

Ebla and Beyond

Ancient Near Eastern Studies
after Fifty Years of Discoveries at Tell Mardikh

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Edited by

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PROGRAM

Monday 15th December

Comune di Roma, Sala della Protomoteca, Piazza del Campidoglio, Palazzo Senatorio

9:30 Opening Session

Ignazio Marino, Mayor of Rome

Louis Godart, Counsellor of the President of Italian Republic

Francesco Rutelli, President of the Association Priorità Cultura

Eugenio Gaudio, President of Sapienza University of Rome

Roberto Antonelli, Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei

Roberto Nicolai, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities, Sapienza University of Rome

Enzo Lippolis, Director of the Department of Old World Studies, Sapienza University of Rome

*Maamoun Abdulkerim, Director-General, Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums, Damascus

*Frances Pinnock, Sapienza University of Rome, Co-Director of the Archaeological Expedition at Ebla

Morning Session (Chair: Stefania Mazzoni)

11:30 P. Steinkeller (Harvard University), Ebla's Place in the International Trade Network at ca. 2350 BC

*12:00 P. Butterlin (Université Paris I – Sorbonne), Du lapis, de la cornaline et de la chlorite: Mari et les échanges au III^e millénaire

*12:30 W. Sallaberger (Ludwig-Maximilian Universität), God Kura in a Comparative Perspective

Afternoon Session (Chair: Nicolò Marchetti)

Sapienza Università di Roma, Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, Aula I, Piazzale Aldo Moro 5

*15:00 B. Foster (Yale University), The Akkadian Adventure in Syria

15:30 L. Kogan (Russian State University for Humanities), East Meets West: The Impact of Ebla on the East/West Semitic Lexical Dichotomy

*16:00 G. Chambon (Université de Lille), Comparaison dans les notations des chiffres et des mesures à Ebla, au III^e et au II^e millénaires

17:00 A. McMahon (University of Cambridge), Spinning and Weaving: The Textile Industry at Tell Brak in Light of the Evidence from Ebla

- *17:30 C. Castel (Maison de l'Orient Méditerranéen, Université de Lyon 2), Urbanisme et urbanisation dans la Syrie du III^e millénaire
*18:00 A. Vacca (Sapienza University of Rome), "Ebla wasn't built in a day" ... Reappraising the Formative Phases Preceding the State Archive Period at Tell Mardikh-Ebla

Tuesday 16th December

Sapienza Università di Roma, Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, Aula I, Piazzale Aldo Moro 5

Morning Session (Chair: Alfonso Archi)

- *9:30 M. Krebernik (Universität Jena), Syllables in Eblaite and Their Representation in the Eblaite Writing System
*10:00 A. Kzzo (Sapienza University of Rome), Cappadocian Style Seals at Ebla
*11:00 L. Cooper (University of British Columbia), Half-Full or Half-Empty? Past and Recent Research of EBIV 'Caliciform' Goblets and Their Chronological and Socio-Economic Implications
11:30 G. Philip (University of Durham), North of South: Inter-Regional Connections and Contrasts in EBA Syria-Palestine
*12:00 M. D'Andrea (Sapienza University of Rome), The Early Bronze IVB Pottery of Ebla: Stratigraphy, Chronology, Typology, and Style. Remarks from a Work-in-Progress

Afternoon Session (Chair: Maria Giovanna Biga)

- *13:30 J.-M. Durand (Collège de France), La documentation paléo-babylonienne d'Ebla et sa situation par rapport à la documentation syrienne
14:00 A.A. Burke (UCLA, University of California), Ebla and the Identification of the Levantine Amorite *Koiné*
*14:30 D. Nadali (Sapienza University of Rome), Inward/Outward: A Re-Exam of the Four City-Gates at Ebla
15:30 I.J. Winter (Harvard University), Wood and Ivory: Ebla's Contribution to Understanding Ancient Architectural Decoration and Furniture of Ancient West Asia
*16:00 M. Al-Maqdissi (Chargé de Mission, DGAM Damas), Mishrifeh-Qatna, quatre-vingt-dix ans de recherches archéologiques '1924-2014'
*16:30 A. Polcaro (Università degli Studi di Perugia), Urban Landscape and Funerary Ideology in Old Syrian Ebla: Analysis of the Tombs in Areas B and FF

Wednesday 17th December

Sapienza Università di Roma, Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, Aula I, Piazzale Aldo Moro 5

Morning Session (Chair: Luca Peyronel)

- *9:00 M. Feldman (Johns Hopkins University), Tracing Northern Networks Among the Arts of Syria in the Middle and Late Bronze Ages

- *9:30 A. Otto (Ludwig-Maximilian Universität), Basins in the Temples of Ebla and Upper Mesopotamia: An Essential Cult Requisite?
- *10:00 M. Alkhalid (Sapienza University of Rome), From Ebla to the East and Back to the South: Ceramic Horizons in the Transition Phases Between the MB I and MB II
- *10:50 G. Schwartz (Johns Hopkins University), The Value of the Vestigial: From Middle to Late Bronze in Ebla and Western Syria
- *11:20 S. Pizzimenti (Sapienza University of Rome), Ebla in the Iron Age. New Evidences from the Acropolis Excavations. Remarks from a Work in Progress
- *11:40 M.G. Micale (Sapienza University of Rome), Clay Figurines in the Persian Achaemenid Near East as seen from Tell Mardikh
- *12:30 Conclusions, P. Matthiae, Sapienza University of Rome, Director of the Archaeological Expedition at Ebla

* Contributions published in this volume, in some instance with a different title.

BASINS IN THE TEMPLES OF EBLA, SYRIA AND UPPER MESOPOTAMIA:
AN ESSENTIAL CULT REQUISITE?

