرية لتلّ الشيوخ الفوقاني عبر دراسة كافة نواحي الحياة فيه والتي تطورت في بيئة سورية-حثية، في ظل الهيمنة المتتالية للأشوريين والآراميين.

Tell Shiukh Fawqâni lies in North Syria, in the Euphrates valley, near the present border with Turkey (fig. 1). Between 1994 and 1998 it has been excavated by a French-Italian team, led by Luc Bachelot and Frederick Mario Fales and then since 1999 by Luc Bachelot only. The cemetery proper is located on the northern outskirts of the tell. Its existence was revealed in September 1997 by the find chance of a complete jar containing human burnt bones. Between 1997 and 2003, almost 150 structures were

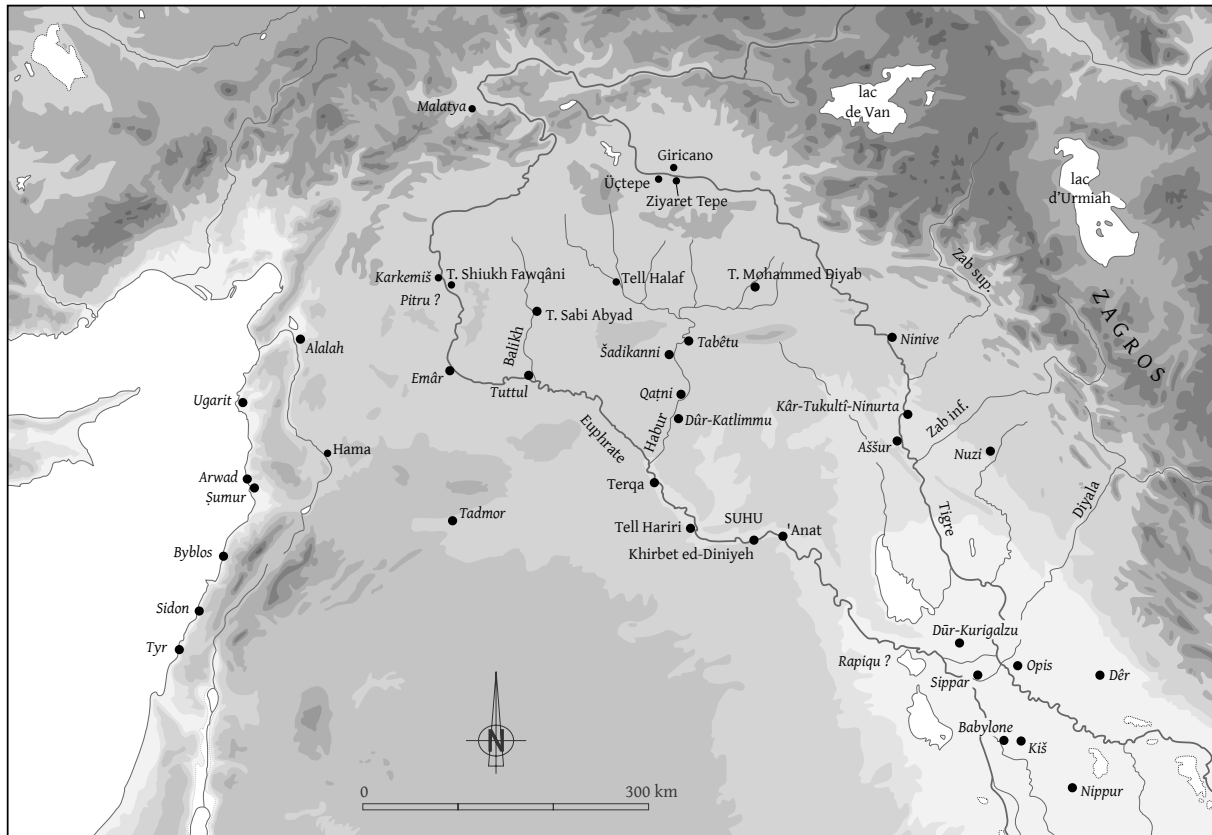


Figure 1: Map.

excavated then studied in Aleppo Museum<sup>1</sup>. The analysis of this very large documentation is still in process, but three main features can be outlined:

- of course, the practice of cremation in itself;
- the choice of a specific funerary space, outside of the inhabited area;
- and finally, the deposit of numerous iron objects.

The dating of the necropolis constitutes one of the most important, but complicated question for two main reasons: first the rather limited corpus of contemporary material and second the fact that some shapes were obviously reserved for funerary use. As a result the most relevant ceramics *comparanda* come mainly from cemeteries explored long before the Second World War at Hama<sup>2</sup> and around Karkemiš<sup>3</sup>. This material gives a time range between the 12<sup>th</sup> and the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC<sup>4</sup>, but four radiocarbon dates

1. For 1997 and 1998 campaigns results, see BAHLOUL, BARRO & D'ALFONSO 2005. The following seasons of work are published as preliminary reports in: BACHELOT *et al.* 2001; BACHELOT, LE GOFF & TENU 2002, 2003, 2005; LE GOFF 2005, 2007, in press; TENU 2007a; TENU & BACHELOT 2005.

2. Hama was explored by a Danish team between 1931 and 1938. Two graveyards were excavated, at about 300 m and 800 m south of the tell (RIS 1948, p. 1-3). More than 1500 deposits, dating from 1200 to 720 BC were unearthed (RIS 1948, p. 202).

3. MOOREY 1980; WOOLLEY 1914, 1939. Around the city of Karkemiš three cremation graveyards were excavated. Just north of the tell, the cemetery of Nebe Yunus yielded at least 128 graves. 6 km north of the tell, Merj Khamis cemetery has been plundered for a long time, but Woolley could identify 30 graves, 8 of which were excavated. However, only one has been published (WOOLLEY 1939, p. 12 and 20). A third cemetery lied west of the West Gate. It is only known by objects (unpublished) brought to Woolley and Lawrence (WOOLLEY 1939, p. 12). According to Leonard Woolley, Nebe Yunus graveyard was in use from ca. 1000 BC to the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC (WOOLLEY 1939, p. 19).

