

Marketplaces in Syro-Mesopotamia in the second millennium BC in the light of new archaeological research

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Marketplace, market street, shop, balance weights, capacity measurements, Syro-Mesopotamia, Bronze Age

There have been general doubts, if the concept of a market, market trade, and a marketplace existed in the Ancient Near East. However, cuneiform texts testify that a mahīru(m) existed, which designates commercial activities, the rate, and also an open urban space. The kāru(m) and the sūqu(m) are also clearly defined areas where trade and retail trade took place, the latter one being a street of merchandise. From the texts it appears that markets were regulated and controlled by supervisors, that shops and market houses were associated to the markets, and that these were sometimes situated near a city gate. Only a part of the market trade took place on the marketplaces or streets, other economic processes took place in houses, since the merchant's home was his trading office.

Archaeologically attested examples for a marketplace are rare mainly because few settlements have been excavated on a large scale. This article presents examples of marketplaces in the Syro-Mesopotamian region from the 2nd millennium BC. The investigated marketplaces at Ugarit, Munbaqa/Ekalte, Tall Tuqan and Tall Bazi have certain features in common: they consist of an open space near a city gate, which guarantees good accessibility, or inside domestic areas and vary between 440 and 1200 m². The places are bordered by rooms which served as shops, workshops or store rooms. Also the marketplace itself could be partly covered with shop-like structures, marketstalls, benches and bread ovens. Market activities took also place inside the settlements on and along broad streets. Some of the rooms adjacent to and accessible from the street were shops or offices. Standardized capacity measurements and balance weights are good indicators of market activities.

Marktplätze in Syro-Mesopotamien im 2. Jahrtausend v. Chr.

Marktplatz, Marktstraße, Gewichte, Hohlmaße, Syro-Mesopotamien, Bronzezeit

Es wurde grundsätzlich angezweifelt, ob das Konzept des Marktes, Markthandel und ein Marktplatz im Alten Orient existierten. Allerdings geht aus Keilschrifttexten klar hervor, dass ein mahīru(m) existierte, was Markt im Sinne von Handelsaktivitäten, Tauschkurs und ebenso Marktplatz bedeutet. Zudem sind kāru(m) und sūqu(m) – letzterer eine Straße – klar definierte Bereiche, auf denen Handel und Kleinhandel stattfand. Die Texte lassen darauf schließen, dass Märkte durch Aufseher reguliert und kontrolliert wurden, dass Läden und Markthäuser den Märkten angegliedert waren und dass Märkte bisweilen nahe einem Stadttor lagen. Allerdings wurde nur ein Teil des Handels auf Marktplätzen oder Straßen abgewickelt, manche Handelstätigkeiten fanden in den Häusern statt, da das Haus des Kaufmanns zugleich sein Handelkontor war.

Dass dennoch die Existenz von Marktplätzen bezweifelt wurde, liegt an den angeblich mangelnden archäologischen Belegen dafür. Dies ist darauf zurückzuführen, dass nur wenige Siedlungen großflächig ausgegraben wurden. Hier werden eindeutige Nachweise für Marktplätze in Syro-Mesopotamien im 2. Jahrtausend v. Chr. vorgestellt. Die Marktplätze aus Ugarit, Munbaqa/Ekalte, Tall Tuqan und Tall Bazi teilen bestimmte Eigenschaften: Sie bestehen aus einem offenen Platz nahe einem Stadttor – ideal für leichte Zugänglichkeit – oder inmitten von Wohngebieten und variieren zwischen 440 und 1200 m². Entlang der Plätze liegen bisweilen einzelne Räume, die als Läden, Werkstätten oder Magazine dienten. Auch der Marktplatz selbst konnte teilweise mit ladenartigen Strukturen, Marktbuden, Bänken, Brotöfen und anderen Installationen ausgestattet sein. Markthandel wurde auch auf und entlang von breiten Straßen innerhalb der Siedlungen betrieben. Einige der Räume, die an der Straße lagen und von dieser direkt zugänglich waren, waren Läden oder Marktbüros. Gute Indizien für Marktwesen sind standardisierte Hohlmaße und Gewichtssteine.

Trade and exchange has been one of the main reasons Near Eastern societies flourished for millennia. Sophisticated exchange practices and long-distance trade can be traced back to the Pre-Pottery Neolithic period, appr. 9000 BC. And already in the 3rd millennium BC a full range of economic tools and methods – weights and measures, merchants and market practices – can be observed due to abundant archaeological and written sources (CHARPIN *et al.* 2004).

This paper investigates whether markets and marketplaces existed in Mesopotamia and Syria in the 2nd millennium BC. A complete and exhaustive study of this much discussed topic is certainly impossible in a few pages. The aim of this study is to relate the information from the cuneiform texts and the archaeological record, and to search for possible market spaces in the Ancient Near East – an obvious question, which however has never been systematically explored. Therefore I will limit this contribution to a number of case studies, hoping that they may spur further research on this fascinating issue. After an overview of the information from the Mesopotamian cuneiform sources I will discuss some examples of possible „places for market“ in the archaeological record.

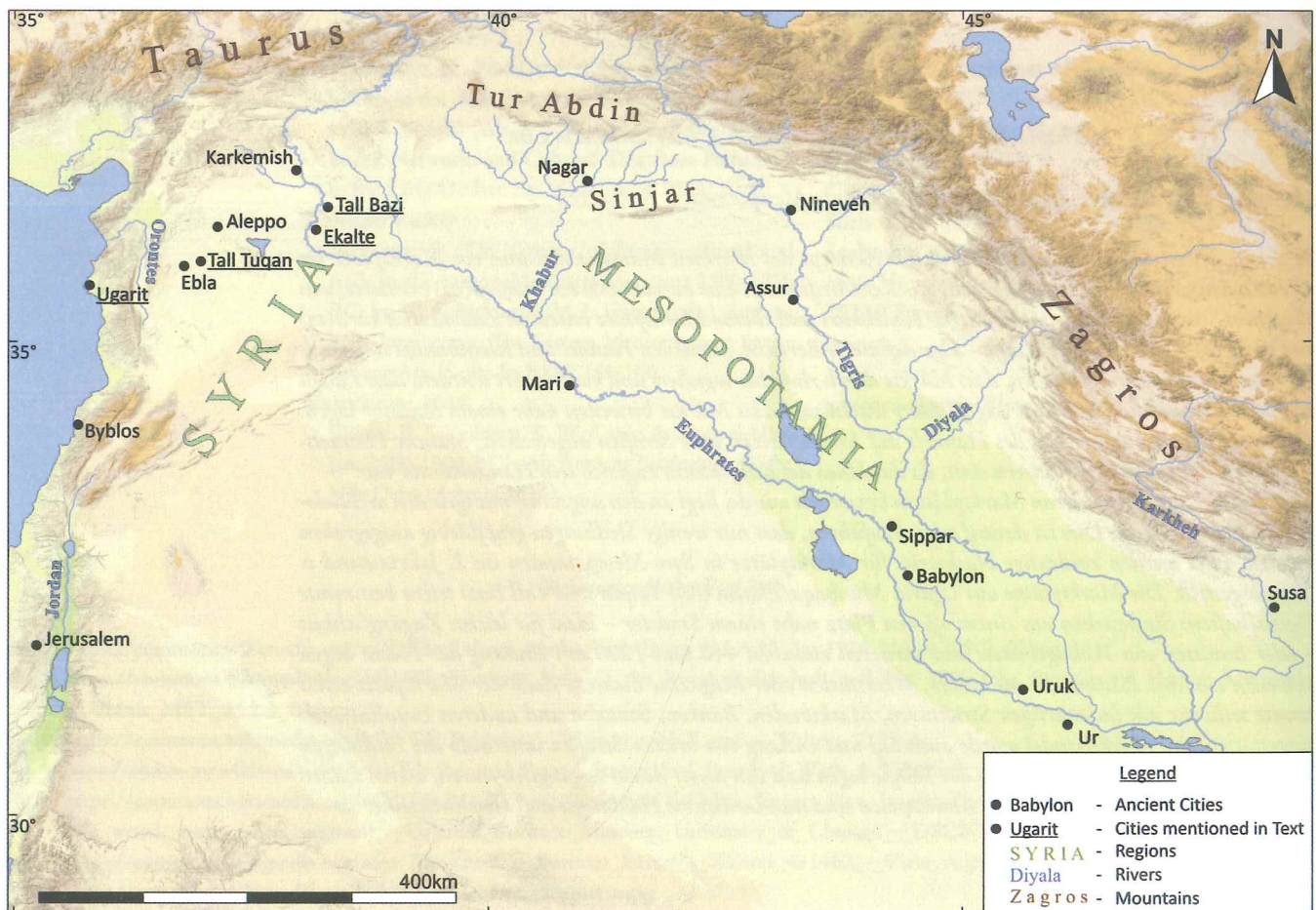
The area under consideration for the archaeological evidence spans from the Syrian Mediterranean coast beyond the Euphrates valley, that is Syria and