1. INTRODUCTION

A large sculptured basin of basalt was one of the reasons why Paolo Matthiae started his excavations in Ebla, which were to change considerably our ideas about the history and archaeology of Syria.¹ Matthiae remembers: "In 1963 I was sent by the University of Rome to choose a site in Syria – preferably Phoenician or Aramaean. Our colleagues there showed me various sites where we might work. Among them was Tell Mardikh, on the surface of which a large basin of sculptured basalt had been found – a magnificent witness to Syrian art at the beginning of the 2nd millennium" (Matthiae and Scandone Matthiae 1976: 90). This basin (Fig. 5) is still one of the masterpieces of Syrian art of the 2nd millennium BC, was exposed first in the National Museum in Aleppo and later in Damascus, and even became the motive of a stamp of the Syrian post in 1988. Later on it was recognized that this basin originally must have stood in Temple B1 (see below).

In successive campaigns in Tell Mardikh, the Italian team uncovered not quite a Phoenician or Aramean site, but rather one of the major centers of the 3rd and 2nd millennium which – this will constitute the focus of this paper – delivered many more large basalt basins. Only two years later, in 1965, a nearly complete and splendidly sculptured basin (Fig. 1) was discovered *in situ* in the cella of Temple D, immediately behind the entrance. Several more basins, all dating to the Old Syrian Period, came to be discovered in Ebla within the subsequent years.

Although the basins and especially their decoration have attracted much attention, the objects as such and the purpose of these containers have not yet been exhaustively discussed. Why are they frequently to be found in temples? Is the decoration related to their function – and if so, what do the depicted motives and scenes reveal about the basins' purpose? What role did the basins play in actions or rituals which took place inside the temples?

In order to answer these questions, I will at first give an overview of the basins, their material, size and pictorial representations, and the spots where they had been set up. Then further basins, which were found at other sites in Syria and Northern Mesopotamia, will be presented and compared to the ones from Ebla.

1 My sincere thanks go to Paolo Matthiae and his team for the invitation to the "Ebla 50" colloquium. Fifty years of excavations in Ebla are indeed a reason to celebrate, since the fabulous and at that time unattended results considerably changed our ideas about Syria, which before had been regarded as a random area with an only little developed culture during the Bronze Age.

Finally, their purpose will be discussed with reference to their iconography, their localisation, some textual evidence, and scientific residue analysis.

2. THE SCULPTURED BASINS FROM EBLA

Mainly the number and position of the basins in Ebla, as well as their main motives, will be discussed here (see also table 1). Their depictions, iconography and date have been treated profoundly by Matthiae (1989: 190–195; 1996; 2006: 430–34; 2010: 293–300; 2013: 383–385), Pinnock (2008), Di Paolo (2006) and others. Only those basin fragments, which were found in Late-Roman ballast and cannot be attributed to a certain building, are not taken into consideration here, although the remains of a large-sized and finely carved basalt basin, showing the remains of a standing bull-man, a squatting bull and a crescent, possibly also originated from the area of Temple D (Matthiae 2006: 430–433).

2.1. *The basins from Temple D*

This temple on the citadel mound is a *templum in antis* with a long cella and two ante-chambers. A basin (Ebla D-1, see table 1) was found *in situ* inside the cella, immediately behind the entrance, neatly set up in the corner of the room (Matthiae 1989²: 152–60, figs 32, 35; here Fig. 1d). The rectangular basin is made from limestone and disposes of two chambers. It is carved on three sides (Fig. 1a–c). The central scene shows a banquet of a king (the ‘king with the peaked cap’)² and a female figure, presumably the queen or the high priestess. They are seated on either side of a laden altar. The woman is followed by two female court ladies carrying buckets, and the man is followed by three men holding spears. The lower register of the obverse and both sides are decorated with several animals, demons and monsters.³

The fragment of another sculptured basin (TM.65.D.227; Ebla D-2, see table 1) was also found somewhere inside the cella (Matthiae 1966: 138, pl. LVII; 1989²: fig. 129). It shows the upper part of a bearded man, probably a warrior or dignitary, holding a spear. This fragment joins with another fragment (TM.93.G.309) that was found 28 years later in the large pit in front of the cult building. It shows a part of a similarly dressed and armed bearded man (Fig. 2).⁴ This Basin D-2 was made from basalt and – judging from the size of the fragments – must have been

2 It has been supposed from the beginning that this person represented a king, and B. Teissier (1993) argued convincingly that this man with the peculiar peaked cap was the king in early 2nd millennium Syria.

3 For detailed iconographic studies see Matthiae 2006a; 2006b. For more data about each basin see table 1. On the right side, the main figure is a lion-headed demon who grasps two lions. On the left side, the main figure is the hairy genius *lahmu* who grasps the tail of the flood monster *abūbu* (I follow Ursula Seidl in this interpretation, see Seidl 1998).

4 Matthiae 2006: 430; Matthiae, Pinnock and Scandone Matthiae 1995: 398, cat. 248.

much larger than the limestone Basin D-1 in the corner.⁵ The fragmentary state of the basin is in contrast to the well preserved basin in the corner and attests the thorough plundering and destruction of the temple inventory.⁶ A possible explanation for the different state of conservation could be that the basin in the room's corner had been overlooked by the enemies, because it had been covered completely by the collapsed material of the temple walls.

2.2. The basin from Temple N

This temple, situated north-east of the Acropolis, is the largest one in the lower town. Only the inner part of the cella has been preserved while the entrance is eroded. A carved limestone basin with two chambers (TM.72.N.468) was found *in situ* exactly in the middle of the rear side of the cella, i.e. at the most important place of the sacred room (Fig. 3b). It had been placed against the large brick bench in front of a presumed central niche. The strange fact that the reverse side and parts of the sides had been embedded in the brick benches explains why only these parts have been preserved. Both sides depicted protective *lama* goddesses side by side, represented *en face* (Matthiae 2010: 323–325, figs 173, 174); the rear side shows three couples of men embracing each other or holding a standard together, and a single man (Matthiae 1989²: 192–93, pls 131–33). This has been interpreted as an alliance, which might have taken place inside the temple, and which could have been the occasion for the donation of the basin (Matthiae 2013: 384–85). Presumably the front side, where the main subject was depicted, was destroyed on purpose when an end was put to the temple.