4. RIS 1948, p. 202; WOOLLEY 1939, p. 19.

provided by burnt bones from Tell Shiukh Fawqâni are surprisingly slightly older, from between 1395 and 936 BC.

The combined data pertaining to the dating show a long lasting use of the cremation graveyard, partially contemporary with the Assyrian presence in the area, that is during the Middle Assyrian period and after Shalmaneser's conquest in the second quarter of the 9<sup>th</sup> century<sup>5</sup>. At the same time, textual evidence clearly shows the massive presence of Aramaeans, particularly obvious when they conquered two Assyrian cities Pitru and Mutkinu during the reign of Aššur-râbi II (1012-972 BC)<sup>6</sup>. The graveyard was clearly in use during the "Aramaean" occupation of the region. The point could then be summarized by this quite naive question: since the part of Assyrian culture is relatively easily to evaluate, could one (or more) features of the cemetery be linked to Aramaeans?

### THE CREMATION PRACTICE

The cremation practice represents in itself a very important and disputed question. According to Stefania Mazzoni<sup>7</sup>, it is one of the most striking features introduced at the beginning of the Iron Age. The cremation did not actually appear at that moment<sup>8</sup>, but this was clearly the moment at which it was the most widespread. The Tell Shiukh Fawqâni cemetery is the second largest after those of Hama, with about 150 tombs. The burnt bones were usually put in a jar then interred. The grave could be very simple: just a jar closed by a cup or bowl, or even a large potsherd, but in some cases, the cinerary urn was covered by a far larger vessel, measuring about 1 m in diameter and 1 m in height (**fig. 2**). This kind of object is clearly restricted to funerary use. The deceased was sometimes buried with some belongings: spindle-whorls, astragals, beads in female graves (**fig. 3**), iron weapons in male ones (**fig. 4**), and some jewellery for children (**fig. 5**). These graves are quite similar to those of Yunus, near Karkemiš, and especially of Hama (**fig. 6**), even if the painted pottery is almost completely absent at Tell Shiukh Fawqâni<sup>9</sup>.

In the Tell Shiukh Fawqâni case, the point is to identify who burnt their dead. The main problem in answering this question is the lack of sources, combined with evidence of various cultural backgrounds.



Figure 2: Cremation graves at Tell Shiukh Fawqâni: 4051: cinerary jar covered by a plate, 4052: cinerary jar with burial goods (4054 and 4055), 4048: empty crater in secondary context, 4026: bath tub covering two cinerary jars and other deposits © A. Tenu.

5. Both are attested at Tell Shiukh Fawqâni. A Middle Assyrian occupation has been found in Area E, cf. CAPET 2005; and Neo Assyrian levels were excavated in Area F, cf. FALES, RADNER, PAPPI & ATTARDO 2005 for epigraphic finds; MAKINSON 2005 for archaeological report, and in Area G, see LUCIANI 2005.

6. GRAYSON 1996, p. 19 (A.0.102.2). These cities were established by Tiglath-pileser I.

7. MAZZONI 2000b, p. 34.

8. BIENKOWSKI 1982, p. 82-84; MAZZONI 2000b, p. 35 and TENU 2005, p. 38.

9. See for more detailed comparisons, TENU 2007a.



Figure 3: Material from a female grave (2441-3)  
© A. Pelle.



Figure 4: Burial goods from a male burial (2441-1) © A. Pelle.



Figure 5: Bronze bracelets from a child burial (2444)  
© A. Pelle.

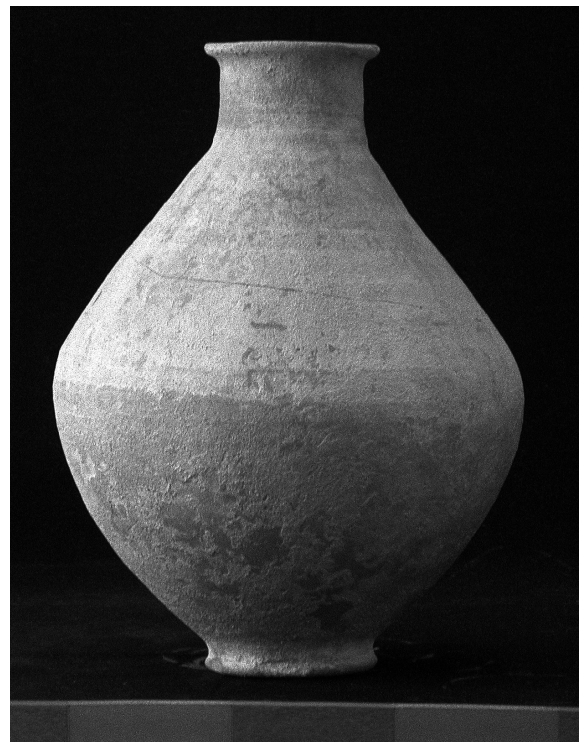


Figure 6: Funerary jar from Tell Shiukh Fawqâni (1306-1094 BC or 1383-1016 BC), very similar to one of Hama (Rus 1948, p. 7) © Mission archéologique de Tell Shiukh Fawqâni.