Northern Mesopotamia proper; the relevant cuneiform texts cover a slightly larger area including also Babylonia (Fig. 1).

1. General doubts about the existence of a marketplace in the Ancient Near East

There have been general doubts if the concept of a market, market trade, and a marketplace existed in the Ancient Near East. Max WEBER (1922) claimed that Near Eastern cities were no community of citizens and had no market, and that cities were royal strongholds, where the kings owned the market privileges. When Max Weber developed his ideas in the early 1920s, ancient Near Eastern cities with urban structures were not well known, since the earliest large-scale excavations of cities with official and private sectors including housing areas and a road network, the capitals Babylon and Assur, were only published a few years later. The then known Assyrian capital cities Nimrud, Niniveh and Khorsabad gave the false impression that ancient Near Eastern cities consisted of huge, splendidly equipped palaces occupied by the despotic rulers, but were surrounded by a walled empty space, where the army and the slavlike population was to live in encampments (LIVERANI 2000, 87-89).

▼ Fig. 1. Map of the Ancient Near East in the 2nd millennium BC. Places with evidence for markets are underlined (map: C. Fink).



Strangely, this idea was maintained especially among sociologists for a long time. Karl Polanyi wrote still in 1957, when many settlements with a complete range of urban structures had already been excavated and published: „Markets were the rock bottom on which rested with axiomatic assurance the determination of forms of trade, money uses, prices, commercial transactions, profit and loss accounts, insolvency, partnership, in short, the essentials of business life... Babylonia, as a matter of fact, possessed neither market places nor a functioning market system of any description“ (POLANYI 1957, 16). A. L. OPPENHEIM (1967, 17) saw this in a more differentiated way, but was also puzzled by the apparent absence of marketplace: „No agora, forum, market place or city hall provides the city dwellers with a meeting place for an assembly, for litigations, for civic spectacles or whatever purpose“. This quote reveals the main cause for the general doubts of many scholars: the Greek and Roman market was deemed THE model of an ancient market. Yet another reason for the frequent doubts about markets in the Near East lay in the sources. Since most economic texts derived from palace archives and therefore have a very one-dimensional perspective, it was often assumed that mainly palace-based economy and little private trade existed. LIVERANI (1987, 69) claimed that the status of the merchant in the Late Bronze Age was that of a palace dependent. However, arguments in favor of ancient Near Eastern marketplaces have increased since the 1970s. Wolfgang RÖLLIG (1976), Carlo ZACCAGNINI (1990), Dominique CHARPIN *et al.* (2004) and others have assembled many references for markets in the cuneiform sources, which will be summarized briefly in the following.

2. Markets in the cuneiform texts

2.1. *maḫīru(m)*

The Akkadian term *maḫīru(m)* (Sumerian: *ki.lam*) designates the various semantic aspects of market: the commercial activities, the rate, but also the physical entity of an open urban space which might have served as a market(place) (ZACCAGNINI 1990, 421-422). Some texts give precious informations how such a *maḫīrum* looked like. There are several relevant texts from Emar, the most important city along the upper Syrian Euphrates in the 13th century BC. Sale documents describe the location of a house as bordering either another house or a street, a place or a large place (Sumerian: „*sila.dagal.gal*“) (ARNAUD 1991, no. 54:4). Another text reports the story of an attempted coup against the king of Emar named Zu-Aštarti (ADAMTHWAITE 2001, 233-260): A man goes to the king of Emar and warns him, that troops who planned a conspiracy against him assembled on the marketplace („*ana ki.lam*“). The king sent other troops, which seized the ringleaders of the conspiracy from the

marketplace, and punished them. This texts testifies that the marketplace must be inside the city (otherwise there would have been no danger for the king who could simply close the city gates), that the place was large enough that a fair number of people could assemble and that troops were necessary to quell the revolt, and that a marketplace served not only for commercial purposes, but was also the place where people assembled for various reasons.

Trade is also attested at the „market gate“, Akkadian: „*bāb maḫīrim*“, Sumerian: „*ká ki.lam*“. An Old Babylonian letter (AbB I 60:15) mentions that a man gets the order to buy two sacks at the market gate (STOL 2004, 899). A Neo-Assyrian text (7th century BC) states that camels were sold in the market gate („*ina bāb maḫīri*“), and a Neo-Babylonian text (6th century BC) refers to barley which was sold at the market gate (RÖLLIG 1976, 289). In sum, a few texts from all periods make clear that market trade could have taken place near city gates. Unfortunately it is not clear if the market trade was taking place inside or outside the city wall.

The term „*bīt maḫīrim*“ (Akkadian) or „*é ki.lam*“ (Sumerian) means literally „the house of the market“. They were frequently rented (STOL 2004, 899). Possibly this term describes a shop, an exchange office, or another building in direct relation to market trade. An Old Babylonian text from Sippar mentions that 9 SAR (= 324 m²) of these „market houses“ were situated near a city gate (the Šamaš gate), and that also the chief merchant possessed a house there (STOL 2004, 899). Since the sun god Šamaš was responsible for legal procedures and justice, a gate bearing the sun god's name would have been especially appropriate for trading purposes. In this case at least it is clear that shops or other buildings related to the market were situated near a city gate.

There is also evidence that markets were organized, regulated and controlled by a „market supervisor“ (Akkadian: „*rabi maḫīrim*“) (ZACCAGNINI 1990, 422). Market regulation with concrete regulations concerning wages and prizes is also attested in a text from Elam dating to about 1830 BC, which states that Attahušu, the city lord of Susa, erected on the market (*ina maḫīrim*) a stele on which the right prizes for goods were annotated.

For some markets it is attested that they were equipped with special weight stones. „Weight stones of the market(place)“ („*na₄-há maḫīrim*“) are mentioned in texts from Mari (CHAMBON 2011, 148-156).

2.2. *kāru(m)*

There is another Akkadian term, „*kāru(m)*“ (Sumerian „*kar*“), which literally means „embankment, quay-wall“, and designates a merchants quarter, a trade station, or a market-office. It is attested in 2nd millennium Babylonia, Syria, Assyria and Anatolia, and designates an area where the merchants who were involved in medium- and long-

distance trade were living together and acted in various ways (ZACCAGNINI 1990, 421-423; STOL 2004, 898). For more details see the contribution of Stratford (this volume) about the *kārum* in Old Assyrian and Anatolian trade, since the Old Assyrian *kārum* serves as the model for any other *kārum* trading station.