2.3 The basins from Temple B1

This fairly small and simple *templum in antis*,⁷ situated close to domestic quarters in the southern lower town, was equipped with a 1.20 m deep podium along the rear side and steps at the entrance between the antae (Matthiae 2010: 432–33, fig. 234). No basin was found *in situ*, but there are good reasons to believe that Temple B1 used to be equipped with two basins. Several basalt pieces, which were found in a cistern close to the rear podium, are the remains of a very large basalt basin with two chambers (Basin B1-1, Fig. 4a–d).⁸ The fragments show the remains of

5 Matthiae 2006: 430, note 27: "... at least two or perhaps almost three times bigger than the basalt basin of Temple B of the Lower Town".

6 Matthiae wonders if this could be the basin which was mentioned by Ibbit-Lim in his votive inscription, see below.

7 The area of the entrance with the walls, which closed the cella, is heavily eroded, but can be restored: see Matthiae 2010: 432–33, Fig. 234.

8 Matthiae 1989²: 189, pls 130, 134; 1966: pls 60, 1–2; 1965: 66–69.

two human-headed bulls, above one of them a crouching animal, the fragments of two *lahmu* figures, birds and other animals.

The other basin, which may be attributed to Temple B1, is the splendidly decorated and nearly complete basin mentioned at the beginning, which triggered off the excavations in Ebla (Fig. 5). According to the villagers, the basin had been discovered prior to the excavations in this area of the slope. Since a small fragment of the same basin was found on the entrance steps of Temple B, it is quite certain that basin B1–2 indeed stood in this temple (Matthiae 2006: 433). It consists of two chambers and is decorated on three sides. The front shows the banquet of the ‘king with the peaked cap’, who is seated in front of a laden altar and assisted by two servants; seven armed warriors accompany him. The socle is formed by the protomes and paws of four lions on each side.

Given the limited space inside the cella room, the question imposes itself where these basins had been standing. The large basin B1–1 measured approx. 1.6–1.7 metres in length and 0.75–0.90 metres in depth. The interior of the cella is only 4.50 m wide, and its length must have been approx. 6.30 metres, if the eroded walls at the entrance are restored (Matthiae 2010: 433, fig. 432). Since the form of the temple resembles that of Temple N, and since fragments of the large basin have been found close to the pedestal in the rear and a fragment of the small basin near the entrance, I propose an analogous position: the large basin placed in the middle of the rear side exactly opposite the entrance and close to the pedestal, and the small basin in one of the corners close to the entrance (Fig. 5d).

2.4. The basin from Temple P2

This large *templum in antis* formed part of the extended sacred area south of Northern Palace P. The sacred area housed also the enigmatic Monument P3 and a large open space, where numerous *favissae* contained remains of the cultic inventory.

Fragments of a basalt basin were “found scattered among the stones heaped up in the area of the cella” (Matthiae 2013: 576). The lower left corner of the basin shows a naked woman or goddess, her head not preserved (Fig. 6b); three other joining fragments from the upper end of the basin show the upper parts of a winged figure; the head and shoulders of a person holding a beaker, with a bird sitting on its head; and the upper end of a bull man holding a standard (Fig. 6a). The basin is estimated to have been approximately 1.10–1.20 m long, 0.65 m wide, and 0.60–0.65 m high (Matthiae 1996).

More basalt basin fragments were found in Area Q in 2000 (TM.00.Q.500+510; TM.00.Q.727); they depict a squatting bull and the head of a bull-man (Matthiae 2006a, 430–433, figs 8, 9). These fragments are not included in this study, because they were discovered in Late-Roman ballast above the Western Palace in the Lower Town and cannot be unequivocally attributed to a certain temple.

3. CONCLUSIONS CONCERNING THE EBLA BASINS

One or two basins are to be found so regularly in the “in antis temples” of the Middle Bronze Age (precisely in four out of the hitherto five known ones) that they must be considered as standard equipment of the Ebla temples during the Old Syrian Period. They were made from basalt or limestone and measured 0.88–1.60 m in length, 0.65–0.90 m in width, and 0.53–1.00 m in height. They were produced in the MB I–II period and continued to be in use until the deliberate destruction of the temples. The iconography seems a bit strange at first sight, since the basins mainly show interactions between humans: banquet scenes, meetings between equals, and warriors; other motives are animals, apotropaic genii and protective deities. But no religious acts towards deities are depicted, which would have been regarded as an appropriate motif in a temple. So, what was the basins’ purpose, and what could they have been used for?

Let us get back to these questions after we have studied more basins from other sites, since Ebla is not the only site where stone basins are attested in temples. There are further examples from Middle and Late Bronze Age temples in Alalah, Ugarit, Emar, Tell Munbaqa/Ekalte and Tell Bazi.

4. THE STONE BASINS FROM ALALAH

The temple of Alalah was in continuous use from the Middle to the Late Bronze Age. In the level I temple were found several basalt basins, not inside the cella, but in the forecourt. L. Woolley mentions a broken double basin from basalt in or near the gateway which was flanked by the lion-orthostats.⁹ It is difficult to trace this basin. The plan of the temple (Fig. 7a) shows a basin at the foot of the stairs leading into the cella. But this basin seems to have one chamber only, and is probably the basin which was described by Woolley (1955: 87) as follows: “In the north corner [of the court] there was a square basalt tank (certainly *in situ*) and against it a number of large stones ... which might be the foundation of a raised pedestal ...”

However, there is a photo of the temple forecourt (Fig. 7b) which shows a heavily damaged double basin. Although it is standing apart from the entrance steps on the left side of the forecourt, I assume that this is the basalt tank which had been found near the gateway. Many objects were clearly arranged for this photo (also the table-like altar was neatly placed in the forecourt, although it had been found in the room east of it not too far away from Idrimi’s statue). It seems therefore probable that there had been at least two basalt basins inside the *temenos* area of the sanctuary, one with a single compartment and one with two compartments.

⁹ Woolley 1955: 87: “In the gateway was found the ivory libation-pourer ..., and just by it was a (broken) basalt tank divided into two compartments each 0.60 m sq. and 0.30 m deep”.

