THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE ROYAL PALACE OF QAṬNA

By Mirko Novák

INTRODUCTION[*]

The archaeological site of Tell Mišrife (Fig. 1) close to the modern town of Mišrife is located 18km north-east of Homs in a large fertile plain situated between the dry steppe of the Palmyra region and the nearby Orontes valley. The site can be identified with the ancient city of Qaṭna, which flourished during the Old and Middle Syrian Period (= Middle and Late Bronze Age).[1] Due to its position at the crossroads between the main north-south route from Anatolia to Egypt and the important east-west route from Mesopotamia through the Syrian Desert to the Mediterranean shore it was one of the major Syrian kingdoms and a commercial centre of outstanding importance.

Previous archaeological work at Tell Mišrife was carried out by Robert Du Mesnil du Buisson from 1924 to 1929.[2] The most extended excavation was placed in the northern part of the upper city, called *Butte de l'Église*. Here, a large architectural complex covering an area of almost 1 ha
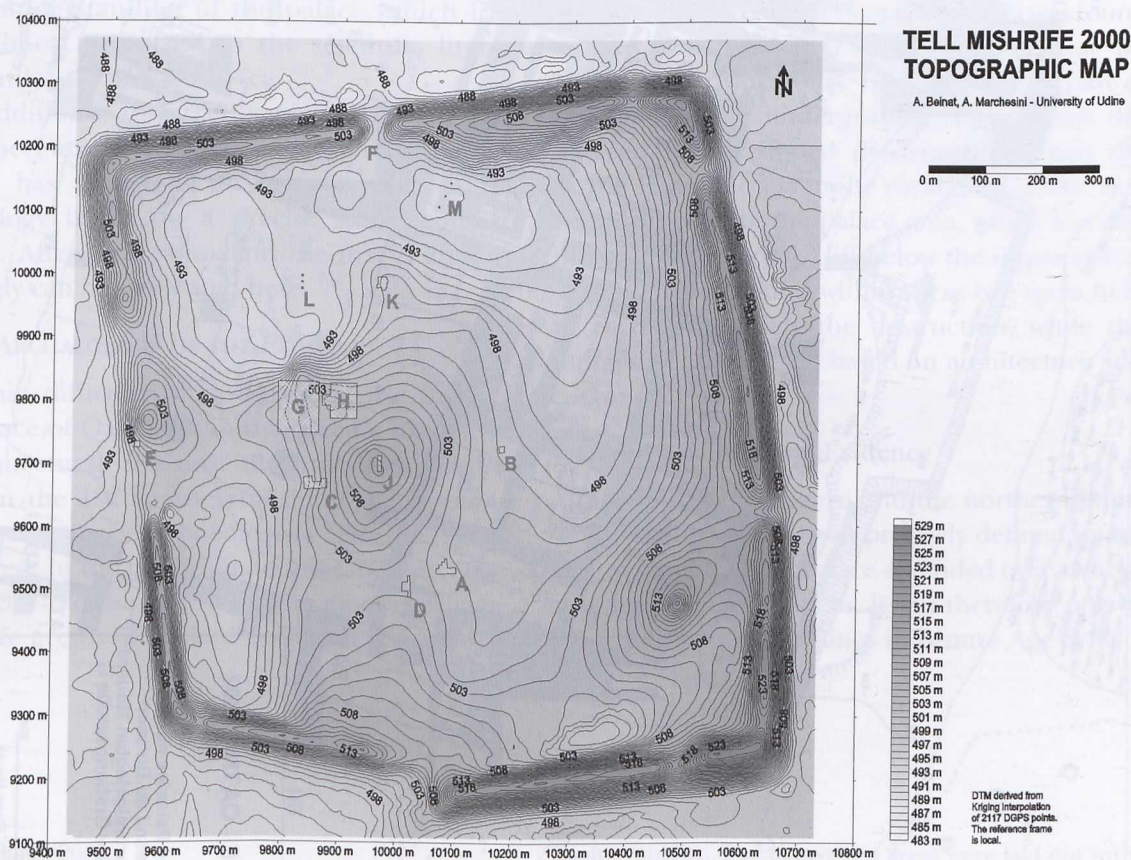

Fig. 1 Topographic Map of Qaṭna (produced by A. Beinat, A. Marchesini)

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[1] For the identification, cf. DU MESNIL DU BUISSON 1927; on the political role of Qaṭna, cf. KLENGEL 2000.

[2] The first campaign was conducted in 1924, the following three from 1927 to 1929. Cf. DU MESNIL DU BUISSON 1926, 1927a, 1927b, 1928, 1930, and 1935.
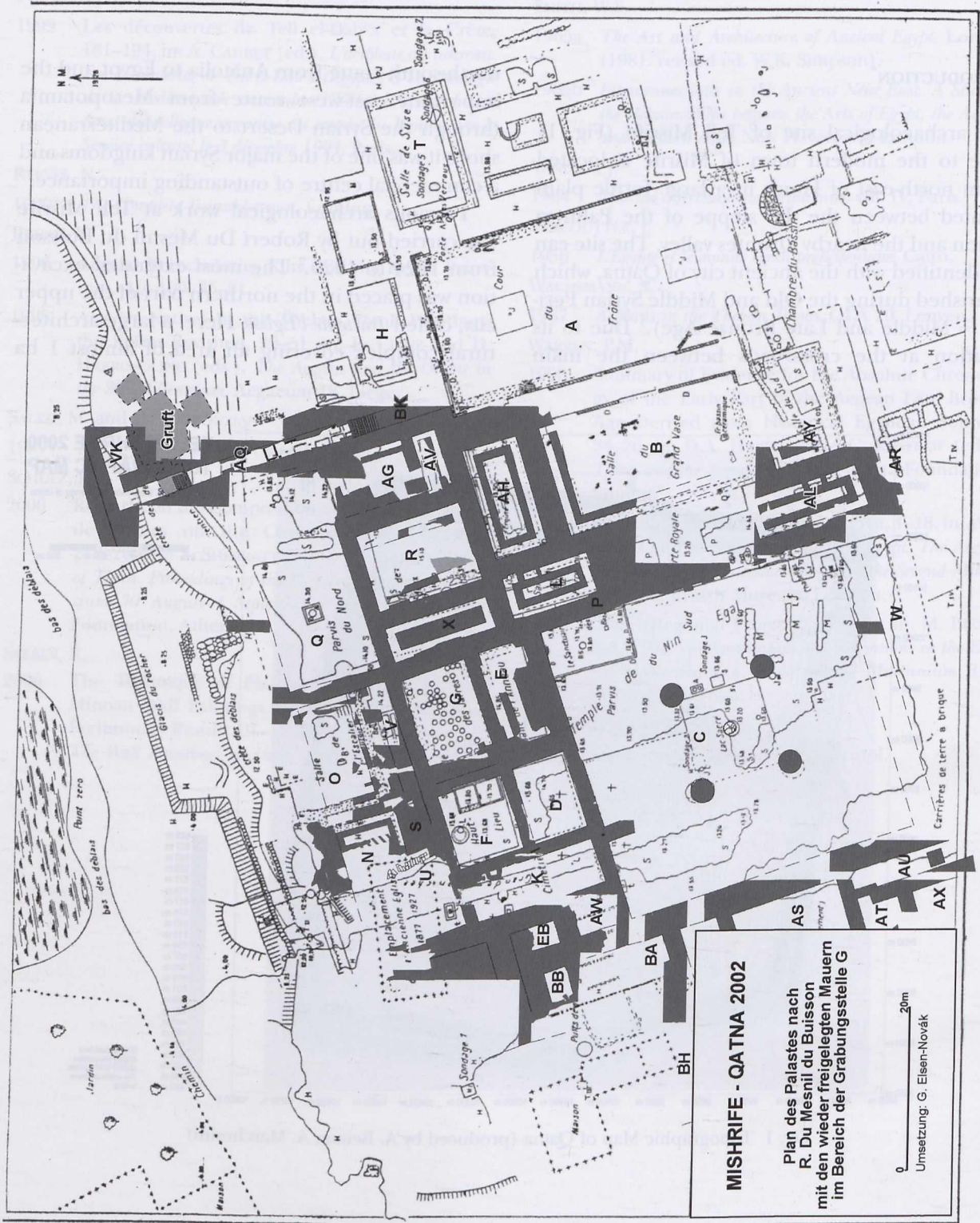
Fig. 2 Plan of the palace as published by Du Mesnil du Buisson (1935) with rediscovered walls (produced by G. Elsen-Novák)