The *kārum* must have been an urban area in- or outside the city where merchants of a certain origin lived together. It is attested in texts for many 2nd millennium cities such as Babylon, Sippar, Mari, Shehna, Emar and others (ZACCAGNINI 1990, 421; STOL 2004, 895-896). Merchants were usually called „*tamkarum*“ („*dam.gar*“), but some merchants e. g. at Mari were called „sons of the *kārum*“ (MICHEL 1996, 415). They were free and independent colleagues, which were organized. The chief of this organization was called the „head of the merchants' quarter“ („*qaqqad kārīm*“; STOL 2004, 895). Special weight stones of the *kārum* („*na₄^{mes} ka-a-ri*“) were mentioned in a text from Emar (Emar 87: 8; ZACCAGNINI 2018, 49). Whether this designates weight stones of the (Emar) market or its market-office, is not clear (ZACCAGNINI 2018, 59-60), but we learn from this text that possibly a set of reference weight stones existed in the *kārum*; presumably they must have been kept in a special building or were on display on the marketplace.

2.3. *sūqu(m)*

Finally, a few texts mention retail trade which took place on the streets. The „*sūq šimātīm*“, literally meaning „the street of the merchandise,“ designates probably a trading street (ZACCAGNINI 1990, 422; STEINERT 2011). The *sūq šimātīm* is mentioned in a few omen texts; for example, a Babylonian merchant slaughters a lamb and hires an extispicy specialist who should predict if his sale on the „trading street“ would be profitable: „Will the large bead, which he has bought, be sold with profit in the *sūq šimātīm*?“ (WILCKE 1990, 303). The expected profit was apparently large enough that the merchant paid for the lamb and the specialist. Later texts mention that flour, barley and empty vats were bought from the *sūq šimātīm*. An overseer of the *sūqu* („*ša muḫḫi sūqu*“) is also mentioned in a text (STOL 2004, 898).

This term, of course, raises the question if the ancient *sūqu* resembled the modern oriental *sūq* or *bazār*, where trade takes place to a large extent along a dense network of streets (WIRTH 2000, 67-73). Since the *sūq* or *bazār* streets are often covered with roofs, it makes them ideally suited for commerce and trade in countries with hot climate, since they have the enormous advantage of being shaded areas. In most areas of the Near East, the climate is not suitable for conducting trade during the day on a large open space. At least in the hot period, between May and September, it would have been extremely uncomfortable to conduct sophisticated

trading activities on an open marketplace. Today, open marketplaces outside the cities do exist for the trade of bulky and dirty goods such as animals, vehicles and agricultural products, but they mostly take place in the fresh morning hours.

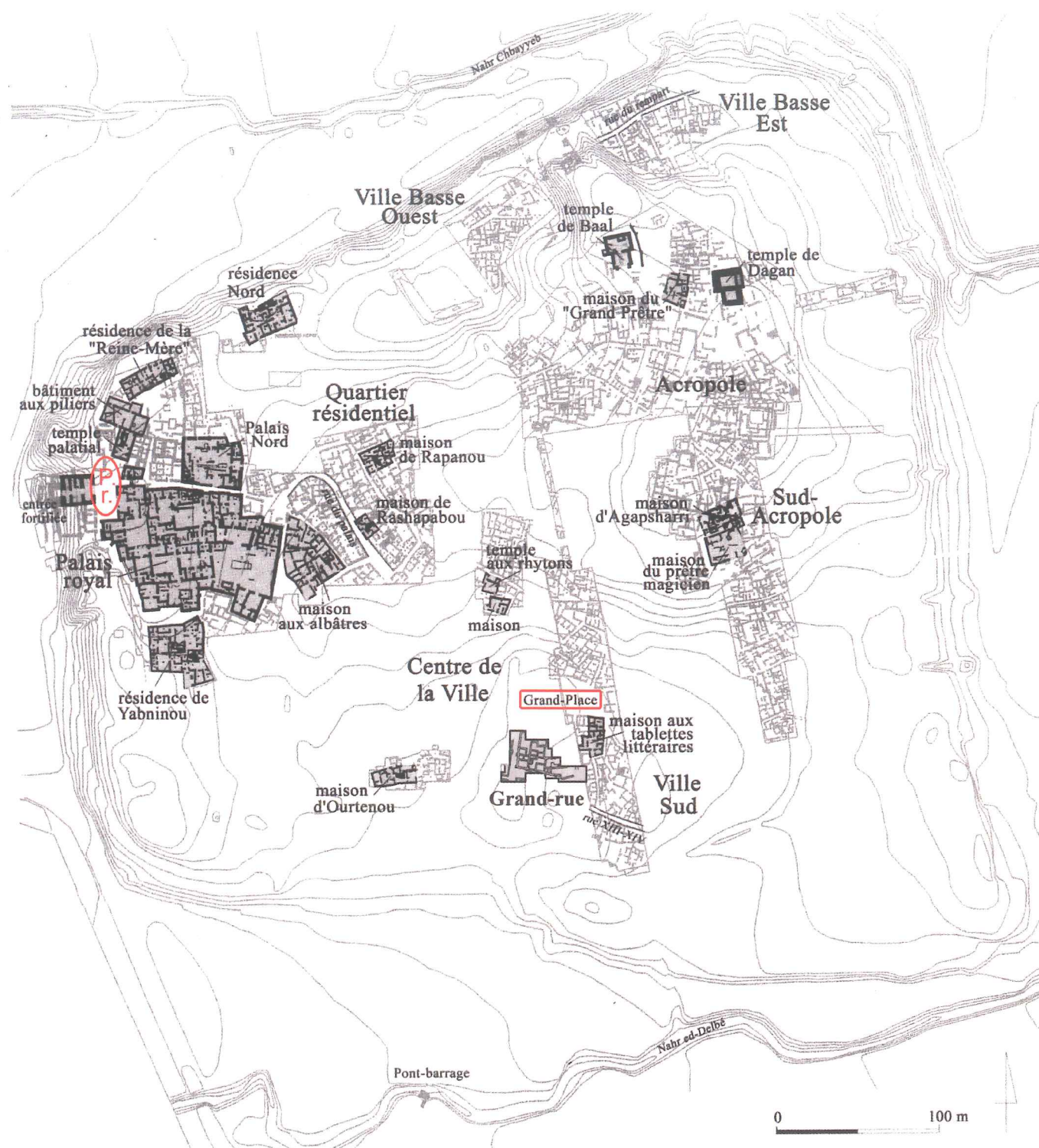
The geographer Eugen Wirth in his monography about the islamic oriental city (WIRTH 2000) defined the oriental „*sūq*“ or „*bazār*“ as the traditional center for trade and commerce, a central business district. On the basis of existant cities such as Isfahan he developed the model of an Islamic city, where the *sūq* is centered along the main streets and has concentrations near the city gates and close to the main mosque (WIRTH 2000, fig. 40-41). He claimed also that business centres like this had not existed before anywhere else, not even in the Ancient Near East (WIRTH 2000, 103): „Damit wäre der *Suq* möglicherweise das einzige grundlegende Abgrenzungskriterium der orientalischen Stadt, das seine Wurzeln nicht schon im Alten Orient hat, und welches damit als eigenständig-islamisches Kulturerbe angesehen werden kann.“ As we shall see in the following pages, this statement seems less convincing in the light of new research on Ancient Near Eastern markets.