Many scholars have stressed the significant proportion of the Hurrian population, especially near the Levantine Coast but not restricted to it, and the prominent presence of Semites<sup>10</sup>. In addition, the real impact of the imperial Hittite conquest of the 14<sup>th</sup> century on the local population ought to be discussed, as well as the Luwian component. Thus J. David Hawkins stressed the lack of evidence for a mass migration from central Anatolia to Syria during the Hittite imperial period, but considers such a shift took place after the destruction of Hattuša, and the collapse of the Hittite Empire. One of the consequences of this movement would have been the generalized use of Luwian<sup>11</sup>. Horst Klengel suggests two periods for the arrival of Luwian groups in Syria, the Hittite Empire and the onset of the Iron Age<sup>12</sup>. But it could be argued that evidence for such migration is inexistent and as a result, the increase of Luwian use would have been essentially a cultural choice, induced by the prominent place of Karkemiš: Aramaean rulers may have ordered for their own Luwian inscriptions, or Neo-Hittite sculptures<sup>13</sup>. According to Paul-Eugène Dion, the bulk of population in northern Syria was Semites and Hurrians, and neither the Egyptian Conquest, nor the Hittite one, nor the emergence of Neo-Hittite states changed this situation<sup>14</sup>. Hélène Sader goes further, underlining the fact that textual evidence is too scanty to shed light on the population substratum present in Iron Age Syria, with the exception of the Luwians and of the Pre-Aramaean groups themselves<sup>15</sup>. These references, not exhaustive at all, show how the different components of local population in the area near Tell Shiukh Fawqâni are numerous, various and too interlinked to be easily isolated<sup>16</sup>.

This specific mix of cultural influences complicates the interpretation of the few remains at our disposal as Aramaean burial practices. Paul-Eugène Dion<sup>17</sup> focused mainly on the Zencirli Stela, underlining the difficulties of understanding this Neo-Hittite funerary monument, without further available information. Edward Lipiński pointed out the role of cremation for princely burials at least in Tell Halaf in the 10<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> century<sup>18</sup>, but elsewhere links the cremation burials at Hama to a non-Semitic occupation<sup>19</sup>. Unfortunately, the data relating to funerals and the treatment of the deceased are too meagre to infer definitive information, but the presence of large cemeteries at Tell Shiukh Fawqâni, Karkemiš and Hama could shed new light on this question. The origins of cremation are still obscure. The importance of Karkemiš leads some scholars to attribute it to the Hittites<sup>20</sup>, but Stefania Mazzoni rejected even late Hittite influence because of the southwards extension of the cremation burials and their development mostly during the 8<sup>th</sup> century<sup>21</sup>. More precisely, the cremation cemetery at Hama began at level F2 on the Citadel around 1200-1075 BC<sup>22</sup>, after the Hittite empire had lost its Syria territories. Since the best parallels for Tell Shiukh Fawqâni are to be found at that site, it seems to constitute a good argument for down-playing Hittite influence. On the other hand, Volkert Haas does not exclude an Hurrian origin for the Hittite practice itself<sup>23</sup> particularly well documented with the royal ritual<sup>24</sup> and the Osmankayesi

10. For references, see DION 1995, p. 1284; DION 1997, p. 66 and 74, or HAWKINS, 1995b, p. 1297.

11. HAWKINS 1995b, p. 1297.

12. KLENGEL 2000, p. 25.

13. BUNNENS 2000a, p. 17; BUNNENS 2006, p. 97-99.

14. DION 1997, p. 66.

15. SADER 2000, p. 68.

16. A probable discrepancy between language spoken by the population and by their rulers ought also to be considered (SCHWARTZ 1989, p. 281).

17. DION 1997, p. 267-270. In his synthesis, he tackles the Aramaean funerary practices only with the question of the king's death. The topic is not even evocated for population: it clearly reveals how unknown it is.

18. LIPIŃSKI 2000a, p. 636-637.

19. LIPIŃSKI 2000b, p. 125.

20. BIENKOWSKI 1982, p. 83 and MOOREY 1980, p. 6.

21. MAZZONI 2000b, p. 35.

22. RIIS 1948, p. 202; FUGMANN 1958, p. 275. On the basis of comparison with Tell Afis material, Stefania Mazzoni suggests rather a 11<sup>th</sup> century date, more than a 12<sup>th</sup> one (MAZZONI 2000b, p. 34).

23. HAAS 1995, p. 2023. On this question, see also TENU 2005, p. 39.

24. CHRISTMANN-FRANCK 1971; HAAS 1995, p. 2024-2027.

graveyard<sup>25</sup>. The question is thus very complicated, and the problem I would raise is its possible link to Aramaean groups. As I just recalled, our knowledge of Aramaean burial practices is very scanty, mainly focused on the “cult of Ancestors”. But many important sites where cremation is attested are clearly tied to an Aramaean presence, such as Hama, Tell Halaf<sup>26</sup> or Tell Shiukh Fawqâni itself which yielded a bilingual archive<sup>27</sup>.

The origins of Aramaean tribes remain a very disputed topic<sup>28</sup>, but more and more scholars share nowadays a convergent opinion. In northern Syria<sup>29</sup>, Aramaeans would not have been “newcomers,” but agro-pastoralist groups living in North Mesopotamia long before their presumed “arrival” at the end of the Late Bronze Age. The shift was not a migration, but a change in the political and social fabric, local rural communities, perhaps with nomadic tribes or uprooted groups, becoming its nodal element<sup>30</sup>. One of the arguments could be found in their name itself, connected to the land of Aram, which extended from the Khabur to the foot of Mount Lebanon<sup>31</sup>. Even if this etymology is contested<sup>32</sup>, some tribes, later clearly Aramaean, are already mentioned in the Middle Assyrian record, as living in Upper Mesopotamia<sup>33</sup>. Edward Lipiński suggests confederations of Aramaic-speaking tribes appeared in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and are acknowledged as a new entity by Assyrians at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century<sup>34</sup>.

More precisely, Tell Shiukh Fawqâni is located in the area where Aramaean presence is well documented in cuneiform texts. At the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, Aramaeans are fought by Tiglath-pileser I in the Euphrates valley “from the edge of the Land of Suhu to the city of Karkemiš”<sup>35</sup>, and later the sector of Pitru and Mutkinu is conquered by them at the transition of the 11<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>36</sup>. Moreover, on the basis of philological arguments, Edward Lipiński suggests that the surroundings of Marina (name of Tell Shiukh Fawqâni in a Middle Assyrian letter found at Tell Sheikh Hamad)<sup>37</sup> were occupied by Aramaeans, perhaps designated by the general term “Sutû,” as early as the 14<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries BC<sup>38</sup>. This dating corresponds to the oldest radio carbon dates from Tell Shiukh Fawqâni cemetery.

