

MÜNCHENER ABHANDLUNGEN ZUM ALTEN ORIENT
BAND 1

Münchener Abhandlungen zum Alten Orient

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From Pottery to Chronology: The Middle Euphrates Region in Late Bronze Age Syria

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Summing up the Late Bronze Age of the Upper Syrian Euphrates Region

ADELHEID OTTO

The papers of this volume presented and discussed materials in different ways, each applying the method which was considered the best in view of condition of and the variety of sources for the relevant site. Given the results of this conference, I propose a synchronized chronology of the Upper Syrian sites during LB IA, LB IB and LB II as detailed in Table 1. This table was assembled with the help of all contributors; any mistakes are my responsibility.

Tom L. McClellan's contribution focusses on the methodological background of pottery analysis. He establishes six important principles, among which the importance of quantification and seriation is emphasized. McClellan, following these principles, categorises the pottery types of el-Qitar in 32 seriated groups. The groups are in turn subsumed into five chronological periods. His quantitative analysis is based on the whole available pottery from el-Qitar and thus highly reliable

Date BC (MC)	Period	Emar	Munbaqa	Hadidi	Qitar	Bazi	Banat	Shiukh Fawqani	Umm el-Marra	Historical Interpretation
1600	MB II	UT 4	II-Mbq-6		II	North slope 4 Temple			IIIa-c	
1500	LB IA	UT 3	II-Mbq-5	H-XIII	Gap	North slope 3 Temple Room B Citadel Gate, lev. 5			Gap	Local authorities under Mittani hegemony
1450			-----			North slope 2				
1400	LB IB	UT 2	II-Mbq-4	Tablet Building		West stadt	Temple Room A	Period 0 Area A	La maison brûlée	IIb
1350		Houses J-K	II-Mbq-3		III					Suppiluliuma I campaign
1300	LB II	Chan-tier A	II-Mbq-2		IV					IIa
		Bit Hilani Temple	II-Mbq-1		V					Hittite hegemony
1200		UT 1			VI					End of Hittite empire

Table 1: Synchronised Chronology of the Upper Syrian Euphrates area in the Late Bronze Age

— horizontal lines indicate major breaks, destruction and abandonment;

- - - broken lines indicate breaks with reoccupation;

..... dotted lines indicate resettlement after abandonment.

for recognising changes in the material. Periods II and III are divided by a long gap. While period II dates back to the Middle Bronze Age, periods III-VI cover much of the Late Bronze Age; period III starts after or shortly before most of the other sites were destroyed.

There seem to be certain trends of ceramic development and especially in the frequency of types in the four stratified sequences: two from the Orthostat Building 14 and the overlying Building 15, and two superimposed layers from the Temple, Building 10. Characteristic of the latest LB pottery is “a heaviness or crudeness not seen in earlier levels... It seems as if more clay was used per pot than previously; bases are thicker, walls are thicker, rims are heavily turned.” (this volume, p. 114).

Glenn M. Schwartz presents the material from **Umm el-Marra** period IIb, which can be divided into a pre-destruction phase and a destruction phase. The houses of the latter phase contain abundant pottery in primary context, from which he defines the most typical shapes of that phase. He compares them to those from the destruction horizons at Hadidi, Bazi Weststadt, Munbaqa phase 4, and Shiukh Fawqani, and concludes that they have much in common, but that there are differences, e.g. the profusion of bowls with round bottom at Bazi versus their absence at Umm el-Marra, and wonders „if such differences are the result of chronological, regional, or functional differences.“

He interprets, albeit with caution, the burnt destruction level in several excavation areas at Umm el-Marra as an indication of a site-wide event. Five radiocarbon dates from barley indicate a date somewhere between 1390 and 1280 BC for this event. Unfortunately, there is too little ceramic material from the post-destruction phase period IIa, dated to 1340-1275, to gain a reliable idea of the Umm el-Marra LB II pottery. Since this is a general handicap in the investigated area, neighbouring regions with sites such as Tall Afis (MAZZONI 2002; ARCHI/VENTURI 2013) may one day help to better understand the LB II period.