P. Matthiae and N. Marchetti were so kind as to report to me that they saw several basalt objects, among which basins with one and two chambers respectively during their visit to the old excavation house at Tell Atchana. They forwarded the images, which are presented here (Fig. 7c–d). It is not clear if they once belonged to the temple equipment, but it is possible that the square basin in the background of Fig. 7c is the mentioned basin from the forecourt. No decoration is visible on the photos, and no decoration either is reported for the basins which had been excavated by Woolley.

5. THE STONE BASINS FROM UGARIT

In the very heart of Ugarit, immediately opposite the main entrance to the Royal Palace, there is a building called “bâtiment dit au trône”. It is interpreted as a shrine consisting of several rooms (Callot 2013). The two largest rooms were each equipped with a rectangular basalt basin with plain sides and only one chamber. Locus 3 featured a stone basin side by side with a massive stone throne (Callot 2013: Fig. 10), Locus 8 an altar and a stone basin (Callot 2013: Fig. 11). The floor plan of the building certainly differs considerably from that of the other temples presented here; but since the equipment of the rooms is indeed not standard and might point to a sacred function of the rooms, these basins are worth mentioning in this context.

6. STONE BASINS FROM EMAR

The highest and most prominent spot in Emar, chantier E, housed a sacred area. It was equipped with a twin sanctuary, the Northern and the Southern Temple each constituting a *templum in antis* built side by side. A stone basin had reportedly been found by J. Margueron in the Northern Temple¹⁰, embedded in the platform on the rear side of the cella (Fig. 8c). It can be assumed that this basin was part of the inventory of an earlier temple. The same basin was re-excavated later on by the German team. It is the lower part of a rectangular basin with one chamber from sandstone (Sakal 2012: 89–90). It measured approx. 1.30 m in length and 0.50 m in width; its height cannot be restored, since it was found heavily damaged (Fig. 8a). Margueron (1975: 74, pl. VIII.4) had also published another fragment of a basin, the outer face of which bore the relief of a standing *kusarikku*-bull-man (Fig. 8b). Since this sculptured fragment is also made from sandstone, and since it was also found “enfoui dans une installation cultuelle” (Margueron 1975: 74) it is not too far-fetched to interpret this as a fragment of the same basin. It may be concluded that a sandstone basin, sculptured in relief and adorned with genies and other motifs, stood close to the focal point of one of Emar’s main temples (Fig. 8c).

10 This temple is frequently named the Temple of Ashtarte. Since there is no positive reason for an attribution to this goddess, the neutral name Northern Temple is used here.

7. THE BASINS FROM TELL MUNBAQA/EKALTE

On the highest point of Tell Munbaqa/Ekalté three temples, named *Steinbau* 1, 2 and 3, towered the city. They were erected side by side along the fringe of the Euphrates valley. The latest building phase dates back to the Late Bronze Age, but at some places preceding temples were discovered below (Werner 1994: 59–60). A temple from the late Middle or early Late Bronze Age was covered by *Steinbau* 3, which had been built in the Late Bronze Age, but apparently never had been finished. A stone basin, of which no illustrations and no further details have been available to date,¹¹ was found in this earlier temple. It stood in front of the white plastered mudbrick altar, to which two steps were leading.¹² Another stone basin was found in *Steinbau* 2 beside the staircase that leads to Room B.¹³ Its position inside a *templum in antis*, in a corner of the cella behind the entrance, resembles very much the position of Basin 1 at Ebla, Temple D.

8. THE BASIN FROM THE TEMPLE IN TELL BAZI

A decorated terracotta basin was found in the *templum in antis*, which occupied the central part of the 60 m high citadel of Tell Bazi (Einwag and Otto 2012). The fragments of the basin were found scattered in front of the main altar of Room A (Fig. 9b). This room served as the cella in the final phase of the temple. A detailed study of the basin, its position and its decoration, was conducted recently (Otto in press). The basin was decorated on its front side with a drinking scene showing a seated man drinking with a tube, a tree-like object and a star, and two naked women or goddesses to the right and to the left (Fig. 9a).

A considerable number of small beakers and other vessels were also found in the debris, mixed with the fragments of the terracotta basin.¹⁴ Residue analyses were conducted with the basin and most of the vessels. Both the basin and numerous beakers, each one of a different fabric, form and size, showed traces of oxalate. This indicates that they had once contained beer.¹⁵ As a result, it is highly probable that a basin stood in front of the altar in the Temple of Tell Bazi (Fig. 9b). It was decorated with – among other motifs – a man involved in a ritual drinking

11 I thank Peter Werner for this information.

12 Werner 1994: 106; Machule *et al.* 1993: 75.

13 Orthmann 1976: 32: "Die Einrichtung besteht aus einem Altar in der Mitte des Raumes, einer freistehenden Bank nördlich des Altars, an den Wänden umlaufenden Bänken, einem kleinen Wasserbecken neben der Treppe zu Raum B ...".

14 Terracotta basins, which had been part of the temple equipment and were discarded in a *favissa* of Area P at Ebla, has been described by Marchetti and Nigro (1997: 17): "Some fragments of clay basins, with applied rope decoration along the borders, testify that some pieces of the temple equipment, such as clay vats or basins, were also thrown in the *favissa*".

15 I am grateful to Dr. Martin Zarnkow (TU München-Weihenstephan) who made the residue analyses. It is part of our ongoing project on ancient Near Eastern brewing, see Zarnkow *et al.* 2006 and Zarnkow, Otto and Einwag 2011.

scene. This reminds the decoration of some of the Ebla basins, where the king is equally involved in ritual drinking. The residue analysis testifies that beer had been poured into this basin or scooped from it. Perhaps it served as a container for ritual offerings of beer, which were brought here in their own little beakers by numerous individuals.¹⁶ There is also another tempting explanation, which was pointed out to me by Irene Winter: beer libations may have been poured over the cult statue and trickled down into this container which stood at its foot.