25. BITTEL 1958.

26. NAUMANN 1950, p. 159; OPPENHEIM 1939, p. 244-245.

27. FALES, RADNER, PAPPI & ATTARDO 2005.

28. The bibliography is too vast to be wholly quoted, but see *inter alia*, DION 1997, p. 15-21; LIPÍŃSKI 2000a, p. 25-54; SADER 1992; SADER 2000, SCHWARTZ 1989, ZADOK 1991.

29. The situation in Babylonia and along the Middle Euphrates valley seems very different (LIPÍŃSKI 2000a, p. 409-422). The place of the Aramaeans in Babylonia proper occupies only a few pages in P.-E. Dion’s book (DION 1997, p. 22-25). This choice obviously indicates he considers this question irrelevant for his study focused on north.

30. BUNNENS 2000a, p. 16; KLENGEL 2000, p. 25.

31. SADER, 2000, p. 65.

32. Edward Lipiński proposed as etymology for Aram “wild bulls” (LIPÍŃSKI 2000a, p. 52). See also ZADOK 1991, p. 106.

33. LIPÍŃSKI 2000a, p. 49. Moreover Nahor Abraham’s brother and Aram’s grandfather (Gen 22, 21) was named after the city Nahûru located near Harran in Upper Mesopotamia. The last attestation of this city goes back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century BC in Middle Assyrian record (LIPÍŃSKI 2000a, p. 65, note 68; 76). See also LEMAIRE 1984. For a point concerning the tradition of an Aramaean origin in the Land of Qîr (near Emar?), see LIPÍŃSKI, 2000a, p. 40-45 and 2000b, p. 131.

34. LIPÍŃSKI 2000a, p. 50.

35. GRAYSON 1991, p. 23. This passage is the first one where ‘Aramaean’ proper is written (Ahlamû-Aramaean). According to Edward Lipiński, the term ‘Ahlamû’ does not designate a peculiar ethnic group or a specific tribe, but pertains more generally to roaming nomads. Etymologically, the word means “lad” or “boy” (LIPÍŃSKI 2000a, 38). This opinion is shared by Paul-Eugène Dion (DION 1997, p. 16). G. Schwartz considers Aramaeans as an ethnic group, associated with a specific language, the Aramaic (SCHWARTZ 1989, p. 281). See also HERLES 2007, esp. p. 339 and MASETTI-ROUAULT this volume. Ahlamû/Aramaean could be understood as “enemy” in Assyrian record.

36. GRAYSON 1996, p. 19 (A.0.102.2).

37. CANKIR-KIRSCHBAUM 1996, p. 104 (letter 2).

38. LIPÍŃSKI 2000a, 176, n. 75. The Sutû constitute a confederation of nomadic tribes, and an ethnic entity (HELTZER 1981, p. 83; LIPÍŃSKI 2000a, p. 39). At the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium, the name lost this precise meaning and concerns nomads or robbers in general, which was not the case before (HELTZER 1981, p. 90; LIPÍŃSKI 2000a, p. 40). For a brief presentation of Suteans in the Mari texts, see JOANNES 1997, p. 408-411.

More generally, the presence of Aramaean groups in northern Syria could be an accurate explanation for the isolated cremation graves dated as early as the 13<sup>th</sup> century in Assyrian contexts at Tell Mohammed Diyab<sup>39</sup> and Tell Sabi Abyad<sup>40</sup>. Actually, the Mesopotamian conception of afterlife<sup>41</sup> seems so incompatible with cremation that attributing these graves to another population seems to be the best solution<sup>42</sup>. In this case, pre-Aramaean people could be good candidates, even if not the only ones<sup>43</sup>.

#### A NEW FUNERARY SPACE

The use of a specific area to bury the dead seems rather new at the beginning of the Iron Age in Syria. During the Late Bronze Age, by far the most widespread practice was to bury the dead under house (or palace) floors. At Tell Shiukh Fawqâni itself, the necropolis is located north-east of the tell, about 70 m from its base (fig. 7). The graveyard was clearly delimited by a wadi, which deeply cut the Holocene terrace. The very hard earth and pebbles which constitute it did not allow for the easy and quick digging of burial pits. On the contrary, it was far harder to bury cinerary urns here than in the tell. The nature of the burial ground precludes any micro-stratigraphic analysis, but we can suppose that the summit of some (if not all) burials was intentionally kept visible. The existence of signalling stelae or stones is not attested at Shiukh, but is known at Hama<sup>44</sup> and Karkemiš<sup>45</sup>.



Figure 7: The cremation cemetery seen from south-east © A. Tenu.

39. SAUVAGE 2005.

40. AKKERMANS & ROSSMEISL 1990, p. 17 et AKKERMANS & WIGGERMANN 1999, p. 65. Andrzej Reiche kindly informed me he has found a Middle Assyrian cremation jar at Nemrik.

41. See JOANNES 2005, esp. p. 82 and ABRAHAMI 2005, p. 88.

42. AKKERMANS ([www.sabi-abyad.nl/tellsabiabyad/resultaten/index/0\\_28/28\\_36/?language=en](http://www.sabi-abyad.nl/tellsabiabyad/resultaten/index/0_28/28_36/?language=en)); SAUVAGE 2005, p. 50.

43. In the area where cremation is used, Hurrian populations were also very numerous until the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC as recently shown by RADNER & SCHACHNER, 2001, p. 757. However the text HSS XIII, 165 did not pertain to the cremation of the king, but of an “image” of him (GAAL 1976, p. 286). Moreover no cremation burial has been excavated in Nuzi, even if some are attested in sites belonging to Mittani. Haas sees also a possible influence of Hurrian practice on Hittite burial cremation (HAAS 1995, 2023).