3. Archaeological examples for market areas or marketplaces

Before we present some examples for possible marketplaces in the 2nd millennium Syro-Mesopotamian region, it is important to keep in mind that only a few cities and settlements are suitable for permitting insights into the possible existence of marketplaces. Only those settlements which have been excavated on a large scale can be searched for eventual city structures such as markets. However, only very few sites have been excavated completely or at least to a large extent.

3.1 Ugarit

Ugarit was a flourishing harbour town until the Late Bronze Age II (1300-1185 BC), intensively involved in the trade between the Mediterranean world and the Near East. The mound is 26.4 ha large and 8-18 m high, and about one quarter of the Late Bronze Age II settlement has been excavated so far (CALVET/GALLIANO 2004). The westernmost part of the city is occupied by the large royal palace and several elite residences. Two fairly small temple-towers are situated at an elevated place in the north-eastern part of the city. The remaining urban surface seems to have been densely covered by houses, which were built close to each other and structured in quarters. Not much open space existed within the urban tissue: mainly the streets and a few small places. Only two open places are fairly large: one behind the main city gate in the west, and the other in the city center in the quarter „*Ville Sud*“ (Fig. 2).



3.1.1 The Royal Place

The „Place royale“ measured approximately 500 m² (ca. 35 m by 14 m) and was situated directly behind the main city gate and in front of the entrance to the Royal Palace (CALLOT 1986). On its northern side it gave access to a small palace temple and a pillared building, the function of which is not clear. Possibly it was related to trade which was in Ugarit very much controlled by the king and his elites. The access to this place from the city was

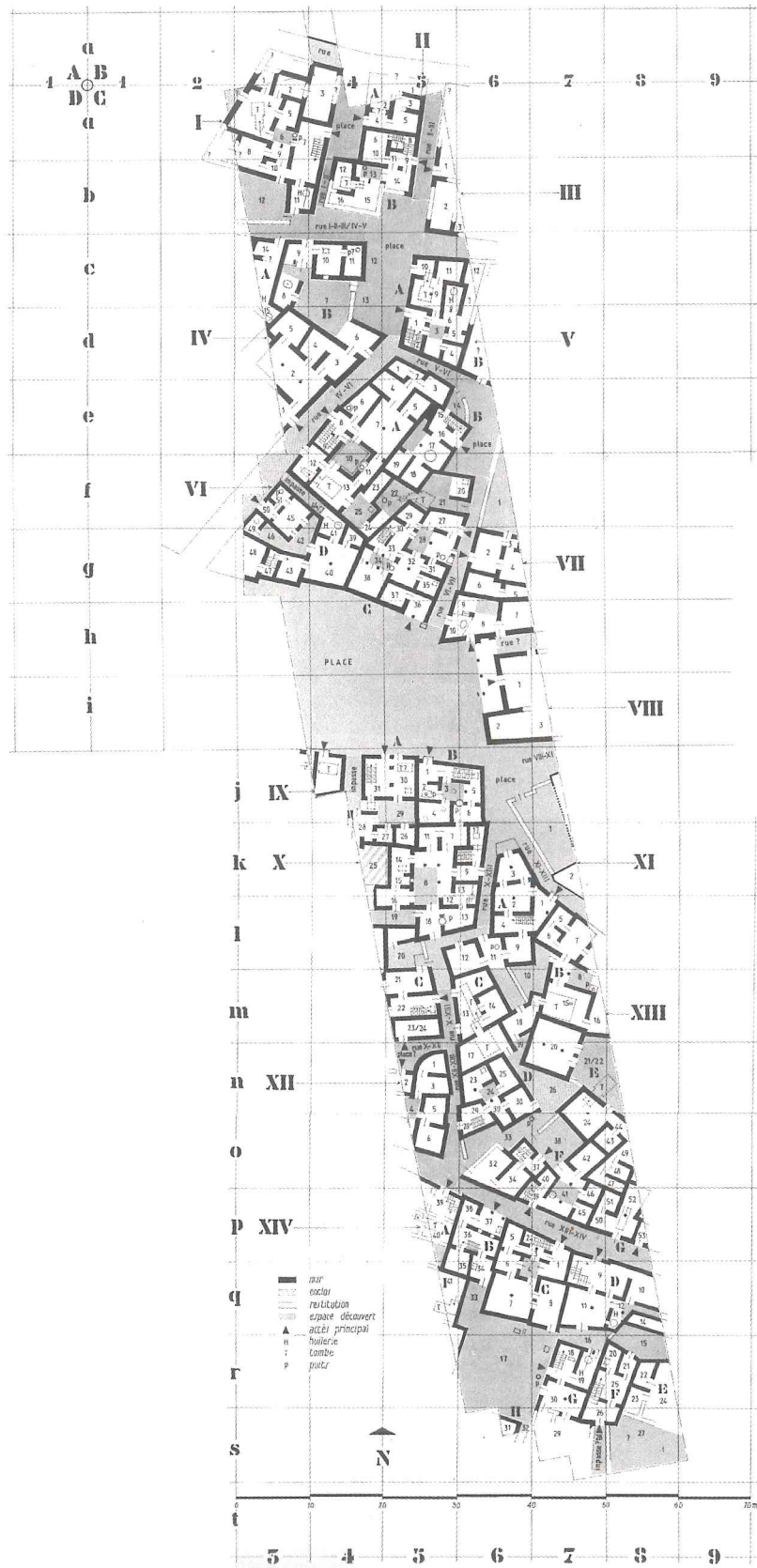
carefully controlled by a double gate. In this way the royal place could be easily segregated from the remaining city and from the outside, if necessary. A hematite weight (RS 15.226), which was found in the eastern archives of the adjacent palace, bears the cuneiform alphabetic inscription “ten” (*šrt*) (BORDREUIL 2004, 135-139). Since the stone is weighing 89.5 g, a weight unit of 8.95 g may be derived from it. It could point to the fact that reference weights were kept in the palace under royal control.

▲ Fig. 2. Ugarit around 1200 BC with the „Grand-Place“ and the „Place royale“ (P. r.) indicated (AL-MAQDISSI/MATOLAN 2008, fig. 2a).

3.1.2 The „Grand-Place“ in the „Ville Sud“

The open space within the domestic areas consists mainly of streets. Most of them are astonishingly narrow and measure from 1.5 to 3 m in width, the secondary streets were even narrower (1 m or less). Additionally, the streets were seldom straight, but

▼ Fig. 3a. The „Grand-Place“ at Ugarit, bordered by shops, plan (CALLOT 1994, fig. 312).



curved or bent. Only some main streets like the „rue du palais“ are broader and widen in places up to 10 m. In this way small places are created along some of the streets. Additionally, there must have been not much sun and air between the houses which had – according to the excavators – an upper storey and were at least 6-7 m high.

But so far only one large place has been known, the „Grand-Place“ or „Large Place“, situated in the „Ville Sud“ (Fig. 3a-b). Only half of it has been excavated, but its surface can be reconstructed as appr. 1000 m² (ca. 20 m x 50 m) due to the geomorphology of the mound. Its floor has completely disappeared, but the terrain was slightly inclined (3-5 %). The „Ville Sud“, a densely built living quarter around this place, has been studied extensively by O. CALLOT (1994). He was able to reconstruct a number of commercial activities with the help of the remaining installations (e. g. oil presses) and objects (e. g. weight stones, cylinder seals, moulds for metalwork). Commercial activities must have taken place to a large extent within the houses, e. g. a few houses near the „Grand-Place“ specialized in oil production (CALLOT 1994, fig. 290). He was also able to identify a few rooms as the workshops of smiths and shops, and several weight stones in the houses point to economic activities of the inhabitants.