had been exposed (Fig. 2). Du Mesnil du Buisson defined three different units within this complex, which he labelled as "Palace" (*Palais*), "Temple of Bēlet-Ekallim" (*Temple de Nin-Egal*), and "High Place" (*Haut-Lieu*). The reasons for the selection of these three units have not been fully understood, and the architectural layout and the chronology of the building have also remained unclear.

From 1994 to 1998 a Syrian Expedition, directed by Michel Al-Maqdissi, resumed excavations at the site but did not conduct operations in the palace area.[3] In 1999 a joint Syrian-Italian-German archaeological project was initiated,[4] with operations in five different areas.[5] Since the palace of the rulers of ancient Qaṭna must have been one of the most important Bronze Age buildings of Western Syria, one of the main efforts of the new project is its re-excavation and re-evaluation. This study has as its goal a better understanding of the palace, which has been almost neglected in the scientific literature until now.[6]

In addition to the architecture and function of the palace, much of the effort of the recent excavations has aimed at an investigation of its chronology based on a precise stratigraphical analysis. After four campaigns the first results of this study can be presented here.

1. THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE PALACE

The main difficulty of investigating the Bronze Age palace of Qaṭna lies in the specific history of its architectural remains after the first exploration in the 1920s. After finishing their operations the French archaeologists left the ruins uncovered. In the following decades, between the early 1930s and the late 1970s, the modern village of Mišrife grew rapidly and occupied the area of

the ancient palace. The remaining walls were removed by the inhabitants and the hard gypsum-mortar floors of the Bronze Age were partly reused as floors of the new houses. Nearly the entire original inventory of the rooms has been taken away during the French excavations or the following decades. This made it quite unlikely for us to get good finds of objects *in situ* and thereby indications of the chronology of the palace.[7]

Fortunately the intact foundation walls reach to a depth of nearly 4 m below the original floor level, so that the layout of the building can be completely reconstructed (Figs. 2, 3). It was with unexpected luck that two subterranean areas of the palace have been discovered and partly excavated during the last three campaigns, in which the original inventory dating to the destruction phase had remained undiscovered: In the northwestern corner of the palace a cistern was placed within the basement, Room U. Here, part of the inventory of the neighbouring Room N was found in the debris of the collapsed wall that lay between the two rooms. In the northern part of the building an underground corridor was discovered, which sloped downwards towards the north. It gave access to the royal tomb at the very northern edge of the palace area, which was dug into the natural rock cliff below the upper town.

The objects found within these two spots help us to date precisely the destruction, while the foundation date is still based on architecture and ceramics.

1.1. The Architectural Evidence

Although just the eastern and the northern limits of the building have been precisely defined so far, it turned out that the palace extended over an area of at least 135 m × 100 m. It was therefore one of the largest known buildings in Bronze Age Syria.

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[3] AL-MAQDISSI 2001.

[4] The project is co-directed by Dr. Michel Al-Maqdissi, Dr. Daniele Morandi Bonacossi and Prof. Dr. Peter Pfälzner. Scientific responsibility is shared by the three directors and Dr. Marta Luciani (vice-director of the Italian component) and the author of the present paper (field director of the German component).

[5] Cf. AL-MAQDISSI *et al.* 2002; NOVÁK and PFÄLZNER 2000, 2001, 2002 and 2003.

[6] Work in the Bronze Age palace of Qaṭna is a co-operation of the Italian and the German components of the

joint mission. Two excavation areas were laid out within the palace, Operation G in the western part of the building where the German team is working, and Operation H in the eastern part where an Italian team under the local supervision of Andrea Barro MA is active.