Felix Blocher and **Peter Werner** analysed the character and date of the historical events reported in the cuneiform texts from Emar such as the Hurrian war(s) and attacks by the enigmatic Tarwi-people. From this they conclude that it was not one single large event that caused the horizon of destruction, but many events. This could explain why the houses of the **Munbaqa** II-Mbq-4 phase were sealed below and above by destruction layers. However, there is some ambiguity in dating the II-Mbq-4 houses, a few of which contained cuneiform archives. The latest of numerous philologists' attempts to date the tablets was made by Torrecilla (2014), who dates them to 1350-1280 – astonishingly late. The pottery, however, seems to be a bit older than that from Bazi Weststadt and that from the Tablet

Building at Hadidi – and the pottery must be comparable, since Hadidi and Munbaqa lie just across the river. Radiocarbon dates cluster around 1500-1300 for II-Mbq-4 (short-lived samples) and 1450-1250 for II-Mbq-3 (wood). This speaks in favour of a date in the first half of the 14th century. If we consider that the dating according to historical evidence has to be taken seriously, a date around 1350 would be possible for the tablet phase.

The settlement of Munbaqa shrinks in the following II-Mbq-3 phase, but the pottery shows no marked differences. The houses of this phase were also destroyed by fire. At the moment it is impossible to tell whether the destruction of II-Mbq-4 or the destruction of II-Mbq-3 was contemporary with those at Hadidi and Bazi-Banat. One radiocarbon date from Munbaqa level II-Mbq-3 is close to several from the destruction level of the Bazi Temple, thus corroborating the end of both settlements at approximately the same time. Settlement activity continued during phases II-Mbq-2 and -1, but was much reduced in extent.

Anne Porter discusses the occupation of **Banat-Bazi** in the 3rd and **Bazi-Banat** in the 2nd millennium. Interestingly, the floors of the Late Bronze Age houses lie directly on the material from the third millennium; the Middle Bronze Age is completely absent. Her presentation of the material from a few houses at Banat, some of them not well preserved, is highly interesting both from a methodological point of view, and in comparison to the material from the 20 best preserved houses from Bazi Weststadt. While Otto (2014b and this volume) has been trying to distill the most typical set of pottery from hundreds of individual ceramic vessels, ignoring vessel types that are infrequently attested, the identification of an ideal typical inventory does not take into account individual variations of specific households. But the individual variation can only be recognized as such if the ideal typical inventory has been defined before. Porter notices subtle differences between ceramic forms in the houses at Bazi West City and Banat, which is a part of the North City. She wonders whether these were caused by a socio-economic distinction of the city's quarters, or whether each neighbourhood was supplied by its own potters. An important result of Porter's analysis of the Banat pottery is that „Typologies are subjective..., but more than this, they mask what might be slight, but telling, differences.“

The material from the adjacent **Tall Bazi** is presented by **Berthold Einwag**, **Costanza Coppini** and **Adelheid Otto**. While the single period settlement enlargement of the western lower town ('Weststadt') allows the recognition of the most typical pottery shapes of the LB IB in an exemplary way (Otto), the Citadel was continuously occupied from the MB to the LB IB period. Especially

its northern slope ('Nordhang') gives insight in the slow but marked ceramic developments from the MB II to the LB IA and LB IB (Coppini). A good collection of LB IA pottery is also attested in the area of the Citadel's gate. The pottery from the destruction level of the Temple on top of the Citadel is contemporary with that of the Weststadt and attests the overall destruction of Bazi at one time. But the Temple pottery differs both in quality and in quantity from the Weststadt pottery, which seem to be caused mainly by the different nature of the find spots. More ancient pots were kept in the Temple, the variations within types are larger and reveal, that probably not only the local inhabitants but also people from abroad were offering to the temple (Einwag). The authors present and discuss in length the radiocarbon dates from Tall Bazi which raise questions as to the reliability of radiocarbon analyses in general. Nevertheless, by eliminating the clearly wrong measurements, the dates for the destruction level cluster around two peaks, one around 1400 calBC and the other around 1320 calBC.

The material from the crucial site Emar is discussed by Annie Caubet for the earlier French and by Ferhan Sakal for more recent Syrian-German excavations. Caubet presents important primary inventory from the burned level in the area of the main building in Chantier A, the so-called Bit Hilani (MARGUERON 1979). She argues that this burned level marks the end of the final occupation of Late Bronze Emar, which was flourishing until it was suddenly attacked and destroyed by a yet unknown enemy. The pottery partly resembles that of the LB I ceramic complexes of the other sites investigated here; but other forms are completely different, especially large pithoi and mixing vessels with a high foot, and elongated pointed bottles. The general appearance of many ceramic vessels is extremely crude with especially thick and heavy walls. This is similar to McClellan's comments on the latest LB pottery at el-Qitar (this volume). This crudeness may be the main marker for mass-produced pottery of the late LB II phase.