9. REFLECTIONS ON THE PURPOSE OF THE BASINS

The basalt torso of King Ibbit-Lim's statue was found in Ebla south of Temple D in a more recent level. The inscription on the statue reports that King Ibbit-Lim dedicates a base to the goddess Ishtar on the occasion of the introduction of a basin (akk. *apsûm*, written *ap-za-am*) (Gelb 1984). Gelb writes (1984: 217): "The meaning of the Sumerian *abzu* and Akkadian *apsûm*, originally 'underground water' and 'sea', is 'water basin' when applied to objects dedicated to the temple". In the following sentence, he mentions several basins excavated in Tell Mardikh. Since that time it has been tacitly accepted that all the sculptured basins from Ebla served as water basins, especially used for ablution: "... la tipologia del bacino scolpito a due vasche quadrate affiancate era caratteristica di arredi templari di natura lustrale, tipici di santuari di Ebla" (Matthiae, Pinnock and Scandone Matthiae 1995: 422).

This may be a plausible explanation for some of the basins, especially for those positioned directly behind the entrances to the cellae. But did they all necessarily have to be water basins? First of all, the position of several basins directly at the front side of the cella in front of the supposed cult image is puzzling. Secondly, the question arises why the basins had two chambers, since water is water – there are no different kinds of water. And, finally, it seems strange that water basins depict symposia and banquets in the presence of the king, as well as protective spirits, but never fish or a *guilloche*, the god Enki/Ea or other motifs which were associated with or symbolizing water.¹⁷

Similar activities and rituals were performed in temples and houses at Late Bronze Age sites. The size of the temple cellas and the main rooms of the houses in the Euphrates valley were strikingly similar, as were the immobile installations such as benches, altars and pedestals (Otto 2006b). Therefore, it is not surprising that some private houses in Tell Munbaqa/Ekalte exhibit basins in front of the altar of the main room or in front of the pedestal – those two locations where demonstrably the house cult was held. A terracotta basin with two chambers, 36.1 by 21

16 It is highly probable that numerous individuals offered tiny bits of beer here, since every beaker and vessel is different in shape, clay and volume, see Sallaberger 2012; Otto 2012.

17 There are water basins from Susa, Tello, Assur and other sites which depict those motifs; see Otto 2016.

cm large and 11.5 cm high, was found in House P on top of a mudbrick in front of the altar.¹⁸ It is seemingly undecorated, but the four broken edges at the upper corners indicate that protomes had been formerly attached. Another terracotta basin with two chambers, 33 by 17.1 cm large and 9 cm high, decorated with a snake on the front side, was found in House M near the pedestal on the floor (Fig. 10a).¹⁹

More terracotta basins with one chamber – or more frequently two chambers – were found in at least six houses in Ekalte (Czichon and Werner 2008: 314–318). Some of them were plain, others decorated, and measured 29–39 cm in length, 13–31 cm in width and 9–20 cm in height. They were mostly found in the main room, in several instances close to the altar or the pedestal. Two basins from House AK in the Inner Town are nicely decorated and feature two chambers. Basin 8686 (29 by 18 cm large and 9 cm high) is decorated with a zig-zag rope-like pattern or snake on the front side, several attached protomes at the corners are broken off.²⁰ Basin 8687 (21.5 by 15.1 cm large and 13.9 cm high), disposing of two chambers, depicts three human figures, each of them embracing or holding a ram in their arms (Fig. 10b).²¹ The terracotta basins clearly served some ritual purpose. Since some of them – being quite shallow – were placed on neatly plastered and certainly not water-resistant surfaces, and since some of them had two chambers, it seems to me quite unlikely that they were used as water basins for ablution. It seems more logical to conclude that two different substances were kept in them or poured into them.

Apparently, the decoration, form and position of the terracotta basins were similar to those of the stone basins. Rectangular basins in general seem to have been essential requisites for specific ritual acts that took place inside the Syrian and Upper Mesopotamian temples and private houses during the Middle and Late Bronze Age. The difference in material might be due to the status or economic situation of the offering person (mighty king of Ebla *vs.* private persons from Ekalte and Bazi?) and to different customs in the Middle and the Late Bronze Age respectively. The residue analysis of the basin from Tell Bazi, which testifies beer in the basin, is a strong argument as to the function of the stone and terracotta basins in Ebla and other Syrian sites. At least some of the basins – in all probability those at the central point of the cella in front of the assumed cult statue – might have served as receptacles in which offerings were poured or laid, or over which the liquids had been poured. Whether the various chambers of the basins were designed to hold different kinds of liquids (beer, wine or water) or hard and liquid substances is – of course – mere speculation, but would explain why many consist of two chambers.

18 Mbq 26/25–118: Czichon and Werner 2008: 315, no. 8684, pl. 273.

19 Mbq 40/26–40: Czichon and Werner 2008: 315, no. 8685, pls 273, 325.

20 Mbq 35/28–42: Czichon and Werner 2008: 315, no. 8686, pls 274, 325.

21 Mbq 35/28–45: Czichon and Werner 2008: 315, no. 8687, pls 274, 325.

10. CONCLUSIONS

Basins from stone and terracotta constituted essential cult requisites in Syrian temples of the Middle and Late Bronze Age. So far, examples have been known to date from Ebla, Alalah, Emar, Ekalte and Tell Bazi. The largest and the most abundantly decorated stone basins are known from Ebla, but also some basins from Emar, Ekalte and Tell Bazi were decorated. The main subjects depicted on the basins are cultic banquet scenes and ritual feasting, protective spirits or deities, and apotropaic animals or hybrid creatures.

The basins might have served several purposes. Some of the basins, perhaps those which were standing close to the entrance of the cellas, might have been used for cleaning and ablution rituals of worshipping people. Other basins which were – as well in temples and in private houses – placed at the central focus point of the cellas or the main rooms, might have served other purposes. Since the residue analysis of the decorated terracotta basin in the temple at Tell Bazi indicates that the basin contained beer, it is argued here that possibly not all the investigated basins used to contain water and serve ablution purposes only, but some of them might have collected offered beer or other liquids. This seems especially likely for the basins, which were placed at the most prominent place of the temple cellas and the main rooms in the houses, in front of the assumed divine statue.²² It may also explain, why the banquet and ritual drinking scenes are common motifs on those basins which are well preserved. I wonder if not most of the basins had been decorated with the motif of the king or other high-ranking people involved in ritual drinking, and if this had been another reason for the meticulous smashing of the front sides.²³

22 Texts from Emar and Ekalte indicate that statuettes of “the gods” were present even in the houses, see Otto 2006a: 241–244.