44. RIIS 1948, p. 28, p. 31.

45. Funerary monuments are not systematically erected directly on the burial, because some were used to perform ritual, not bounded to the actual grave (BONATZ 2000, p. 189). Such stelae have been found at Nebe Yunus, but their context is too poorly published to infer for what purpose they were set up (WOOLLEY 1939, p. 14).



The development of a necropolis on the outskirts of cities is parallel to a wider use of cremation during the Iron Age at Karkemiš, Hama, Sukas, Bassit<sup>46</sup>, but the two phenomena do not overlap completely. Actually some cremation burials go back to the Late Bronze Age, notably at Alalakh, Tell Mohammed Diyab or Tell Sabi Abyad. Alalakh, modern Atchana, situated in the Orontes Valley, was excavated by L. Woolley. Thirteen cremation graves were published. Dated between the 15<sup>th</sup> and the mid 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, they were interred under house floors<sup>47</sup>. At Tell Mohammed Diyab, one cremation burial, and seven inhumations as well<sup>48</sup>, were excavated in association with domestic architectural remains. Unfortunately, the archaeological deposits were too eroded to know if the graves were interred under house floors or after their abandonment<sup>49</sup>. Concerning Tell Sabi Abyad, only little information has so far been published, but the cremation graves were usually buried in collapsed houses. Generally speaking, they were interred on the tell itself, not placed outside the inhabited area. Even in the two last cases in which a strict relation between houses still occupied and burials under them is less obvious, the point is that the burial ground is not separated from the living quarters. Some ruined houses have been used for funeral purpose, but the site was still wholly occupied.

The cremation is striking and unusual; we focus on its significance especially as opposed to inhumation<sup>50</sup>, and ultimately pay less attention to the consequences of change in funerary space. Moreover the non-systematic association cremation/cemetery become striking by considering precisely also inhumations. At Karkemiš, with the exception of the ‘Gold Tomb’, no grave was found inside the city: inhumations were rejected as well as cremations beyond the walled area<sup>51</sup>. In Tell Shiukh Fawqâni graveyard, five inhumation graves were identified as well as a bi-ritual one, in which burnt bones of a deceased were placed on the legs of a non-cremated person<sup>52</sup>. The other inhumations were very badly preserved, and according to Isabelle Le Goff, it could be explained by an anteriority of this practice gradually replaced –certainly even not completely– by cremation. It seems likely that the change in funerary space precedes the widespread use of cremation<sup>53</sup>.

The interpretation of the choice of burying the deceased on the outskirts of the inhabited space remains conjectural, but it certainly did signal an important shift in the relationships between the dead and the living. It clearly implicates major changes in the social behaviour linked to the funerals. Instead of a rather intimate setting provided by the house, the burials took place in an open area, visible from the site. Even if the pyre could be relatively plain and limited<sup>54</sup>, the cremation proper was certainly conducted in a public sector, outside the site because of its duration (sometimes 19 hours for an adult)<sup>55</sup> and its specific nature. As far as we understand the importance of appropriate funeral rituals to allow for rest in the afterlife, it is hardly conceivable such events were unimportant<sup>56</sup>. We can also infer that

46. BIEŃKOWSKI 1982, p. 81-82, and for Bassit, see COURBIN 1993.

47. WOOLLEY 1955, p. 202.

48. SAUVAGE 2005, p. 49.

49. SAUVAGE 1997, p. 162.

50. TENU 2007a, p. 273.

51. The so-called ‘Gold Tomb’ was discovered in the north-west fort of the Inner Town. Its specific location would be explained by the fact that cemeteries were not accessible since the city was besieged by Nebuchadnezzar’s troops (WOOLLEY & BARNETT 1952, p. 250-251). The context of the infant burial discovered in the West Gate is unclear, but the disturbed bones were not burnt. A stele found in its close vicinity may have been a funerary monument associated to it (WOOLLEY 1921, p. 80-81). In this case too, the grave was dug on the outskirts of the city proper.

52. LE GOFF, personal communication. The radiocarbon dates provided by this tomb (2592) are the oldest we got: 1367-1124 BC or 1395-1041 BC.

53. P. J. Riis signals some graves containing non burnt remains of babies (RIIS 1948, p. 4).

54. For some practical information concerning the construction of the pyre, and the conduct of cremation, see GRÉVIN 2005.

55. GRÉVIN 2005, p. 18.

56. At Tell Sheikh Hamad, cremation burials were found inside houses. More precisely the pyre was dug into the floor, and after cremation had taken place, fully buried (personal communication of Hartmut Kühne). Some similar structures were also found at Ziyaret Tepe and preliminary interpreted as kilns or metal-working facilities (MATNEY *et alii* 2002, p. 55-56). To my knowledge, this type of tomb is still very rare: it is later, dated to the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC.

these new practices shaped new Ancestors cults which seem still very important according to Dominik Bonatz<sup>57</sup>. Could this shift be related to the relative decline of the urban way of life that followed or accompanied the end of the Late Bronze Age? I am unable to answer, but the strong ties that linked a family to their house (and the problems raised by its eventual sale) were thus broken. The Tell Shiikh Fawqâni analyses are still in process, but we hope to find schemes in the organization of the different tombs. For instance we wonder whether the bath tubs tombs were not attraction points for later burials.

### THE INCREASE OF IRON OBJECTS IN GRAVES

The third hallmark to be discussed is the importance of iron deposits in the tombs. At Hama too, the level F2 (c. 1200-c. 1075 BC) is marked by new elements, two of which are iron and cremation<sup>58</sup>.

At Tell Shiikh Fawqâni, of the 95 tombs found in 2000, 41 contained burial goods and 15 included iron objects. Iron is not restricted to men; some tools, maybe tied to wool work, and tweezers were found in female graves (fig. 8). In one grave, more than 30 arrowheads were deposited: some above the bones, some at the bottom of the jar (fig. 9). For two graves containing iron objects, we have radio carbon dates at our disposal.