[7] The chance to work in the palace was made possible in 1982 through the complete abandonment of the village that had covered the whole western part of the ancient settlement site. This is due to the engagement of the Directorate General of Museums and Antiquities in Damascus.
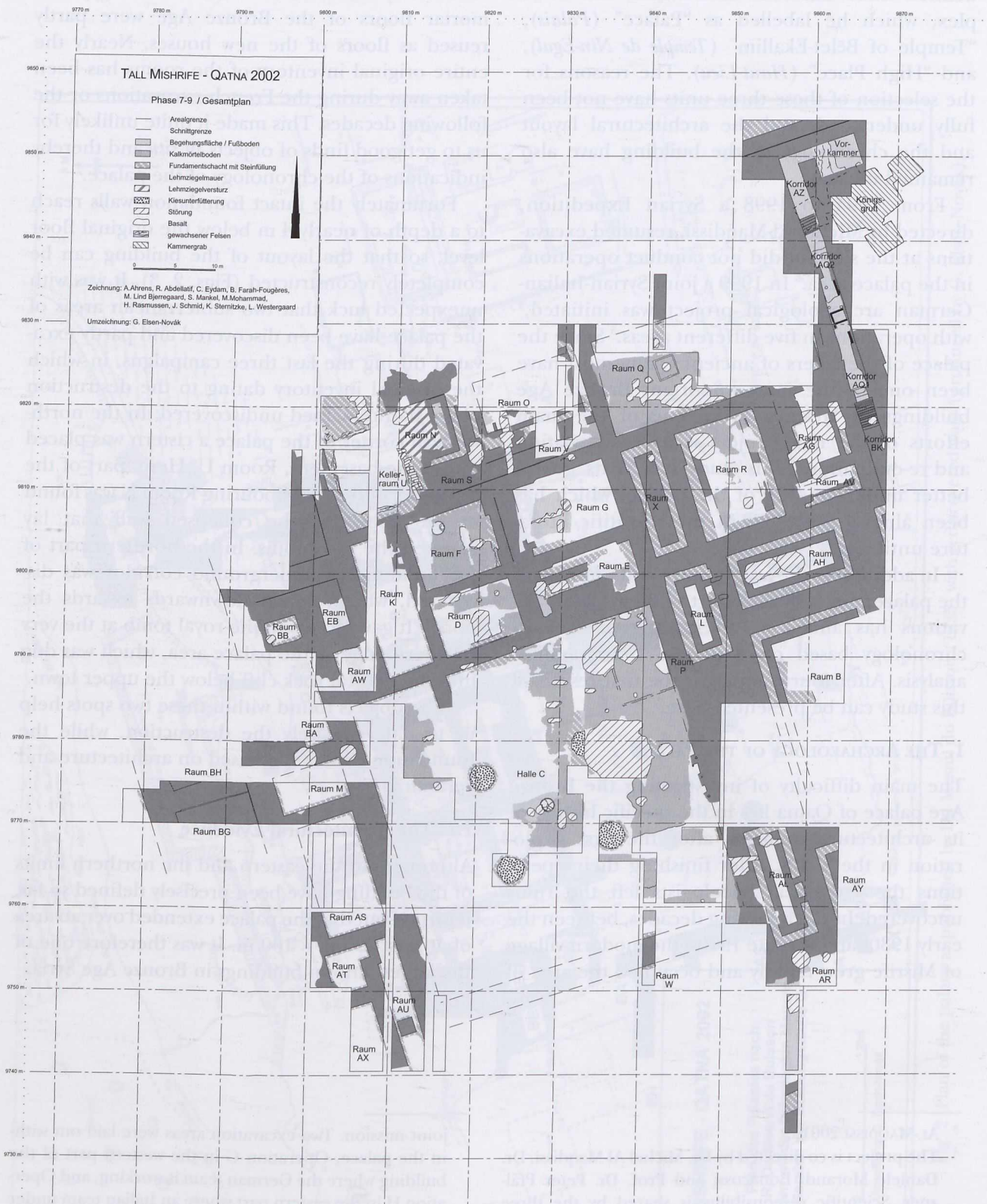
Fig. 3 Plan of the palace in Operation G (drawing by G. Elsen-Novák)

Fig. 4 Overview on the palace area with foundation walls seen from west (photo by G. Mirsch)

The most unusual feature was the technique of the foundations (Fig. 4): They consisted of mud brick "core walls", which reached to a depth of nearly 4 m. They were extremely thick, in one case reaching even 10 m in width. For the purpose of drainage they were flanked by so-called *couloirs*, narrow corridors filled with stones, and retaining walls made of mud bricks. Both, *couloirs* and retaining walls, were originally covered by the floors of the palace.

The largest room of the building was the monumental Hall C, named as the "Temple of Bēlet-Ekallim (NIN É.GAL)" by Du Mesnil du Buisson, which extended over an area of 37 m × 37 m. Four columns were originally placed on basalt bases and carried the ceiling. Their round, very deep foundation pits were plastered with large limestone blocks and were completely filled with pebbles. In the centre there was the so-called *lac sacré*, a circular monolithic basalt basin of 1,60 m in diameter. In the north-eastern corner of Hall C two channels were found that separated the so-called *sanctuaire* of the Temple of Bēlet-Ekallim. It was the place where Du Mesnil du Buisson had found cuneiform tablets and other objects such as an Egyptian sphinx of the 12th dynasty.[8]

To the east of Hall C two large rooms were found. The layout of both of them reflects the so-called *Breitraum* type, with the entrances along the long walls of these rectangular rooms. The first of these rooms was Room B, which was connected to Hall C by a monumental *porticus* in the centre of the dividing wall, the so-called *Porte Royale*. Room B was flanked on both of the short sides of the rectangular room by two small side-chambers with wide openings. They gave access to the second large room, Room A, lying east of Room B and greater in size than Room B. It is unknown if

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[8] For the distribution of the objects, cf. Du Mesnil du Buisson 1928, pl. VII.

these two representation rooms were roofed over completely. The width of Room A measures about 20 m, nearly 2 m more than the throne room in the Late-Babylonian palace of Babylon. The vicinity of Qaṭna to the mountains of Lebanon, and thus to the cedar forests, probably allowed the kings of this powerful city to acquire wooden beams that were long enough to cover the room despite its extraordinary dimensions.

The northern side-chamber of Room B, labelled as Room AH, was connected to a small Room (AV) and gave access to the royal tomb through a series of rooms that measured 60 m, including a staircase (Room BK) and a long corridor (AQ). The whole series may be considered as a processional entry to the sphere of the netherworld with ritual function (Fig. 5). The inventory of these subterranean rooms, including the tomb itself, was still *in situ*.

In the filling debris of corridor AQ a part of the royal archive consisting of 67 complete or fragmentary tablets was found. It was originally deposited in a room located at least in part above the corridor. As a result of the destruction by fire of the palace, the roof of the corridor (which was also the floor of the archive room) collapsed.

To the west of the reconstructed archive room, above the subterranean corridor, there was an extended room (Q) at the northern edge of the palace, which may be identified as a kind of "panorama room". It was connected with a small courtyard to the south and two corridors to the west. The two corridors gave access to Room N, a square room with polychrome wall paintings inside.

Room N was adjoining the basement Room U in the north-western corner of the palace. Here a cistern was cut into the natural bedrock (Fig. 6). It was the only installation for water supply found in the palace to date. The cistern was filled with the rubble of the collapsed walls, floors and inventory of Room N, neighbouring Room U to the east, with a 7 m higher floor level. Within the debris from room U, nearly 4000 fragments of the wall plaster with a high quality painted decoration were found.[9]

Fig. 5 Corridor AQ (photo by K. Wita)

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[9] Cf. PFÄLZNER *infra*.

Fig. 6 Room U with cistern and rubble of Room N (photo by G. Mirsch)

The comparative analysis of the architectural layout of the palaces of Qaṭna and Mari[10] as well as other Old Babylonian residential buildings yields some possibilities for a chronological understanding:[11] The spatial organisation shows striking similarities, mostly in the central representational wing. They are formed by an inner courtyard, and a sequence of two rooms, the so-called *Thronsaal-Festsaal-Gruppe* in the terminology of E. Heinrich.[12] Hall C in Qaṭna is typologically comparable with Court 106 of the palace of Mari. Room B and A, which could be entered from Hall C, form a sequence of two representative halls parallel to Rooms 64 and 65 in the Palace of Zimri-Lim. In both buildings the larger room lies behind the smaller one and shows a similar access pattern.

The main difference between Old Babylonian palaces and the palace of Qaṭna lies in the use and frequency of columns and column bases made of basalt. Even Hall C was, contrary to Court 106 in Mari, completely covered with the help of columns. The reason for that may be found in two specific features: First, there was much more rain in Western Syria than in Babylonia; therefore, open courtyards were (and are today) less frequent in Syria. Second, wood was much more available in the areas close to the coastal mountains of the Levant. In Babylonia, good wood like cedars must have been imported from far away.