23 This would also explain why only the front side of the basin in Temple N was destroyed.

Basin	Findspot	Material	Length in m	Width in m	Height / Thickness in m	Depiction	Fig. and Reference
Ebla D-1 (TM.65.D.2 26), basin with 2 chambers	Ebla, Temple D, cella, <i>in situ</i> in the left corner of the cella	Limestone	1.12	0.64	0.79 (H)	Three sides carved in relief. Obverse: Banquet of the king and the queen/high priestess, female court-ladies and male dignitaries; animals. Right side; lion-headed demon and animals; left side: <i>lahnu</i> , <i>abubu</i> , warriors, man fighting lion attacking bull	1a-c (Matthiae 1989: pl. 127-28, Matthiae 1966: Pl. LI)
Ebla D-2 (TM.65.D.2 27, joined with TM.93.G.30 9)	Ebla, Temple D, cella	Basalt	[0.33]	[0.24]	0.7 (T)	Two joining fragments: Two bearded men equipped with spears	2 (Matthiae, Pinnock, Scandone Matthiae 1995: 398, cat. 248)
Ebla N-1 (TM.72.N.4 68) basin with 2 chambers	Ebla, Temple N, cella, <i>in situ</i> in front of the rear pedestal	Limestone	1.38		0.71	Remains of three sides. Reverse: 7 dignitaries (alliances between 6 of them?) and 1 <i>lama</i> goddess; right side: remains of 4 <i>lama</i> ; left side: remains of 3 <i>lama</i> .	3a-b (Matthiae 1989: Pl. 131)
Ebla B1-1 Large basin with 2 chambers (TM.64.B.2 3, TM.64.B.25, TM.64.S.2,	Ebla, Temple B1, in a cistern close to the rear pedestal	Basalt	Reconstructed size: c. 1.60/1.70 ¹	c. 0.75/0.90	c. 0.90 / 1.10	Fragments: Human-headed bulls; <i>lahnu</i> figures; animals	4a-d (a: Matthiae 1989: Pl. 134; b: Matthiae 1966: Pl. 60, 2; c: Matthiae

1 TM.64.B.23: 44 x 31 cm; TM.64.B.27: 34 x 16 x 28 cm; TM.64.S.2: L: 34 cm; H: 22 cm; D: 33 cm; TM.65.B.230: 53 x 59 x 13 cm.

TM.65.B.230, TM.64.B.27)							1966: Pl. 60, 1; d; Matthiae 1989: Pl. 130).
Ebla B1-2, small basin with 2 chambers	Ebla, found before regular excavations; joining with a fragment from the entrance steps of Temple B1	Basalt	0.88	0.65	0.53	3 sides carved in relief. Obverse: Banquet of the king, 3 warriors and two servants; <i>kusarikku</i> and 4 lions, Right side: 4 warriors and 4 lions; left side: only one lion preserved	5 a (Matthiae 1965: Pl. LXIX)
Ebla P2-1, (TM.90.P.260a+b; TM.90.P.800)	Ebla, Temple P2, cella	Basalt	c. 1.10/1.20	c. 0.65	c. 0.60/ 0.65	Naked woman/goddess; winged figure; person holding beaker, bird ontop her head; <i>kusarikku</i>	6 (Matthiae 2013: Pl. 161a-b)
Alalah-1, basin with two chambers	Alalah, level I temple, near entrance	Basalt	c. 1.20	c. 0.60	c. 0.30	-	7b (Woolley 1955: Pl. XIb)
Alalah-2, square basin with one chamber	Alalah, level I temple, in courtyard	Basalt				-	7a (Woolley 1955: 83, Fig. 34a)
Emar-1a, basin with one chamber	Northern Temple, Chantier E, embedded in platform	Sandstone	c. 1.30	c. 0.50	?		8a (Sakal 2012: Pl. 23A)
Emar-1b	Northern Temple, Chantier E	Sandstone				Bull-man	8b (Margueron 1975, Pl. VIII.4)
Ekalte-1	Steinbau 2	Stone					
Ekalte-2	Temple below Steinbau 3, in front of the white	Stone					

	plastered mudbrick altar						
Tall Bazi-1, basin with one chamber	Temple, Room A, in front of the altar	Terracotta	0.55	0.28	0.20	Drinking scene: seated man drinking from tube; naked goddesses; tree; star	9a

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Fig. 1a-c. Basin Ebla D-1 (after Matthiae 1989²: pls 127-128; 1966: Pl. LI).

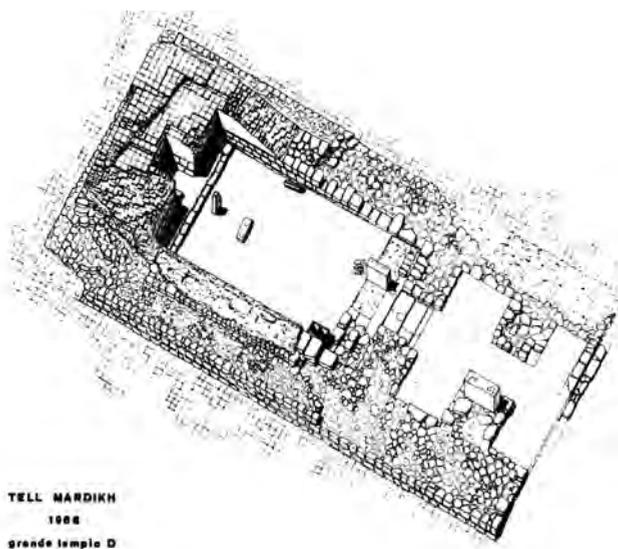


Fig. 1d. Basin Ebla D-1 *in situ* in the corner of the temple's cella (after Matthiae 1989²: 152, fig. 32).