Figure 8: Tweezers from a female grave (2447-1)  
© A. Pelle.

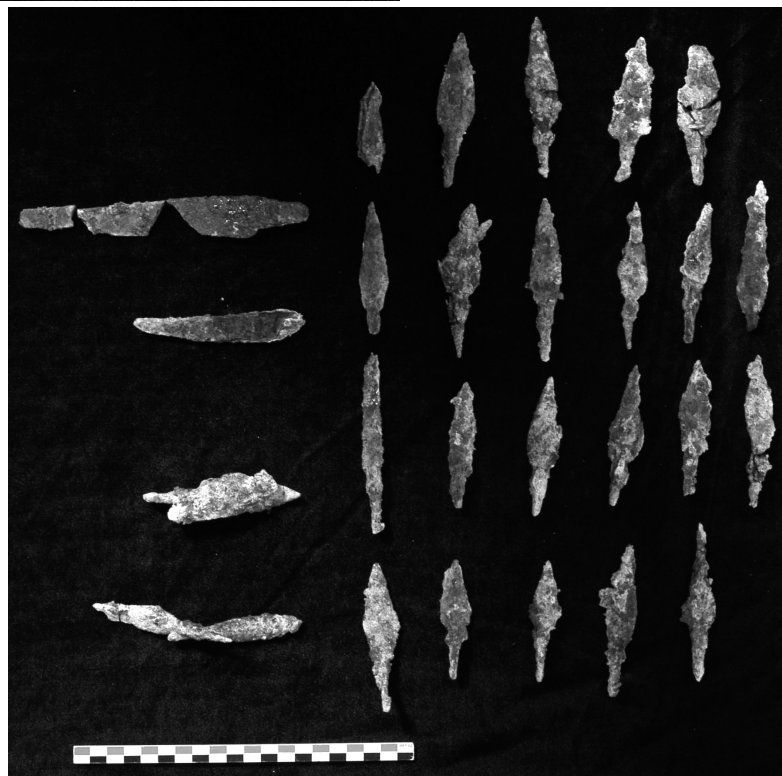


Figure 9: Iron tools and weapons from a male burial (2443)  
© A. Pelle.

57. BONATZ 2000.

58. FUGMANN 1958, p. 275; RIIS 1948, p. 200.



Figure 10: Iron objects from male grave 2528 (1251-1051 BC or 1306-981 BC) © A. Pelle.



Figure 12: Iron arrowheads *in situ* (grave 2584) © Mission archéologique de Tell Shiukh Fawqâni.



Figure 11: Complete assemblage of grave 2584 (1192-1008 BC or 1260-936 BC) © A. Pelle.  
The child remains are visible close to the head of the adult © A. Pelle.

The first one (tomb 2528) was the first covered by a bath tub we found: it contained arrowheads and an axe blade. It belongs to a man about 40 years old and is dated between 1251-1051 or 1306-981 (fig. 10).

The second (tomb 2584) is a double burial with a male adult and a child (fig. 11). Eight arrowheads were deposited with beads. The radiocarbon dates give a time range comprised between 1192 and 1008 or 1260 and 936 BC (fig. 12).

In the Tell Shiukh Fawqâni case, the iron deposits could betray the relative wealth of the deceased. Such weapons would have been still rare, since the generalized use of iron objects is dated to the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC<sup>59</sup>. However the presence of relatively large quantity of this metal (putting to one side its ancient date) is not really puzzling in the cemetery since Area G on the eastern slope of the tell yielded a production area, particularly devoted to iron metallurgy<sup>60</sup>. This activity seems contemporary with the end of the cemetery and clearly reveals, as Marta Luciani stressed, the connection of the site –via

59. WALDBAUM 1980, p. 82.

60. LUCIANI 2005, p. 722-779; p. 933-935.

the Sajour and Euphrates waterway system— to the numerous iron deposits north of Karkemiš, Maraş, Diyarbakır and the Amanus Mountains<sup>61</sup>.

The iron metallurgy is not new at the onset of the Iron Age<sup>62</sup>, but was, so far, mainly devoted to non utilitarian purposes<sup>63</sup>. Effectively, due to its physical property, wrought iron<sup>64</sup> is softer, less attractive than bronze and could be heavily corroded<sup>65</sup>. Moreover, its melting point (1,537°C) precludes completely cast, so used for other metals, because even during the Iron Age, such a temperature was never obtained (max. 1,200°C), except in China<sup>66</sup>. Nevertheless two main technological advances made it harder and consequently allowed for its wider use. Carburization is reached by heating iron with carbon, while quenching, which has no effect on bronze or iron wrought, requires immersing carburized iron, red-hot, in a cold liquid. The dating of the introduction of these advances is quite disputed, but may be 12<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries BC<sup>67</sup>. Between 1,200 and 900 bronze, previously very predominant, was gradually replaced by iron<sup>68</sup>. Since iron working requires much more time, skill, and experience than bronze<sup>69</sup>, the reasons for such a change ought to be mostly found in the socio-economic context, even if discovery of carburization clearly changed the situation<sup>70</sup>. Two main explanations are no longer credited: the collapse of the Hittite empire would have broken their monopoly of iron-working, and then allowed for its diffusion<sup>71</sup>; or the metallurgy was introduced by the Philistines, iron smiths who arrived with the “Sea Peoples”<sup>72</sup>. Mario Liverani proposed to explain the emergence of iron metallurgy in the larger context of the collapse of the LBA socio-economic structures. Tin supplies were disrupted, and at the same time “a centrifugal expansion of the nomadic element”<sup>73</sup> finding new routes, linked to the domestication of the dromedary<sup>74</sup>, gave conditions both for prospecting and technological experiences<sup>75</sup>. In addition, iron ore deposits are locally present throughout the Near East and far easier to spot and to exploit than those of copper<sup>76</sup>. To sum up, all the conditions were gathered to make the wider use of iron possible. Many reservations about this theory ought to be expressed. The importance of the shift in the economic fabric is certainly less important than continuities<sup>77</sup> and the dozens of bronze objects found in the Levant contradict also this hypothesis<sup>78</sup>. Nevertheless, the place Mario Liverani grants to mobile groups in the emergence of iron as the basic utility metal is maybe not to be denied, since they may have been involved

61. LUCIANI 2005, p. 778. For location of iron ores in Anatolia, see MAXWELL-HYSLOP 1974; MUHLY 1995, p. 1510; MUHLY et al. 1985, p. 72.