The consideration of the architecture of the palace of Qaṭna brings us the following results:

1. The three architectural units of the palace area of Qaṭna, as defined by Du Mesnil du Buisson, belong to one and the same building.

2. The layout of the palace of Qaṭna can be best compared with Old Babylonian palace architecture; most of the other known Syrian

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[10] Cf. MARGUERON 1982: 209ff. and HEINRICH 1984: 68ff.
[11] Cf. NOVÁK and PFÄLZNER 2000.
[12] Cf. HEINRICH 1984: 74.

palaces of this period follow quite different layout patterns.

3. The foundation of the palace probably should be dated into the Old Syrian Period (Middle Bronze Age), contemporary to the Old Babylonian Period in Mesopotamia; later buildings, both in Mesopotamia and in Syria, show completely different layouts.

1.2. The Ceramic Evidence[13]

After the architectural indications, the ceramics found within the palace give the most precise information used in reconstructing the chronology of the palace. The majority of well-stratified pottery assemblages belonged either to the fill layers (= Phase G 9 in the stratigraphical sequence) sealed by the floors of the palace (= Phase G 8) or to the layer of its latest use (= Phase G 7).

Most of the sherds from Phase G 9 date to the Middle Bronze Age I and the transition from Middle Bronze Age I to II (Fig. 7). A type found in relatively high percentages is a flat bowl with a slightly retracted rim. An example is sherd MSH 99G-q0253-2, another one with a larger rim diameter is MSH 99G-q0118-1). Comparisons can be found throughout Western Syria like Hama, Ebla,

MSH 99 G - q0258-3

MSH 99 G - q0118-1

MSH 99 G - q0213-1

0   5 cm

MSH 99 G - i0024

MSH 00 G - i0154

MSH 00 G - i0153
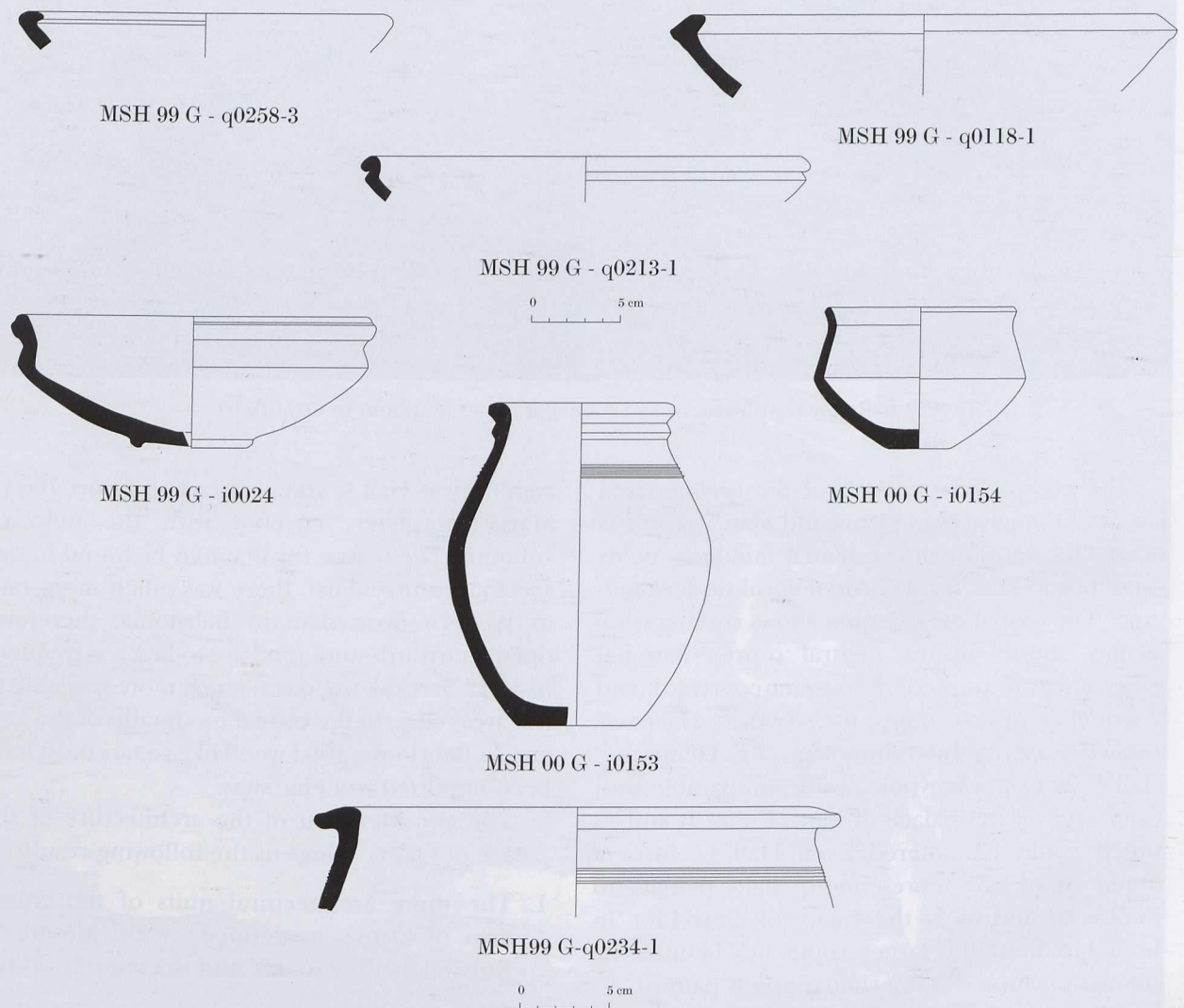
MSH99 G-q0234-1

0   5 cm

Fig. 7 Ceramic from Phase G 9 (drawings by G. Elsen-Novák and S. Mankel)

[13] The ceramics are studied by Dr. Uwe Sievertsen (Tübingen). For first preliminary reports cf. NOVÁK and PFÄLZNER 2000: 285ff. and 2001: 192f., and SIEVERT-SEN *apud* NOVÁK and PFÄLZNER 2002: 239ff. For more detailed quotation of comparisons see there.

Alalaḫ and Halawa. The same applies to bowls with a slightly stepped rim (e.g., MSH 99G-q0213-1). Another very characteristic shape is the carinated beaker with or without a base ring, such as MSH 99G-i0024. As P. Gerstenblith has stressed, this kind of beaker is very typical of the Middle Bronze Age I.[14] It is found from the Levant to Baghuz in Eastern Syria.[15]

A number of jars, pots and bottles from Phase G 9 show the typical Middle Bronze Age combed decoration at the shoulders, either in horizontal or in waved lines.[16]

In Grave 34, which belongs to Phase G 9, two complete vessels were found: a carinated beaker and a small pot with a double rim and combed decoration on the shoulder. Both date to the Middle Bronze Age, most likely to the transition of Middle Bronze Age I and II.