Fig. 2. Joining fragments of Basin Ebla D-2 (after Matthiae, Pinnock and Scandone Matthiae [eds] 1995: 398, cat. 248).



Fig. 3a. Basin Ebla N-1 (after Matthiae 1989²: pl. 131).

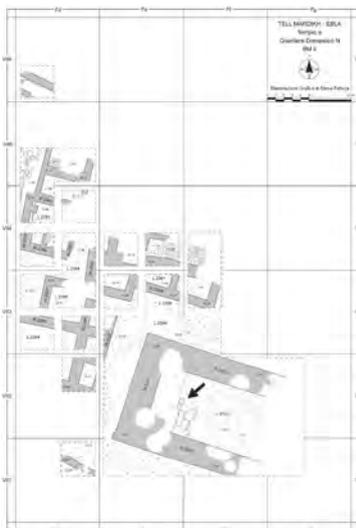


Fig. 3b. Basin Ebla N-1 *in situ* in the central position of the rear side of the cella of Temple N (after Matthiae 1989²: 151, fig. 31).



Fig. 4a-d. Fragments of Basin Ebla B-1 (a: after Matthiae 1989²: pl. 134; b: after Matthiae 1966: pl. 60, 2; c: after Matthiae 1966: pl. 60, 1; d: after Matthiae 1989²: pl. 130).



Fig. 5a: Basin Ebla B-2, certainly from Temple B1 (after Matthiae *et al.* 1965: pl. LXIX)

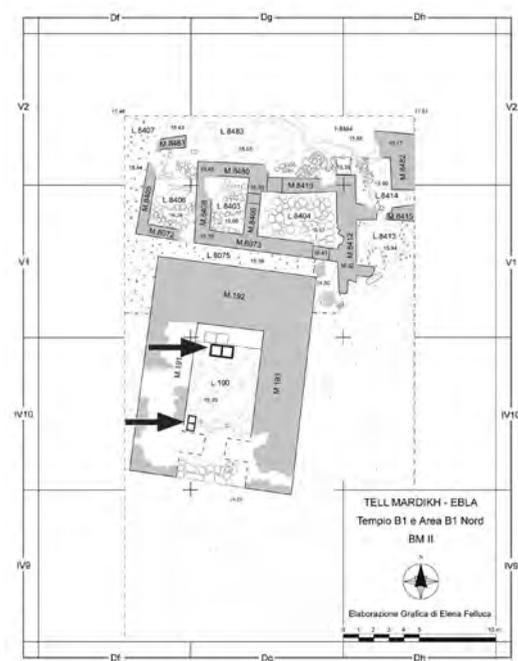


Fig. 5b. Proposed position of the small and the large basalt basin within Temple B1 (after Matthiae 2010: 433, fig. 432).



Fig. 6a–b. Fragments of the Basin Ebla P-2 (after Matthiae 2013: pl. 161a–b).

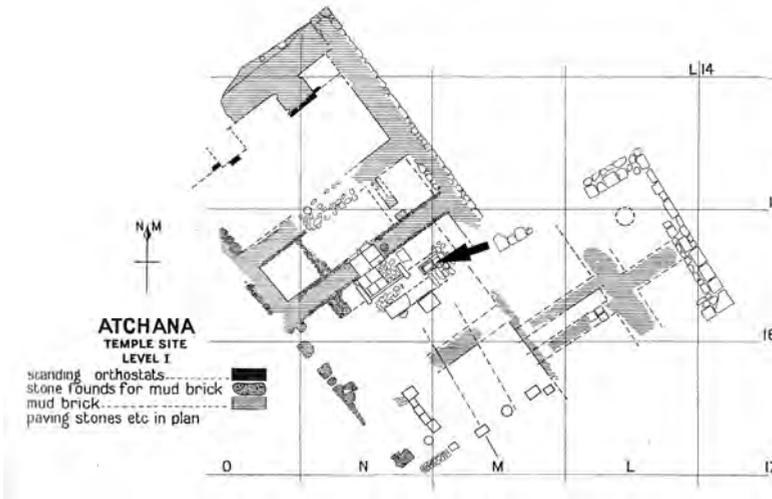


Fig. 7a. Basin Alalah-1 arranged in the forecourt of the temple (after Woolley 1955: pl. XIb); 7b: Plan of the temple and fore-court: basin with one chamber at the foot of the entrance steps (after Woolley 1955: 83, fig. 34a; 7c-d: Basalt basins in front of the old excavation house of Tell Atchana (photos: courtesy N. Marchetti).

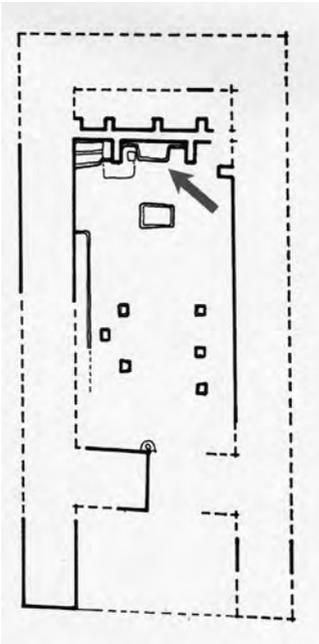


Fig. 8. Sandstone basin Emar-1; 8a: Base of the basin (after Sakal 2012: pl. 23A); 8b: Fragment of the basin, decorated with a standing bull-man (after Margueron 1975: pl. VIII.4); 8c: Location of the sandstone basin in the Northern Temple at Emar, Chantier E (after Sakal 2012: 89, fig. 7).