62. Lists of iron artefacts earlier than Iron Age can be found in McNUTT 1990, (5<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> millennia) p. 118-120; (MBA) p. 122; (LBA) p. 124-126. See also WALDBAUM 1978, p. 17-23, and more generally WERTIME & MUHLY 1980.

63. McNUTT 1990, p. 108. James David Muhly quoted an exception: a text from Nuzi mentions armour with iron scales made for a horse (MUHLY 1980, p. 50).

64. The wrought iron is obtained after the bloom (produced by reduction of parent ore) is reheated in a forge and hammered (McNUTT 1990, p. 113).

65. MUHLY 1995, p. 1514.

66. McNUTT 1990, p. 112.

67. McNUTT 1990, p. 148-150. James David Muhly dates the discovery of carburization around 1200 BC (MUHLY 1980, p. 52).

68. McNUTT 1990, p. 152.

69. MOOREY 1994, p. 286.

70. McNUTT 1990, p. 152.

71. A synthesis on Hittite (and more generally Anatolian) contribution to iron metallurgy has been proposed by MUHLY, MADDIN, STECH and ÖZGEN in 1985. They conclude: “A significant change in ironworking took place after 1200 BC and there is little evidence to show what, if anything, the Hittites could have contributed toward this change.” (p. 82).

72. McNUTT 1990, p. 139-142; MUHLY, 1995, p. 1516; MUHLY 1998, p. 322; MOOREY 1995, p. 289; WALDBAUM 1980, p. 81-83. However James David Muhly considers working of iron weaponry as controlled by the Philistines (MUHLY, 1995, p. 1516).

73. LIVERANI 1987, p. 70.

74. The evidence for a widespread use of dromedaries by Aramaeans is scanty, DION 1997, p. 342-344; SCHWARTZ 1989, p. 282.

75. LIVERANI 1987, p. 70-71; for a wider picture of the LBA economic system see LIVERANI 1990.

76. McNUTT 1990, p. 114-116; MOOREY 1994, p. 280.

77. BUNNENS 2000a, p. 13.

78. MUHLY 1995, p. 1515.

in prospecting and trade of iron. Assyrian records of booty, even if slightly later, revealed the place of iron in Aramaean states. The most important quantities of it given as booty pertain to north-west states, such as Šupru, Yahan, Sam'al and especially Bît-Zamani. At once Aššurnāširpal II received from this last state 300 talents of iron<sup>79</sup>. Later Damascus was able to pay to Adad-nîrârî III 2,000 or 5,000 talents of iron. This huge quantity does not only betray the privileged place of the state on major trade routes<sup>80</sup> but also revealed its own mining activity<sup>81</sup>. To a lesser extent, Lower Khabur states were also able to deliver iron, likely previously obtained by trade, perhaps partly fluvial<sup>82</sup>. In this geography the pre-eminent place of the region north of Karkemiš could easily be explained by numerous iron ores<sup>83</sup>. Unfortunately evidence for ironworking in Anatolia at the Early Iron Age is very rare<sup>84</sup>, contrary to the Palestine sphere where material is very rich<sup>85</sup>. Once again, the numerous iron objects found in Tell Shiukh Fawqâni graveyard could not be only explained by the Hittite influence on ironworking<sup>86</sup>. But the site seems to be in a privileged position: close to iron ores, and on routes allowing for a quick diffusion of technologies. Recent excavations gradually bear new attestations of iron utility objects, bridging the gap between the LBA and the EIA in Syria and south-eastern Anatolia. Thus we might recall the iron items found on sites located in the Upper Tigris Valley. At Giricano Andreas Schachner found iron bracelets in cremation burials dating to after the end of the Middle Assyrian occupation<sup>87</sup>. At Kenan Tepe an iron working activity is also attested in Early Iron Age levels<sup>88</sup>. On the neighbouring site of Grê Dimsê a warrior grave yielded a sword (70 cm in length), six arrowheads and a ring, all in iron<sup>89</sup>. Norbert Karg proposed a date between 1150 and 1000/950 BC, but the context is clearly not Assyrian<sup>90</sup> because of the find of potteries belonging to "Eastern Anatolian EIA" corpus, including *Groovy Pottery*<sup>91</sup>.

Thus due to the non-Assyrian context of these different attestations it seems rather clear that the appearance of iron dated to after the Aramaeans had overwhelmed the Assyrians, probably shortly after the date of the Giricano Archive (1069 BC)<sup>92</sup>. *Groovy ware* is usually not considered as a "marker" of Aramaean presence<sup>93</sup>, but Jeffrey Szuchman sees no problem in correlating this pottery type to Aramaean groups living in this area<sup>94</sup>. Consequently in these cases as well, the ironworking is attested in connection (chronologically and spatially) with Aramaean occupation.

Available data are still scanty but we can put forward the theory that Aramaeans could have been involved in the transport, prospecting, and perhaps in the working of iron. In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, having

79. GRAYSON 1996, p. 211 (A.O. 101.1).

80. H  l  ne Sader notices that Ahlam  -Aramaean may have controlled trade routes as soon as the reign of Aššur-b  l-kala. Consequently they were able to accumulate raw materials and became considerably wealthy (SADER 2000, p. 69).