Because most streets were quite narrow, it is unlikely that wagons circulated in many streets. Nevertheless, three pommels of wagon yokes in houses, one near the „Grand-Place“ in Ilot X, r. 23/24 (could this room have served as a garage or workshop for wagons?), indicate the presence of wagons (CALLOT 1986). It must be assumed that the circulation and the transport of most goods must have taken place mainly on donkeys' backs, and that the circulation of wagons was possible only on the main streets. The narrow streets argue against the interpretation of this place as the only and central marketplace at Ugarit for large-scale commerce, because the traffic and the delivery of the goods was restricted. But it could well have served as one marketplace for this urban quarter. Perhaps also the „Grand-rue“, which ran about 50 m south of the „Grand-Place“ and which is broad enough that wagons could pass, supplied the „Grand-Place“ with goods, if it was used as a marketplace. It is also possible that several marketplaces existed in one city; at least one small and one large marketplace (*mahiri*) were in use at Nuzi according to texts (ZACCAGNINI 1990, 422). More important for circulation were small places at the junctions of the streets, and the large place, which had the size of one insula.

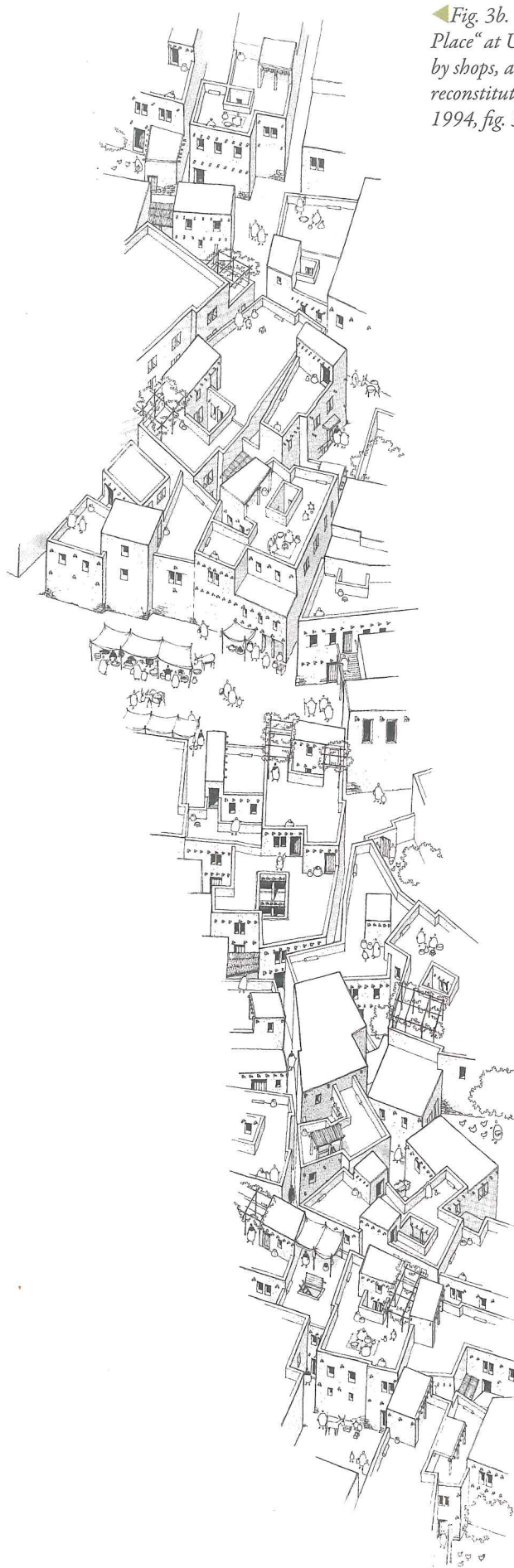
The „Grand-Place“ is surrounded by several rooms which differ from normal houses. Bordering the place at its east side, there is a large building (Ilôt VIII), which, due to his ground plan and its deep foundations, was interpreted by CALLOT (1994) as an exceptional, possibly official building.

House C of Ilôt VI borders the „Grand-Place“ at its northern side. Part of it corresponds to a normal domestic household, but the two Rooms 36 and 37 were separated from the house and were accessible only directly from the „Grand-Place“. Their interpretation as „boutiques“ is thus quite probable. The house at the northeastern corner of the Place was even more clearly used for trade purposes. The room at the corner was directly accessible from two doors, one leading inside from the Place, the other one from Street VI-VII. Since all Ancient Near Eastern private households invested enormous efforts to protect their private sphere and avoid direct access (OTTO 2006, 235-237), the accessibility of Room 10 must have been intentional and indicates that this room was publicly accessible, possibly as a shop. Additional proof is given by three weights which were found there, among which a bronze weight in form of a crouching bull (RS 23.355). It weighs 182 g, corresponding to 20 Ugaritic shekels (M. Yon in CLUZAN 1993, 229, no. 184).

A few cylinder seals, testifying juridic or economic activities, and a few weight stones, the remains of „paying“ with weighed silver, were even found on the „Grand-Place“ itself. Their number is certainly too small to prove the use of the place for trade purposes. On the other hand, why should functioning objects be found at all on open spaces? Even if we suppose that merchants were trading here during daytime, the marketplace was certainly emptied and cleaned in the evening. If an object is found on this place, it must have been discarded because it was broken or had lost its value, or because it had been left behind accidentally. In sum, it is very well possible that this „Grand-Place“ was used as a marketplace.