The Middle Bronze Age sherds of Phase G 9 are mingled with a relatively high amount of Early Bronze Age IV types, like the so-called "Hama-Beakers"[17] (or "Caliciform Ware"). These beakers indicate an earlier occupation of the area dating to the late 3rd millennium BC.

An indication for the dating of the destruction horizon of the palace is found in the ceramics from Phase G 7, the latest occupation phase of the palace. A high number of sherds and vessels were found in Room G, the so-called *Salle des Jarres*.[18] As published elsewhere, the majority apparently dates to the Late Bronze Age I, but is mixed with a number of Middle Bronze Age sherds.[19] Another very important find area is corridor AQ with the royal tomb. The material belongs not only to the subterranean rooms, but also to the above chambers including the archive room which, in the destruction of the palace, fell into the spaces below.

The most frequent type of pottery found here is that of a flat bowl or a deep plate without pronounced rim (Fig. 8). In several cases the inner and outer side shows a horizontal strip of painted red decoration close to the rim. This kind of plate is very characteristic of the Late Bronze Age I and II and is found from the Levant to Southern Mesopotamia.

In the debris of Room BJ, which was originally located above the antechamber, and inside the royal tomb some luxury goods of specific pottery wares were discovered: two goblets of the so-called "Nuzi-Ware" found inside the tomb and three bowls of Cypriote "White-Slip-II-Ware" were discovered in the filling of the antechamber next to sherds of large storage jars.

A long discussion has taken place about the definition, nature, chronology, and distribution of the so-called "Nuzi-Ware" (Fig. 9).[20] One of the major questions is its relation to the so-called "Ḫābūr-Ware", which itself can be distinguished into an older and a younger variant. Most scholars prefer to define the "Nuzi-Ware" in a narrow sense, with elaborated white-on-black-painting as characteristic feature.[21] The "Ḫābūr-Ware", both the older and the younger one, show simple red painting on a light ground. Forms and technological advances found in the younger variant are clearly related to the proper "Nuzi-Ware". Therefore, some authors subsume both together as "Nuzi-Ware" in a wider sense.[22] Anyhow, it seems more justified to define "Nuzi-Ware" in a more narrow sense, irrespective of the fact that the younger "Ḫābūr-Ware" may be seen just as a simple and, importantly, a local Northern Mesopotamian imitation of elaborated "Nuzi-Ware".

Proper "Nuzi-Ware" can be distinguished in itself into an eastern and a western variant; the latter also labelled as "Açana-Ware". The difference lies in the decoration: The eastern one employs primarily geometric patterns, the western one mostly floral decor.[23]

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[14] GERSTENBLITH 1983: 79f.

[15] NEUFANG n.d., Form 5, Variant 1. It is noteworthy here that the ceramic from Qaṭna reveals many parallels to that found in Baghuz (TUBB 1982: 61ff.).

[16] On the combed decoration of Middle Bronze Age pottery, cf. KASCHAU 1999: 101ff.

[17] For "Hama-Beakers" and the "Caliciform-Ware", cf. MAZZONI 1985: 1ff.; ORTHMANN and ROVA 1991: 106ff.; ROVA 1996: 24f.

[18] For the ceramics found by the French archaeologists within the *Salle des Jarres*, cf. DU MESNIL DU BUISSON 1935: 95f.

[19] On the ceramic found in Room G cf. NOVÁK and PFÄLZNER 2000: 288ff. Phase G 7 was labelled there as "Schicht G 4".

[20] Cf. STEIN 1984; HROUDA 1989; PFÄLZNER 1995: 238ff.; POSTGATE et al. 1997: 54f.; OATES et al. 1997: 67f.; and the references cited there.

[21] POSTGATE et al. 1997: 54 f.; OATES et al. 1997: 67f.

[22] Cf. PFÄLZNER 1995: 238ff.; HROUDA 1989.

[23] STEIN 1984: 28.

Fig. 8 Flat plate of Phase G 7 with tablets of the "Archive of Idanda" (photo by G. Mirsch)

Fig. 9 Two beakers of "Nuzi-Ware" found inside the Royal Tomb (photo by K. Wita)

Fig. 10 Bowl of "White-Slip-II-Ware" (photo by K. Wita)

"Nuzi-Ware" appears to have been closely connected with the Mittani empire: In a chronological sense, the ware is not attested in levels which predate the formation of the empire in the late 16th century, and it became less frequent after its destruction in the 14th century.[24] The spatial distribution of "Nuzi-Ware" stretched from Northern Syria to the Zagros Ranges, matching exactly the empire's area of political expansion. We find quite good parallels for our material in the "Nuzi-Beakers" found in the palace of Level IV in Alalaḫ.[25]

The three bowls of "White-Slip-II-Ware" were found in Room BJ above the antechamber of the royal tomb, close to a storage jar (Fig. 10).[26] They belong to a variety, which dates to Late Bronze Age I–IIA, or the late 15th to early 14th century BC.[27]

The preliminary analysis of the ceramic found in the palace of Qaṭna indicates that the foundation of the building must have occurred during the transition phase of Middle Bronze Age I and II, most likely the 18th or 17th century. The destruction should be dated to the 14th century.

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[24] Just a few examples were found in levels dating to the 13th century, for example in Dur-Kurigalzu (STEIN 1989: 57).

[25] Cf. STEIN 1989: pl. XV, 13. The palace of Level IV in Alalaḫ was most probably erected immediately after the time of king Idrimi, contemporary of Mittani king Parrattarna I (ca. 1470 BC), and in use during the reign of his son Niqmepa and his grandson Ilimilima. It was destroyed by the Hittite king Šuppiluliuma I. A large number of "White-Slip-II-Ware" (TODD 2001: 209) appeared side by side with "Base-Ring-II-Ware" and Mycenean ceramic of Phase Late Helladic IIIA. "Nuzi-

Ware" became common just shortly before the destruction of Level IV (STEIN 1989: 41).

[26] This situation is reminiscent of attestation of "milk bowls" covering storage jars at Tell Abu Hawam (cf. ARTZY 2001: 113, fig. 6).