Sakal presents material from the Upper Town houses, where a sequence from the late Middle Bronze to the Late Bronze Age can be observed. Interestingly, the houses UT 2-J and -K from the late LB I seem to have been destroyed so suddenly, that much of the inventory was left behind, but there seem to be no traces of destruction by fire. The pottery from this level is similar to that of the burned destruction level at Umm el-Marra, Bazi and Hadidi, but the question remains whether the observed destructions resulted from a common cause or not. Evidently, Emar was one of the very few sites which continued to flourish throughout the Middle and Late Bronze Age I and II periods.

Not discussed in this volume, but equally important for the overall picture of the Late Bronze Age material culture in the area, is Tall Shiukh Fawqani. One Late Bronze Age house, which ended being burned ("La maison brûlée"), yielded pottery from a primary context (BACHELOT 2005). Many forms resemble the LB IB ceramics of the investigated sites, and they are identical to the material from the Weststadt houses at Bazi. The radiocarbon dates point to the construction of the house at the end of the 15th century BC (SALIÈGE/PESSIN 2005: 1077).¹ L. Bachelot is justifiedly bemused by the fact that the pottery inside the house, which must have existed quite a while, has its closest parallels in the assemblages from Hadidi, Munbaqa and el-Qitar, which are said to date back to the 15th century (BACHELOT 2005: 327). Nevertheless, he tentatively relates the destruction of the house to the military actions in the Karkemish region to Suppiliuma's arrival in the 14th century (BACHELOT 2005: 331).

A synchronization of the levels in the investigated sites results in distinguishing the most typical ceramic forms in this area.²

The reader may refer to the individual plates in this volume for the complete range of shapes.

One major destruction level, caused by one supra-regional event or by many?

Several sites show one major destruction horizon, which resulted in the burning of the buildings: the Tablet Building at Hadidi³; La maison brûlée at Shiukh Fawqani⁴; a burned level in period II at Umm el-Marra (see SCHWARTZ this volume), a site-wide event, bringing period IIb to an end; the houses at Tall Banat (see PORTER this volume); the burned level which marks the end of the Weststadt settlement, and the burned level which seals Temple Room A at Tall Bazi (OTTO/EINWAG this volume).⁵ The situation in Munbaqa is less clear, since there seem to be destruction horizons at the end of II-Mbq-4 and II-Mbq-3 (see BLOCHER/WERNER this volume). The question is, whether these destructions should be attributed to sev-

1 PA 2008, 2041 and 2042 (68 % probability: 1434-1323, 1499-1410, 1516-1414) are from wooden beams of the burnt house. They may have been felled many years before the building was destroyed.

2 The results of this volume show that most of the forms that Dornemann (2007) categorized as characteristic of MB IIC, are typical LB I forms.

3 DORNEMANN 1979, 1980, 1981.

4 BACHELOT/FALES 2005: 329 – 367.

5 It is possible but cannot yet be proven that one of them occurred contemporaneously with the destructions at the other sites.

eral different causes or to one major supraregional event, which affected the whole area⁶.

As McClellan points out convincingly in this volume, it is dangerous to argue that a „destruction layer at point A separated from a similar one at point B by gaps of 10, 20, 50 or 100m may very well be the same, equally they may not.“ Also for Umm el-Marra and Munbaqa it has been questioned whether the destruction by fire was a site-wide event, since a few houses did not show traces of burning. But the situation at the Weststadt of Tall Bazi might also suggest another possible explanation. The Weststadt has been excavated on a continuous, flat surface of 150m by 160m, and the 50 investigated houses clearly existed at the same time. But not all of them were in use at the moment of their final destruction: four were abandoned for good (they were ruins, the roof was missing), four were temporarily not inhabited or abandoned (the main door was blocked), two plots were still not covered by houses, but the remaining 40 houses were in use (OTTO 2006a: 268-271). At the same time, this might explain the situation at other places. G. Schwartz (in this volume) asks why were not all LBA residential houses excavated at Umm el-Marra destroyed by fire at their various excavation sites in. Perhaps they also had been already abandoned at that point (MASKEVICH 2014).

The settlements of Tall Hadidi, Tall Shiukh Fawqani and Tall Bazi were each completely abandoned after the collapse. At Tall Munbaqa and Umm el-Marra the settlements continued to exist, but at a reduced level. Emar and Qitar seem to be the only sites where no site-wide destruction horizon has been discovered so far and which prospered until the end of the Late Bronze Age.

As has been explained in the introductory chapter, this workshop resulted from the disagreement between McClellan/Porter and Einwag/Otto about the dating of the Bazi/Banat houses. The compelling result of this workshop was: we were both wrong. There was only one major destruction level at most of the Late Bronze Age sites in the Upper Euphrates region and this destruction level was neither in the 15th century nor at the end of the Late Bronze Age in the early 12th century, but can be dated to around the middle of the 14th century. What misled us?