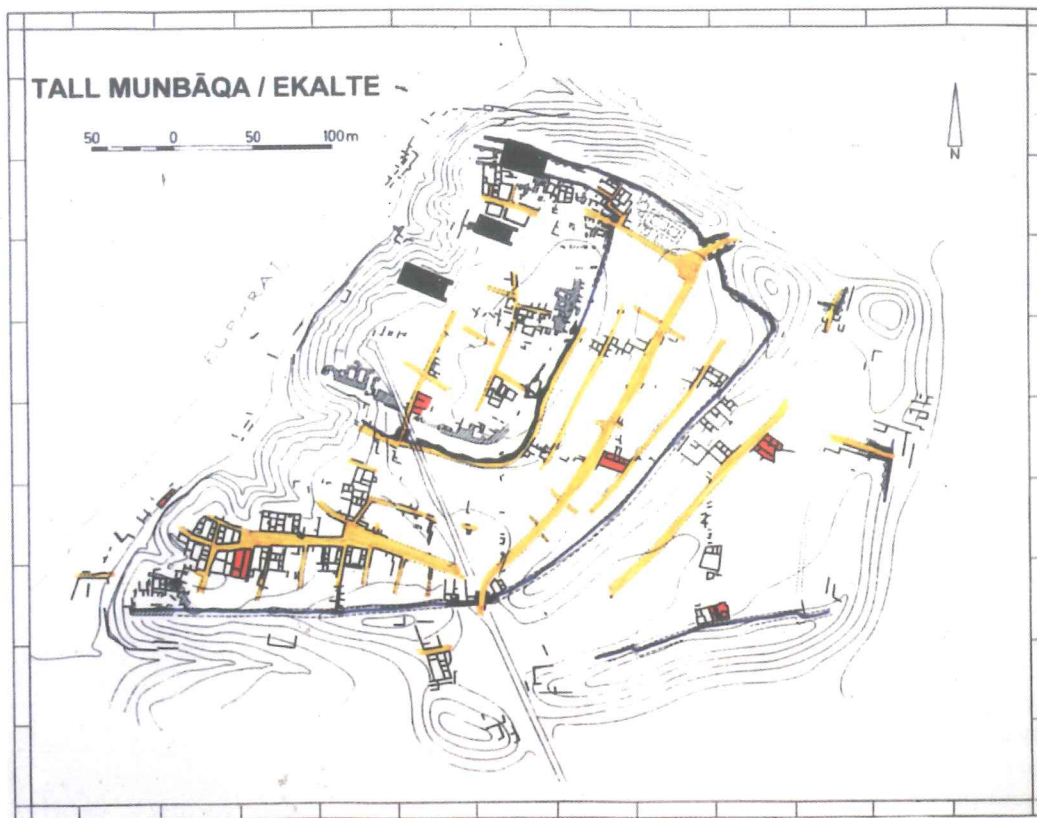
3.2. Munbaqa

Tall Munbaqa, the ancient city Ekalte, is situated on the east bank of the Euphrates. Its city structure from around 1350 BC is well known due to extensive excavations and geophysical prospections (MACHULE 1990; WERNER 1998; BLOCHER/WERNER 2018). The densely built house quarters of the Inner Town were built along a regular street net, which encircles the main mound „Kuppe“ in multiple rings (Fig. 4). The Outer Town and the Inner Town were each fortified by a wall. At least two city gates gave access to the Inner Town. They led directly onto the main street, which made the whole Inner Town accessible. This main street of the Inner Town is 7 m wide in most areas – much wider than the other parallel or vertically running lanes. It widens to 12 m-wide places of triangular shape in at least two areas of the house quarter „Ibrahims Garten“ (WERNER 1998, 54-59; MACHULE/BLOCHER 2013) (Fig. 5). This size of the street cannot be explained by traffic purposes only. Since most of the nearby houses were inhabited by wealthy citizens and traders and many houses were used also for handicraft production, it is not too

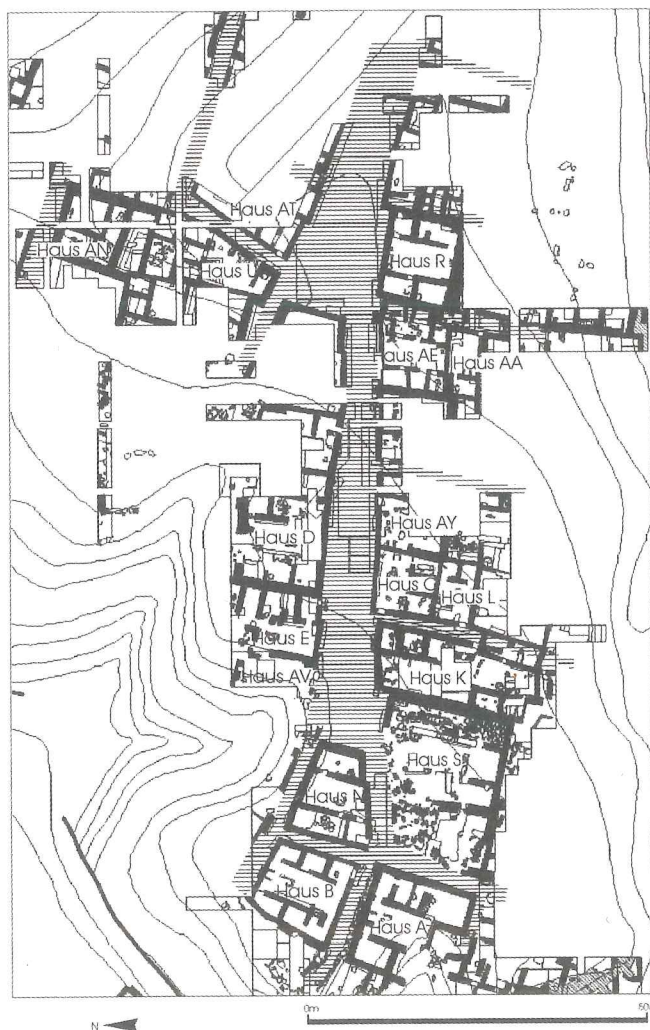


◀ Fig. 3b. The „Grand-Place“ at Ugarit, bordered by shops, axonometric reconstruction (CALLOT 1994, fig. 321).

► Fig. 4. Tall Munbaqa/ Ekalte during the Late Bronze Age (WERNER 1998, fig. 50).



▼ Fig. 5. The main street at Ekalte widening to 12 m large places (MACHULE/BLOCHER 2013, fig. 181).



far-fetched to interpret these wide open spaces as places for trade. Where the main street ends west of the westernmost place (see Fig. 5), it was split up in two narrow alleys, one of which is equipped with a long bench (WERNER 1998, 55, fig. 48) (Fig. 6). Benches along streets are quite unusual. Therefore we wonder, if this bench could have served either for the benefit of people who came here for trading, or as a counter where goods were displayed.

The main street widened to an even larger place in front of the North Gate (BLOCHER *et al.* 2012, 37) (Fig. 7). This place measured *ca.* 20 m x 22 m, *ca.* 440 m². It was situated immediately behind the Northern City Gate and at the 90° bend of the 8 m wide main street, which led from the city gate and Temple 4 up the hill towards the other temples. A few rooms were excavated at the southeastern and the southwestern side of the place. They were equipped with ovens, pits, benches, platforms paved with pebbles, floors plastered with sherds, and are interpreted as workshops and storerooms (BLOCHER *et al.* 2012, 41-44).

The opposite side of the place was framed by the temenos wall of Temple 4. A bench was built on the place along the temenos wall and until the city gate, inviting for a rest or serving as a postament for goods. Since benches and postaments are usually both shallow installation attached to a wall, their purpose is not immediately apparent, or they could have served multiple purposes. Inside the sacred area there was a stone stela standing midway between the temenos door and the temple entrance. But there was a second stone stela



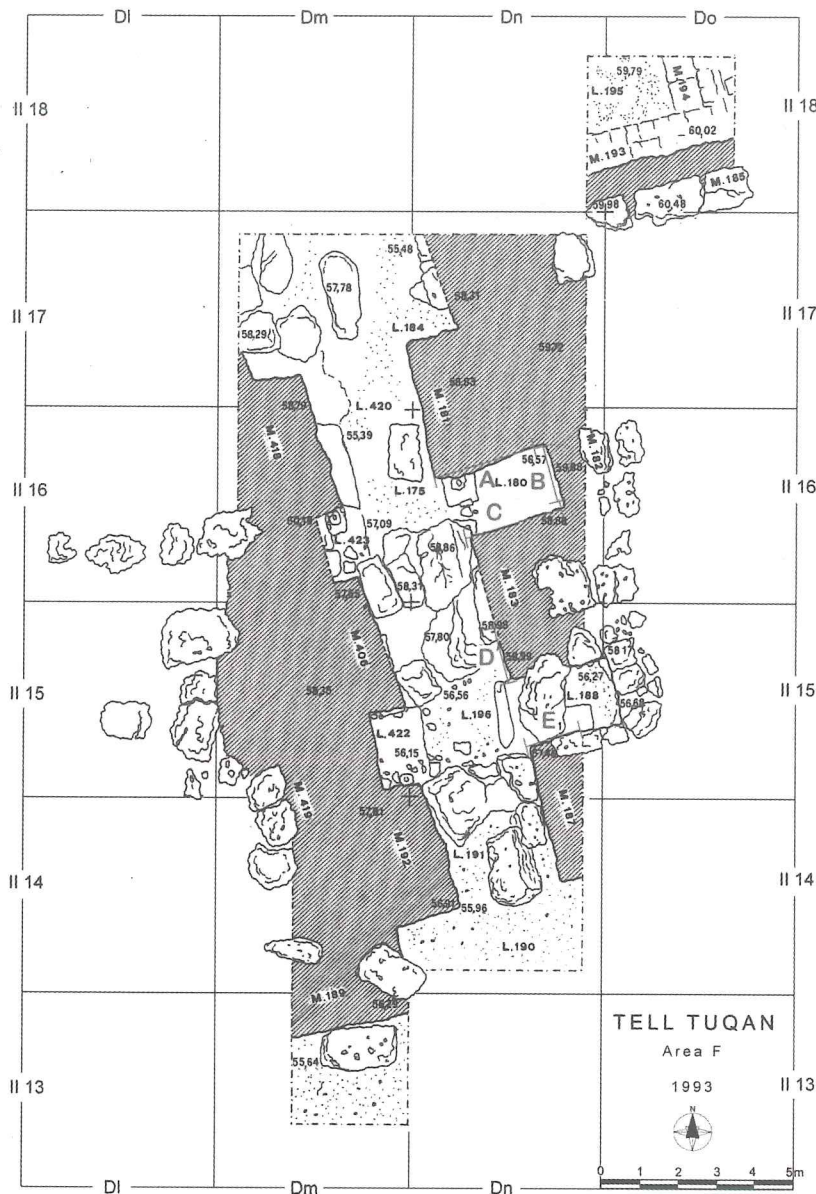
◀ Fig. 6. A narrow lane at Ekalte equipped with benches (WERNER 1998, 55, fig. 48).