[27] Cf. FISCHER 2001: 167, table 1. "White-Slip-II-Ware" is frequently attested at the sites of the coastal plains of Northern Levant but quite rare in the interior (YON 2001). In Qaṭna just one sherd of "White-Slip-II-Ware" has been discovered by Du Mesnil du Buisson (cf. DU MESNIL DU BUISSON 1935: 34f.; YON 2001: 122).
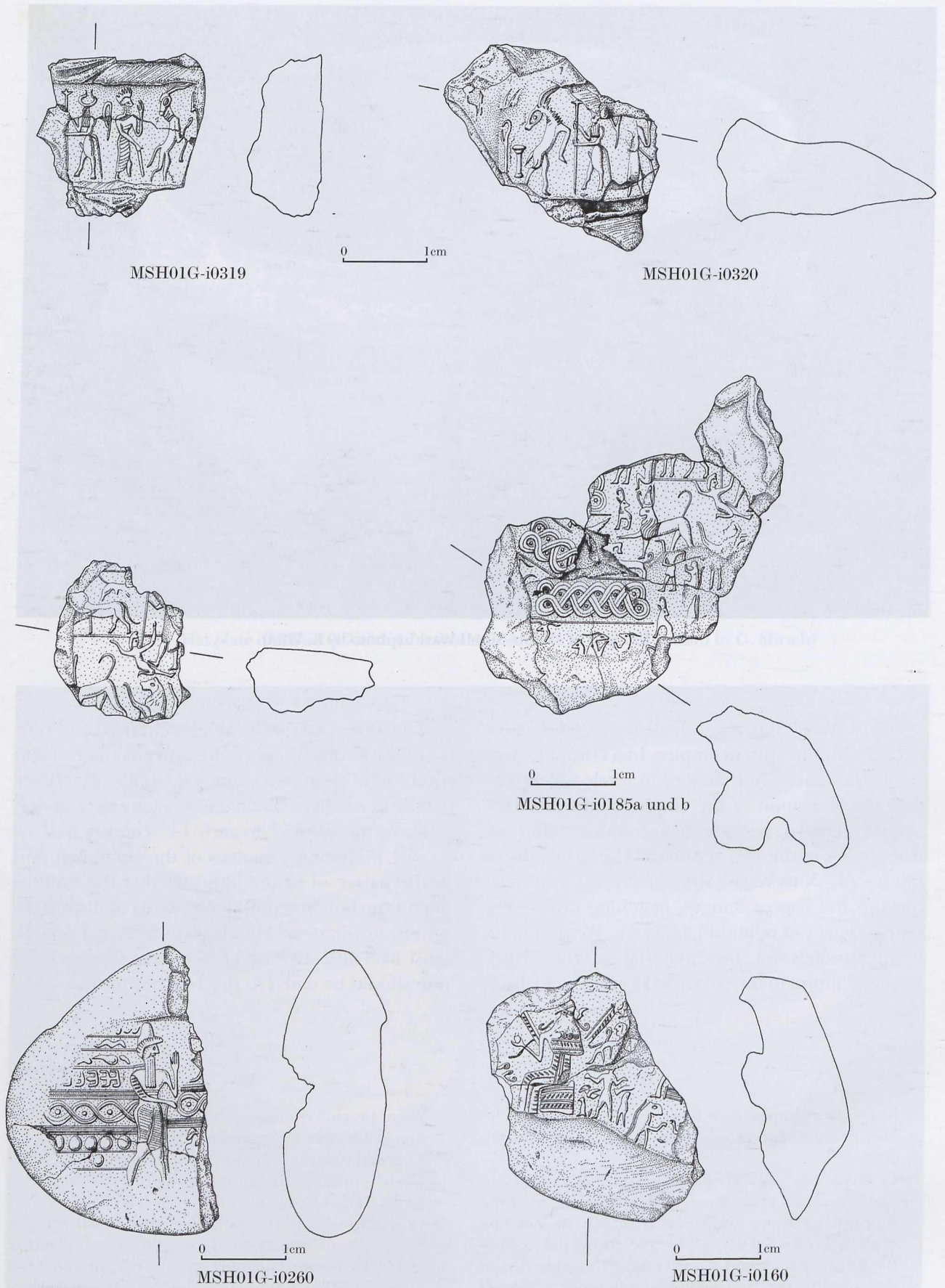
MSH01G-i0319

MSH01G-i0320

0   1cm

MSH01G-i0185a und b

0   1cm

MSH01G-i0260

0   1cm

MSH01G-i0160

0   1cm

Fig. 11 Examples of Old Syrian glyptic from the palace (drawings by G. Elsen-Novák)

1.3. The Glyptic Evidence[28]

Besides the architecture and the ceramics there are some other objects which help to define the chronology of the palace. The most significant is the glyptic evidence, which is represented by 11 cylinder seals and about 400 seal impressions on clay impressions of doorjambs, on clay vessel sealings or on cuneiform tablets (Fig. 11).[29] Most of them were found in filling material near door thresholds, while some of them come from the debris of the collapse of Room N. Other find spots were the material in the corridor, the tablets of the archive, and the royal tomb.

Based on stylistic grounds, the majority of the glyptic can be dated to the second half of the Old Syrian Period. These seals belong to the so-called "Classical Syrian Style", which starts more or less with the time of the archive of Zimri-Lim in Mari.[30] Just a few examples from the glyptic evidence predate this period, while a higher number date to the early Middle Syrian Period.

The range of motifs is very broad and in some cases unique; the style is of high quality with a fine modellation of the figures.[31] A characteristic feature of the Qaṭna sealings both of the Old and Middle Syrian Period is the frequent appearance of Egyptian motifs and elements.[32] This provides further evidence for the chronology, since such motifs are not attested in the Syrian glyptic before Šamši-Adad I (ca. 1710–1679 BC)[33] and the archive of level VII at Alalaḫ.[34] Hittite influence is absent with one exception,[35] Mittani influence is quite limited.

The glyptic evidence indicates a lifespan of the palace from the middle of the Old Syrian to the beginning or middle of the Middle Syrian Period, which matches the comparisons made both with the ceramic corpus and the architecture.

1.4. Conclusion

On the basis of the material culture the following reconstruction of the chronology of the palace can be presented:

The building was founded in the middle of the Old Syrian Period (= transition Middle Bronze Age I to II), more or less in the period of the archives of Mari (18th to 17th century BC). It was in use during the second half of the Old Syrian and the first half of the Middle Syrian Period (Middle Bronze Age II to Late Bronze Age I) and most likely destroyed in the 14th century.

This hypothesis is supported by a number of other objects found in the palace: Two statues discovered on either side of the entrance of the royal tomb date clearly to the Old Syrian Period and show close relations to the so-called "Head of Yarim-Lim" from Alalaḫ (Level VII) and a number of statues from Ebla.[36] These statues mark the foundation of the royal tomb and also of the palace.

A number of stone vessels discovered in the corridor and inside the royal tomb show close relation to vessels found in the so-called *Schatzhaus* in Kumidi, a tomb that dates to more or less the same period as the latest use of our tomb in Qaṭna.[37]

2. The Historical Framework[38]

To connect the archaeological information with the relative and absolute chronology, one should present a brief overview of the history of Qaṭna, as known from external sources and the cuneiform tablets found in the palace.

2.1. External Sources about the History of Qaṭna

As known so far, the toponym of Qaṭna does not appear in textual sources of the 3rd millennium BC, neither in Ebla nor in Mesopotamia. Since

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[28] The seals and seal impressions are studied by Gabriele Elsen-Novák MA (Tübingen). For first results cf. ELSEN-NOVÁK 2002.

[29] Cf. G. ELSEN-NOVÁK *apud* NOVÁK and PFÄLZNER 2003.

[30] On this terminology and the stylistic criteria cf. OTTO 2000.

[31] Cf. ELSEN-NOVÁK 2002.