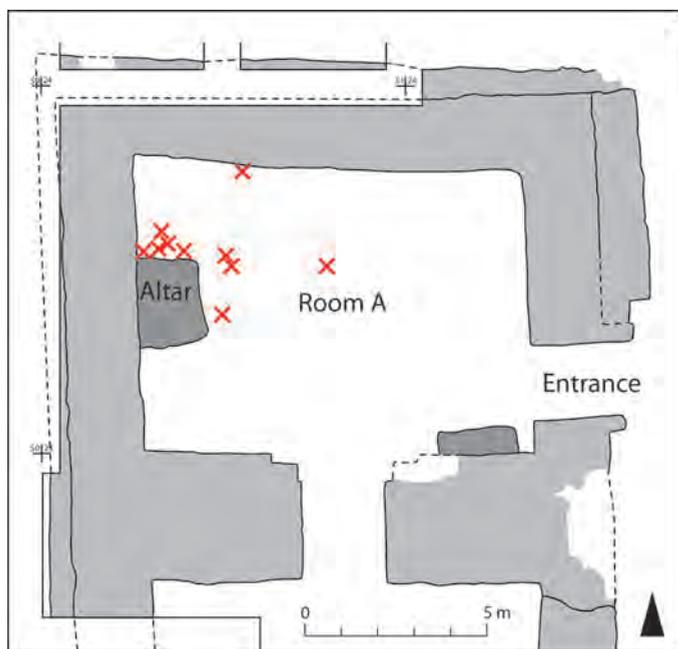
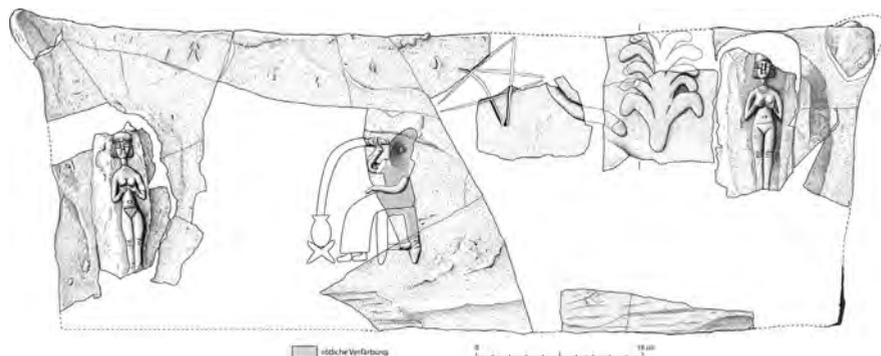


Fig. 9a. Terracotta basin from the temple at Tell Bazi, decorated with a drinking scene, two naked goddesses, star, tree and serpent(?); 9b: Findspots (x) of the basin's fragments. They suggest the original position of the basin near the altar.

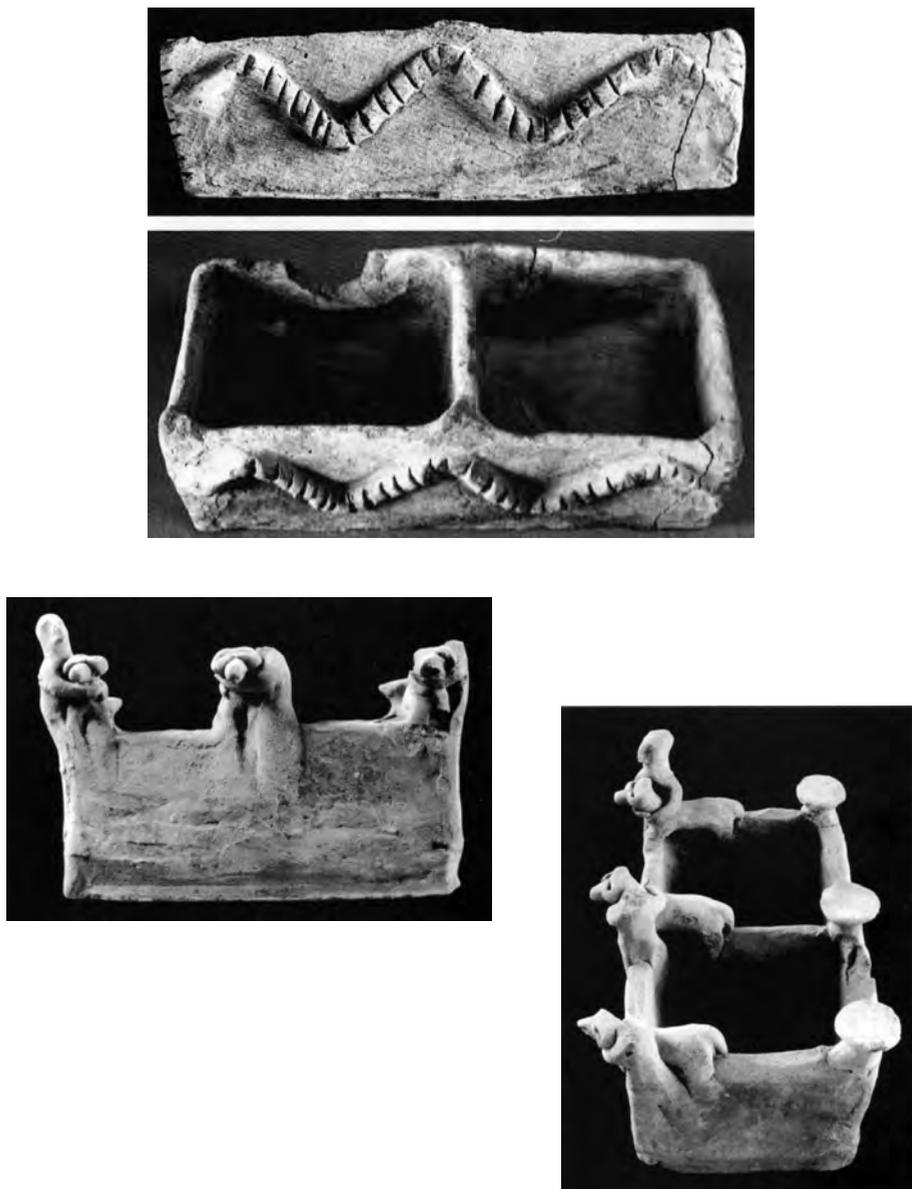


Fig. 10a–b. Terracotta basins from the houses at Tell Munbaqa/Ekalt; a: Basin 8685 from House M (after Czichon and Werner 2008: pl. 325, no. 8685); b: Basin 8687 from House AK (after Czichon and Werner 2008: pl. 325).