81. DION 1997, p. 349-350; LIPINSKI 2000a, p. 535-536.

82. DION 1997, p. 350; LIPINSKI 2000a, p. 535, 538.

83. WALDBAUM 1978, p. 64.

84. WALDBAUM 1978, p. 35. At the time she wrote her book, only sixteen iron objects dating from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> century could be securely mentioned, yielded by only four sites: Assarlik, Tarsus, Sardis and Iasos.

85. MOOREY 1994, p. 289. See also WALDBAUM 1978, p. 24-27. In Syria proper, the only site which yielded iron is Hama (WALDBAUM 1978, p. 27-29).

86. Iron objects such as knives, points, blades, and tweezers were also found in Nebe Yunus (WOOLLEY 1939).

87. SCHACHNER 2003, p. 161. For a presentation of the Middle Assyrian occupation, SCHACHNER 2002b et 2004.

88. PARKER 2004, p. 591. No Middle Assyrian level has so far been excavated on the site. However few sherds belonging to Middle Assyrian assemblage were found (PARKER 2004, p. 591).

89. KARG 2001, p. 676.

90. Middle Assyrian pottery as well as Neo Assyrian is attested on the site, KARG 2001, p. 681-682; KARG 2002, p. 728-733.

91. KARG 2001, p. 678-680. However Groovy Pottery could be contemporary with the latest phases of Middle Assyrian occupation, see for references SZUCHMAN this volume, n. 38.

92. RADNER 2004, p. 115-117; TENU forthcoming b, SZUCHMAN this volume.

93. SCHACHNER 2002a, p. 26; ROAF & SCHACHNER 2005, p. 120.

94. SZUCHMAN this volume.

95. LUCIANI 2005, p. 792, pl. 2:22-24.

taken control in southern Anatolia over iron supplies situated in an area previously disputed between the Hittites and Assyrians, they would have widely spread objects and technology linked to them. The evidence for a more ancient widespread iron metallurgy than previously thought is more and more numerous with the increase of excavations in the Euphrates and Tigris valley.

### CONCLUSION

To sum up, and to return to the question asked by this workshop's proponents, the cremation necropolis does not seem to be tied to the Middle or Neo Assyrian presence, even if it is contemporary with it. More precisely, the necropolis material –notably the burial jars– has no parallel in Area F, in Še-ušni house, and only a few in production Area G (**fig. 13**)<sup>95</sup>. This discrepancy could be explained by chronology, but it does not seem random, if the cremation necropolis use stops before the occupation of Še-ušni house. Martin Makinson who studied the material provided by Area F, where the Assyro-Aramaic archive was found, stressed the almost complete absence of Assyrian influence in the local culture before the middle of the 8<sup>th</sup> century and the Sargonic period. We can suppose that reinforcement of Assyrian presence and control, during Sennacherib's reign, put an end to the cremation graveyard. But we may also consider that people who cremated their dead were perhaps not "Assyrianized" enough to adopt Assyrian material culture, and moreover their burial practices.

If the weight of Assyrian presence seems relatively easy to perceive, the question of the Aramaean one is far more complicated to tackle since Aramaeans still remain elusive in many respects, and more particularly in their material culture. The situations, settings and archaeological sites associated with them can be so different, so distant in time, and so far apart, that they resist all attempts to define common cultural traits. The very cautious use of the term 'Aramaean' for archaeological matters is fully justified precisely by this lack of features widely shared by Aramaean groups. Actually the nonexistence of 'one' material culture associated with them could stem from their own nature. Indeed, one may point out the inaccuracy of the idea of a '*sentiment national araméen*', or of a cultural entity clearly identified since even Aramaean rulers never use the term 'Aramaean' to designate themselves, but the expression 'son of PN'<sup>96</sup>. There is finally no reason to search for a cultural or ethnic entity which might not have existed for them. But the consequence of that is the almost complete reluctance of scholars to envisage a possible link between archaeological remains and Aramaean populations. In this paper, I don't intend at all to define Aramaean material culture, but it seemed relevant to me to not systematically deny all archaeological visibility to Aramaeans. The lack of a unique and homogenous Aramaean material culture does not mean nothing could be tied to them. At Tell Shiukh Fawqâni, the development of the cremation cemetery might be associated with Aramaean groups living in the area. Apparently Aramaeans inclined

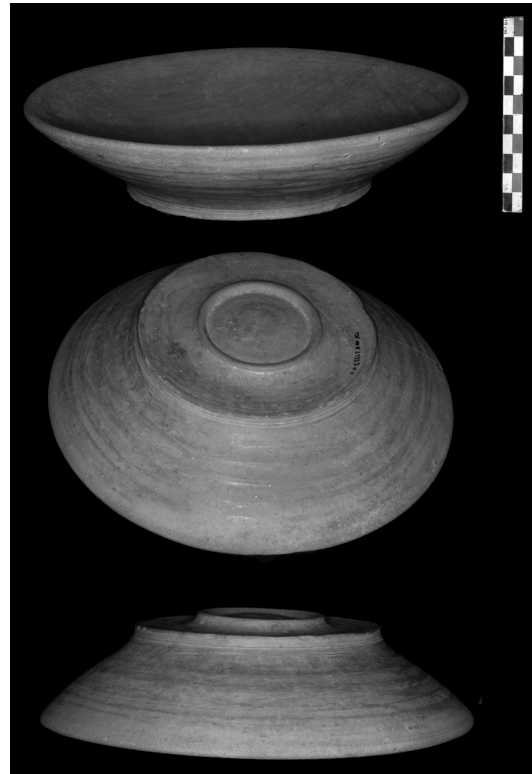


Figure 13: Very low carinated plate  
© A. Pelle.

96. DION 1997, p. 239; SADER 2000, p. 67.

to adopt other cultural features, as proposed also by Jeffrey Schuzman. If so, it is irrelevant to search for common cultural characteristics or “universal” Aramaean hallmarks as well as to deny any accuracy in connecting archaeological sites to Aramaean groups (especially during the EIA) just because such characteristics are not attested in all cases, everywhere at any time.