[32] On Egyptian motifs in Syrian glyptic cf. EDER 1995, TEISSIER 1996 and BIETAK 1998.

[33] The date of the reign of Šamši-Adad I follows GASCHE *et al.* 1998, modified in *Akkadica* 108: 1ff.

[34] COLLON 1975; for the relative chronology of Alalaḫ cf.

HEINZ 1992.

[35] NOVÁK and PFÄLZNER 2001: 189, Fig. 21.

[36] On the statues and their dating cf. NOVÁK and PFÄLZNER 2003.

[37] On the *Schatzhaus* cf. MIRON 1990 and ADLER 1994.

[38] An overview on the history of Qaṭna as known from external sources was presented by KLENGEL 2000. The textual material from Operation G in the palace of Qaṭna including the royal archive is studied by Thomas Richter (Frankfurt). On the first results cf. RICHTER 2002a, 2002b and 2003.

archaeological material indicates an occupation of the site of Mišrife it seems it had another name during that period.

If a recently proposed identification is right, the first mention of Qaṭna was in the so-called "Sinuhe-tale" dating to the reign of Pharaoh Sesostris I.[39]

The archives of the kings of Mari provide the next source of information, dating to the 18th and 17th century BC. In this period Qaṭna, or more precisely "Qaṭanum", was one of the most powerful kingdoms not only in Syria, but also in the whole Near East, and the main counterpart and rival of its northern neighbour Yamḫad with its capital Ḫalab (Aleppo).[40] Both cities were in close contact with Mesopotamian rulers, such as Šamši-Adad I of Assyria and Hammurabi of Babylon. During this period, Qaṭna was ruled by an Amorite dynasty[41], with the kings Išʿī-Ḫadda and Amut-pī-ʿEl. It is still unclear if these two rulers were in contact with the (presumably) contemporary Egyptian king Neferhotep I. As is attested by inscriptions, this Pharaoh had commercial relations with king Yantin-ʿAmmu of Byblos, who is also mentioned in the archive of Zimri-Lim of Mari.[42]

Nearly nothing is known about the history of Qaṭna during the following centuries until the so-called "Amarna-Period". Historical sources

seem to confirm that Qaṭna was a small vassal-state under the control of the Mittani empire during this period.[43] The city is mentioned several times by Egyptian kings who passed by the city during their campaigns to Syria.[44] At that time, the city was inhabited by Amorites and Hurrians, as is attested by the onomasticon of the "Inventory of the Temple of Bēlet-Ekallim" found in the palace of Qaṭna during the French excavations.[45] Some names of kings are mentioned in these texts without any precise dating: Naplimma, Sinadu, Ḫaddu-nīrarī, Ulašuda and Idadda. None of them were known from other sources so far.[46]

The last known king of Qaṭna was Akizzi, who wrote at least four letters to the Egyptian king Akhenaton (Amenophis IV, 1349–1333 BC[47]) with the request for support against the aggressive Hittite king Šuppiluliuma I (ca. 1343–1318/6 BC[48]). The Hittite sources mention the siege and destruction of Qaṭna during his so-called "one-year-campaign" to Syria.[49] Still, there is no proof that both events are one and the same.

Although there is some evidence of an occupation of the site after this event, it is obvious that Qaṭna had lost its importance. There is just one possible appearance of the toponym of Qaṭna in the tablets of Emar that date to the thirteenth century BC.[50]

[39] SCHNEIDER 2002. No historical information is given in this text except the fact that the city might have been of high political importance even in that time.

[40] KLENGEL 2000.

[41] For the Amorites and their significance in the 2nd millennium, cf. BUCCELLATI 1990 and STRECK 2000.

[42] HELCK 1971: 64.

[43] KLENGEL 2000: 247ff.

[44] KÜHNE 1982: 203ff. King Thutmosis III avoided attacking Qaṭna during his campaigns, although the city appeared to be an enemy of the Egyptian troops (HELCK 1971: 157). Instead of Qaṭna, the cities of Tunip and Qadeš are mentioned as the main opponents of the Egyptians in central Syria.

[45] BOTTÉRO 1949; for the other tablets found at Qaṭna, cf. BOTTÉRO 1950.

[46] KLENGEL 2000.

[47] For the chronology cf. VON BECKERATH 1997.

[48] The absolute chronology of Šuppiluliuma I depends on the dating of the so-called "Daḫamunzu-affair". During his siege of Karkamiš he received a letter of the widow of the late Egyptian Pharaoh, who is named Niphururia and can be identified either as Akhenaton (Nfr-ḫpr.w-Rʿ) or as Tutankhamun (Nb-ḫpr.w-Rʿ). The widow is named Daḫamunzu, which derived from Egypt

ta hemet nesu "wife of the king". Queen Daḫamunzu can therefore be identified either with Meret-Aton, wife of Akhenaton and Semankhkare (KÜHNE 1999: 221; PARKER 2002), or Nofretete (REEVES 2002: 204ff.), or Ankhes-en-Amun, wife of Tutankhamun (VAN DEN HOUT 1994: 85; HACHMANN 2001: 149; KLENGEL 2002: 45.). WILHELM and BOESE (1987) argue for an identification with the widow of Semankhkare and calculate therefore the reign of Šuppiluliuma I from 1343–1322/18. But if she was indeed the widow of Tutankhamun, as is nowadays widely preferred, then the "affair" about the desire of the Egyptian queen to marry a son of the Hittite king occurred (after the chronology of VON BECKERATH 1997) in the year 1322. Following FREU (1992: 94ff.) Šuppiluliuma must have outlived this correspondence and the murder of his son by at least six years. This would mean that his reign lasted from 1343–1316 BC.

[49] For the chronology of the Hittite campaigns cf. KLENGEL 1999 and 2000: 248f and FREU 1992: 94.

[50] ADAMTHWAITE 1995: 94. But it is unclear, however, if the place Qaṭna mentioned there as having been attacked by Aramean tribes should be identified with Qaṭna (Tell Mišrife) in central Syria or with Qaṭni (Tall Fadġami or Tell aš-Šamsani) in the Ḫābūr-region.