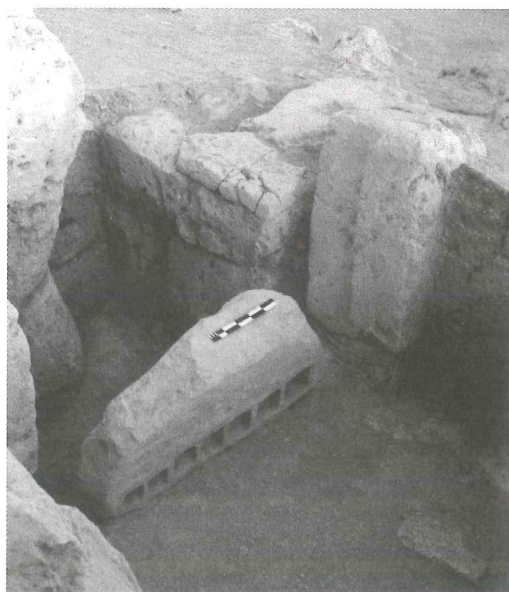
◀ Fig. 7. The „Market Place“ at Ekalte between the city gate and Temple IV (BLOCHER et al. 2012, 37, fig. 2).

outside the temenos wall, standing in the recess of the wall, which had been deliberately built for the stela. These two stelae are so-called „baityloi“, aniconic cult images representing the venerated deity. This second baitylos was clearly installed deliberately outside the segregated sacred space and on the large open space, where the access was not restricted. Is it possible that this cult image stood in direct relation with the transaction which took place on the marketplace, *e. g.* for supervising or guaranteeing them?

Clearly the temples at Munbaqa served not only as centres of worship, but also as the place where legal documents were issued. One sale contract from Munbaqa is especially significant in this respect: the city god and the Elders of the city sell a field to a private person for a certain price in silver, and it is explicitly mentioned that the tablet was written „in the door of the temple“ (MAYER 2001, 80, Taf. 7,RS 26). This is another clear proof that temples were involved in legal and economic activities, and corresponds well to the assumption that temples



▲ Fig. 8a. The city gate at Tall Tuqan where the basalt table was found in L. 188 (BAFFI 2006, 151, fig. 8).



► Fig. 8b. The collapsed basalt table for capacity measurements in the city gate.

were in this region, where most cities had no palaces, the only official buildings (OTTO 2012). To sum up: The so-far largest place inside the city was directly accessible from the city gate and can very well have been used as a marketplace. The association with a temple is clearly not by chance, but the association of the small market with the sacred baitylos can be explained by the role of deities as protectors and guaranters of economic procedures.

3.3. Tell Tuqan

The ancient city at Tall Tuqan near Ebla in Syria was investigated only in limited soundings (BAFFI 2006). However, when the south-eastern city gate in Area F (Middle Bronze Age II, ca. 1800-1600 BC) was excavated, a large basalt table with seven square depressions for measuring capacities came to light within one of the gate chambers (Fig. 8). The depressions of decreasing size hold 500 cl, 700 cl, 1000 cl, 1300 cl, 2000 cl, 3000 cl and 4500 cl (FIORENTINO 2006). The capacity measurements of many agricultural products are well known from the cuneiform texts (POWELL 1990), but the containers themselves have never been found since they consisted of organic material. The only possible depiction of such a standardized container for measuring grain is found on an Akkadian cylinder seal (ca. 2300 BC), where two grain gods are carrying the container to the grain goddess, who sits on a heap of barley (BOEHMER 1965, no. 1266 = pl. XLVI, fig. 541).

The basalt table at Tuqan is so far the only measuring table which has survived. It reminds of a contemporary text from Mari mentioning barley and sesame, which was measured with the „kappu-container used in the market place“ (ARM 13, 100; ZACCAGNINI 1990, 422). Apparently the urban authorities of Tall Tuqan had placed the basalt measuring table in the gate in order to provide the market with a reliable control system for capacities. Since the areas on both sides of the city gate have not been investigated, we do not know if the marketplace was inside or outside the city, or on both sides. But certainly the market must have been nearby.

3.4. Tall Bazi

Tall Bazi is situated in present North Syria, appr. 30 km upstream from Tall Munbaqa/Ekalte, on the eastern side of the Euphrates valley which formed one of the major trade routes. The inhabitants of this city, which existed from 2500-1350 BC, clearly profited of a flourishing economy, and many seem to have been involved in trade and various crafts. The numerous weight stones which we found in many houses all over the city testify that the inhabitants were used to calculating weight according to at least four different weight standards (FINK 2012).

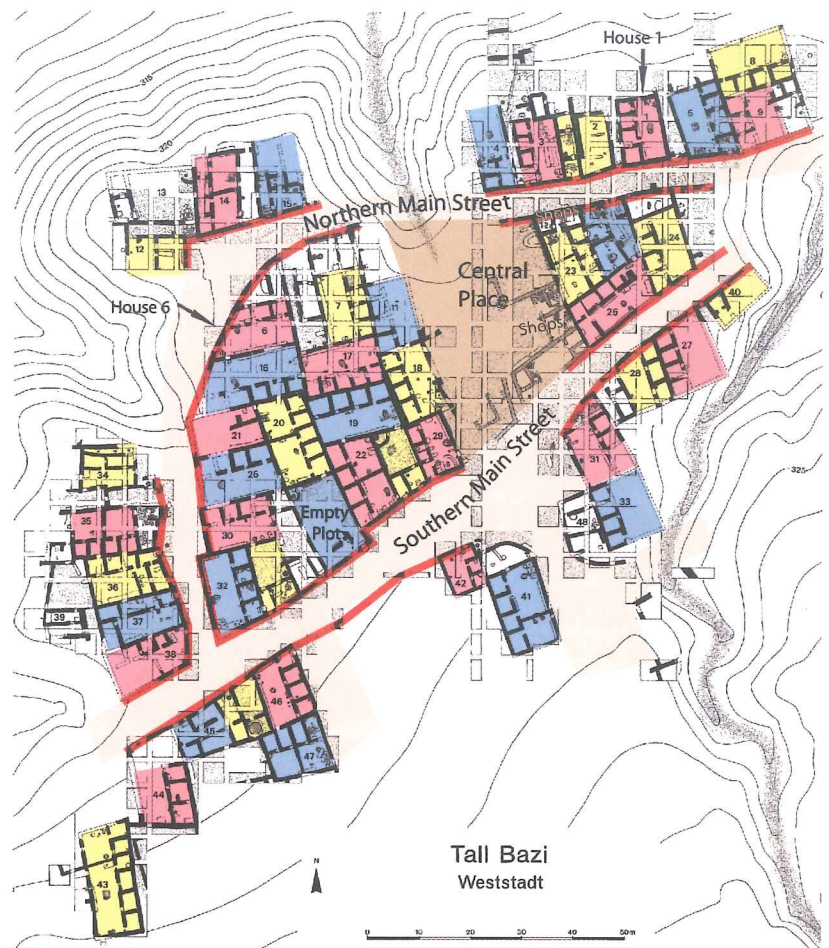
The Western Lower Town („Weststadt“) of Tell Bazi was a short-lived one-level settlement enlarge-

ment which was destroyed around 1350-1325 BC (OTTO 2006; EINWAG/OTTO 2018). It was made up of more than 70 houses which cluster together (Fig. 12). Most of the houses were built next to the other, and only exceptionally narrow lanes separate neighboring houses. Apparently space was extremely scarce, and every plot was covered with a house. More peculiar is the large Central Place in the middle of the densely built house area (Fig. 9). This place and the streets are the only open space which existed in the Weststadt, except for a handful of courtyards between some of the houses. The Central Place measures about 30 m from west to east and 40-45 m from north to south. Additional free space is given by the two main roads which pass by the place in the north and the south. These streets are astonishingly wide in general, at least 6 m, but they widen to more than 20 m next to the Central Place.

While nearly all the houses are carefully built as elongated buildings with one large main room and three to five flanking secondary rooms, the Central Place shows very different features: It consists of a slightly sloping open area, on which steplike terrace walls were built (Fig. 10). Their purpose was to transform the sloping open space into horizontal platforms, which were better suited for trade and other activities. The floor of the Place consists of many superimposed levels, which indicated that the open space was quickly rising. The uppermost floor level of the Central Place and the main streets was about one-half to one meter higher than the floors of the adjacent houses (Fig. 11 shows the neighboring Houses 25 and 23 behind the Place, with much deeper floors).

A few structures and installations were built on the place. These are several shallow, irregularly built walls. They are smaller than the walls of the houses and seem to have been built ad hoc. Since most of them are quite small and irregular, they were probably only shallow walls. Their purpose could have been to divide the area, perhaps in order to create individual market stalls. A few isolated rooms were also built on the place (Fig. 11). Unfortunately not many characteristic objects were found in them, since they were very close to the surface. Worth mentioning are a few working stones, a basalt ringstone, a complete trilobe bottle, and a potter's wheel. The floor of some of them are paved with stones (Fig. 10). Because the rooms differ distinctly from the rooms inside houses, they could have served as small workshops, shops or storage rooms. A small bread oven (tannour) was placed in front of one of these rooms. Another installation on the place is peculiar: a furrow leads into a large open vessel. The exact purpose is unclear, but it must have been connected to some activities with a liquid. Other installations on the place are short benches and a stone trough.

Only a few objects were found at the open area of the Central Place: a small hematite weight stone of 3.9 g, two large weight stones, a few arcularia shells,



▲ Fig. 9. Map of the Weststadt of Tall Bazi with the Central Place and the main streets.

◀ Fig. 10. The marketplace and a broad street with shops in the Weststadt of Bazi (kite photo: 1997, B. Einwag).

pierced limestone disks, the head of a terracotta figurine, some animal bones, and a few beads. Many of these objects seem to be thrash which was thrown away here – apparently the open space in the city



▲ Fig. 11. A shop, benches and platforms on the terraced marketplace in the Weststadt.

center was also used as a refuse area. The other objects might be the remains of trading activities. The few workshops or shops point to a frequent market function; but probably the place was not used every day as a marketplace, otherwise one would expect more solid constructions.

However, there were a couple of carefully built rooms, which can be interpreted as shops, near the Central Place. The large House 23 was situated at the junction of the main road 401 and the large Central Square. This house was composed of a row of four separate rooms which were directly accessible from the road and are interpreted as shops (OTTO 2006, 185-189, 261, fig. 172). In Room 12, which was situated directly at the junction, several weight stones were found, which belonged to different weight systems. Due to this fact and the position next to the Central Place we argue that this was a shop or exchange office for traders and merchants. Local and foreign merchants could have come here to use the present weights of different standards for carrying out their trade activities, or they may have taken them as reference weights in order to countercheck their own weight stones (this interpretation was accepted by ZACCAGNINI 2018). Is it possible that Room 12a corresponds to what is mentioned in the texts as the market office? Could the large House 23 have belonged to a chief merchant or to the overseer of the market? We cannot be sure for House 23, but there are good arguments to assume that House 29 at the western edge of the Central Place was the house of a merchant (OTTO 2006, 197-200). Although it is one of the smallest houses of the Weststadt, it contained numerous valuable objects among which many originated from the Levantine coast. Even more striking was the direct access to the main room from the Large Place – exceptional since usually the privacy of the house, especially the main room where the family assembled and the altar for the gods and ancestors was installed, was carefully protected, for example by the indirect access through a secondary room.

4. Conclusions

Archaeologically attested examples for a marketplace are not easy to find. This article presented primary research in its infancy. Presented were a few Middle and Late Bronze Age examples from Ugarit, Tell Tuqan, Tall Munbaqa/Ekalte and Tall Bazi. Nevertheless we are convinced that these examples are good enough evidence that Near Eastern cities of the 2nd millennium had market areas, where trade and retail trade took place. They correspond to what is attested in texts as „*maḥīru(m)*, *sūqu(m)*“ or *kāru(m)*“.

Contrary to earlier claims, archaeological proof for marketplaces can be found in the rare case that a settlement was excavated on a larger scale. These open places were either situated next to the city gate, which provides easy accessibility for the foreigners, or they were situated inside domestic quarters. The latter is linked to the fact that economic processes also took place in private houses: the merchant's home was his trading office. The marketplaces were frequently surrounded by built structures, some of which were used as shops and workshops. This attests to the regularity of the market activities. Also the marketplace itself could have been partly covered with shop-like structures or marketstalls, or it was equipped with benches. Evidently it served not only for trade, but also for gatherings. If the place was situated next to a temple, this could guarantee the rightfulness of transactions. If markets had standardized reference weights and capacity measurements, these were kept in adjacent buildings, either in shops, in the city gate or in the temple. Since the texts mention special weights of the markets, some of the mentioned structures may have been used as market offices, where the reference weights were kept. The size of the examined marketplaces varies between 440, 600, 1000 and 1200 m². The exchanged goods were victuals and local and foreign products such as tools and jewellery. We suggest that these described archaeological structures could be named *maḥīru(m)*.

But market activities also took place on and along broad streets inside the settlements. These market streets were especially wide and sometimes widened to small places. They can be equipped with benches. In several instances, the rooms adjacent to and accessible from the street were shops. These streets on which trade took place may have been named *sūqu(m)* – an early forerunner of actual *Sūqs* in the Arabic world, which are – as protection from the hot climate – often covered. We do not know if this was already the case in the 2nd millennium BC, but it could explain why the streets are rarely broader than the largest available wooden beams.

So far there seems to be no clear archaeological example for a *kāru(m)*, a separate quarter for for-



eign merchants inside or outside the city outside of Anatolia. But this can change with every new excavation.

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▲ Fig. 12. Tall Bazi, 3D reconstitution of the West-stadt with the central marketplace and the Citadel.

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