2.2. The "Archive of Idanda"[51]

67 complete or fragmentary cuneiform tablets were discovered in the debris filling corridor AQ during the campaign of 2002 (Fig. 8). They have been stored in flat bowls of typical Late Bronze Age shape in the room extending above the subterranean corridor. Most of the texts are legal documents and lists, but five of them are letters written by men named Takuwa, Ḥanute and Šarrutaše and addressed to a certain Idanda. None of the senders is qualified by a title. The first two of them were surely equal in position to Idanda since they call themselves his "brothers", while the latter was subordinate to him and addressed him as his "father".[52] Idanda is most certainly to be identified with king Idadda, known as the latest patron of the Temple of Bēlet-Ekallim from the "Inventory". One legal document was written in the reign of king Ḥaddu-nīrarī, also known from the "Inventory" as the predecessor of Idadda. This ruler is probably to be identified with a ruler of the country of Nuḫašše with the same name, known from the "Amarna letters".[53]

Unfortunately none of the texts of the archive give a precise date to help to connect them with the chronology of Late Bronze Age Syria. At least, a "King of Ḥatti" is mentioned who was raiding in Northern Syria and who is said to have "destroyed" the Mittani empire. Now, there are two possibilities: Either the well known campaigns of king Šuppiluliuma I against Mittani and its Syrian vassals as mentioned in the so-called "Šattiwaza-treaty"

(CTH 51) and the "Deeds" (CTH 40),[54] or the campaign of king Tutḫaliya I (ca. 1420–1400 BC), known from the treaty of Muwatalli II and Talmi-Šarruma of Ḥalab (CTH 75).[55]

The historical context makes it more likely that Idanda should be dated to the reign of Šuppiluliuma I and Ḥanute, who, as one of the senders of the letters, can be identified with a general of the Hittite king.[56] Ḥaddu-nīrarī, known as an opponent of Šuppiluliuma I, might have been removed from his throne by the Hittites during the so-called "one-year-campaign". He was replaced by Idanda, who was allied with the Hittites. During the absence of the Hittite army from Syria between the "one-year-campaign" and the "six-year-campaign", about 13 years later, Tušratta of Mittani managed to re-establish his power and political control over Northern and Central Syria. He might have also defeated Idanda, though this is not attested in any ancient source. The last known king of Qaṭna, Akizzi, was again attacked by the Hittites and their allies and contacted the Egyptian Pharaoh in hope of support.

If this reconstruction of historical events is correct, the palace of Qaṭna might have been destroyed in the time between the two main campaigns of Šuppiluliuma I in Syria, e.g. more or less around 1340 BC.

2.3. Historical Conclusions

On the basis of historical information, the kingdom of Qaṭna lasted from the 19th to the 14th century, with a few attestations of an existence of the

DATE	PERIOD	RULER OF QAṬNA	SYNCHRONISM
1700 BC	Old Syrian	Išʻī-Ḥaddu | Amūt-pī-ʻEl	Šamšī-Adad of Assyria Zimrī-Lim of Mari
		⋮	
1340 BC	Middle Syrian	Naplimma Sinadi Ḥaddu-nīrarī Idanda Akizzi	⋮ Šuppiluliuma I of Ḥatti and Akhnaton of Egypt

Fig. 12 Rulers of Qaṭna and synchronisms

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51 On the "archive of Idanda" cf. Richter 2002b and 2003.

52 This does not mean that there was a biological relation between them. In Akkadian letter formulas hierarchical relations were expressed by family terminology ("brother" to equals, "father" to higher ranking persons, "son" to subordinates).

53 On Ḥaddu-nīrarī of Nuḫašše and some of his political activities cf. Altman 2001a and 2001b.

54 Klengel 1999: 138 (A 4).

55 Klengel 1999: 114.

56 On the reasons for these conclusions and the historical context cf. Richter 2002b and 2003.

city itself until the 13th century. The climax of its power was, based on the material known so far, during the reign of Išš̌ī-Ḥadda, an ally of Šamšī-Adad I of Assyria (Fig. 12). It was the time not only of military and political power but also of extraordinary commercial and economic importance, as reflected in the texts found in Mari.

Nothing is known about the circumstances and the date of Qaṭna's loss of independence. It became a vassal of Mittani empire in the late 16th century. As the letters of the recently discovered archive of Idanda prove, the king of Qaṭna was still able to make his own policy to a certain degree. Anyhow, the conflicts between the main powers of the time involved all of the Syrian kingdoms and made it difficult to find a balance between the empires. It seems as if the kings of Qaṭna failed in this respect, so that its importance vanished towards the end of the 14th century BC.

3. Conclusion

Now let us finally reconsider both archaeological and epigraphic evidence to establish the chronology of the palace of Qaṭna (Fig. 13).

The historical sources provide information about the city of Qaṭna from the 19th to the 13th century BC with the climax of commercial and political power in the 18th and 17th centuries BC. Archaeological material found in the palace area and elsewhere on the site indicates an occupation from the Early Syrian (= Early Bronze Age) to the Neo Syrian Period (= Iron Age).[57] The foundation of the rectangular city, which covered an area of 100 ha, dates to the beginning of the Old Syrian Period, while its abandonment dates to the end of the Middle Syrian Period. Thus, the existence of the rectangular city corresponds more or less to the attestation of the toponym of Qaṭna.

As archaeological evidence makes clear, the foundation of the palace cannot predate the transitional phase from Middle Bronze Age I to II, or the 18th century. Furthermore, as huge dimensions and the high quality of the foundations attest, it must have been built in a period of wealth. The central, dominating position of the palace within the city and its elaborate, monumental architecture indicate an ideological claim to power.[58] Therefore, it seems likely that the

Phase	Structures	Period	Date
G 1	Modern surface, house ruins, debris	Modern	AD 1982
G 2	Later houses of the modern village of al-Mišrife		AD 1929
G 3	Excavation activities of Du Mesnil du Buisson		AD 1924–29
G 4	Earlier houses of the modern village of al-Mišrife		AD 1850
Hiatus			
G 5	Later structures of re-occupation of the palace area	Neo Syrian Period	1000 BC
G 6	Earlier structures of re-occupation of the palace area		
Hiatus (?)			1340 BC
G 7	Later occupation of the palace	Middle Syrian Period	1500 BC
G 8	Main use of the palace with lime mortar floors	Old Syrian Period	
G 9	Construction horizon of the palace		
Hiatus (?)			2000 BC
G 10	Abandonment surface above occupation levels	Early Syrian Period	
G 11	Later structures of pre-palace occupation		
G 12	Earlier structures of pre-palace occupation		2200 BC

Fig. 13 Stratigraphic sequence of the palace area

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[57] Cf. al-Maqdissi *et al.* 2002.

[58] This aspect of the architecture of the palace will be treated elsewhere.

building was founded in the time of the kings Išᵊī-Ḥadda and Amut-pī-ᶜEl or one of their immediate predecessors or successors.

The tablets found within the destruction layers of the palace belong to the archive of a certain king named Idanda, who must have reigned during the period of the Hittite king Šuppiluliuma I. He was involved into the dramatical events resulting from the Hittite attacks on the Mittani empire and its vassals in Syria. Since the archaeological material discovered in the same layers does not postdate the middle of the 14ᵗʰ century BC, we can conclude that this date should correspond to the destruction and abandonment of the palace. There is no evidence for a later use of the building until the re-occupation seen in dwellings and handcraft workshops of the Iron Age.

While it is known that the city itself survived the destruction of the palace by probably 100 years, it is still a mystery where the residence of the later kings had been. Among them was Akizzi, a contemporary of Akhenaton and the last king of Qaṭna attested in historical records.

Addendum: In 2003 a floor was discovered, which abuts the outer facade of the western wall of the palace. On top a rich inventory was found, which consists of a high quantity of ceramics, terracotta figurines, seal impressions and toggle pins. All the objects date to the Middle Bronze Age II, thus indicating the early use of the palace during this period.

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