Radiocarbon dates as one source of erroneous dating

Already some time ago, the suspicion arose, that radiocarbon dates bore joint guilt for the chronological problems of the Late Bronze Age. Glenn Schwartz and Luc Bachelot, working on pottery from Umm el-Marra and Shiukh Fawqani respectively, were puzzled by the results of their radiocarbon analyses, which yielded a 14th century date for pottery which was similar to the ceramic from Hadidi, which had been dated to the 15th century due to radiocarbon determinations⁷. Dominique Beyer, who remarked the intriguing difference of 200 years between similar ceramic material from the French excavations at Emar and Hadidi, proposed that this was due to the calibration of the radiocarbon dates (BEYER 2001: 3-4). They led to a circularity of assumptions, but since apparently secure reference points are always welcome, it was rarely questioned how the dates were established. We are very grateful to Tom McClellan, who did the new calibration of the three samples from the Tablet Building at Hadidi (McCLELLAN this volume). Two of them yielded dates in the 14th century, one in the 15th century. Although all three samples are from wood, they testify that a date in the 15th century is no longer possible.⁸ A 14th century date for the burned horizon of the Tablet Building at Hadidi is thus most probable. This new calibration of the Hadidi samples is of utmost importance also for the chronology far beyond the Euphrates valley, because there is a massive circularity of assumptions. Many ceramic assemblages in Syria, Northern Mesopotamia and Anatolia have been based on the Hadidi dates, some directly and others indirectly, when assemblages were considered as well dated, although they had been dated with reference to Hadidi only. As a result of this new calibration, it will be necessary to review all the Late Bronze Age dates which have been derived through relative dating and synchronizing with Hadidi.⁹

Bad enough, one has also to bear in mind, that absolute dating with radiocarbon dates is impeded especially for the period between 1500 and 1200 BC, because “the 14C calibration curve significantly reduces precision due to wiggles that form an approximately 200-year-long plateau” (ASSCHER ET AL. 2015: 77). The reason for this is that during that period the amount of radiocarbon in the atmosphere changed. This created wiggles which form

6 Tom McClellan (1992) recognized a slow decline of the sites in inland Syria, which began already in the Middle Bronze Age and continued throughout the Late Bronze Age. His reasons for this assumption are the early datings of Hadidi, Qitar and Banat, whose collapses he dated to the 15th century, whereas he accepted a date at the end of the 13th century for the collapses of Emar, Faqus and Tall Fray.

7 SCHWARTZ ET AL. 2003: 352 Table 2; BACHELOT/FALES 2005: 329–331.

8 DORNEMANN 1981: 59. P3090 and P3091 are listed as “from larger pieces of wood”, and P3093 is listed as from “fuel used for cooking”.

9 For example, the pottery of Qatna (IAMONI 2012) and other Syrian sites relies on comparisons with the pottery of the Euphrates valley.

a relatively flat plateau of approximately 200 years in the calibration curve.¹⁰ Only if “sandwich samples” (i.e. samples from one level with additional samples from the level above and below) are available, it is possible to recognize the most probable date. Within the period of the plateau, the dates with a low degree of probability may well be the correct ones. A recent study reveals similar problems for Middle Bronze Age radiocarbon dates in the Levant (HÖFLMAYER ET AL. 2016).

Possible implications of the results for the history of Late Bronze Age Syria

The destruction levels in several of the investigated sites seem to be site-wide events. This is the case at Umm al-Marra at the end of level IIB; it is the case at Bazi - Banat, where the whole settlement including the lower town and the Temple on top of the citadel was destroyed at the same time and was not settled again until the Late Roman period. At Munbaqa the cities of II-Mbq-4 and -3 were destroyed and only some of the houses were rebuilt. Houses at Shiukh Fawqani and Hadidi fell victim to destruction by fire, but the investigated areas are too limited to speak of a site-wide event.

Many of these sites show clear traces of human impact, which caused the burned levels or – in some sites – the definitive end. There are strong arguments for attributing the destruction levels of several sites to a concrete enemy, who came from outside the settlement, and not to internal problems such as growing impoverishment or social tensions within the settlements. The violent destruction of the Weststadt at Bazi was apparently not foreseeable, as many weapons and precious objects were left in the houses. Signs of looting in the houses before the burning speak in favour of a human enemy who destroyed the whole settlement. Even clearer are the traces of an enemy in the Temple on top of the Citadel of Bazi: It was carefully plundered, the inventory deliberately smashed (numerous ceramic jars were assiduously broken and the sherds scattered over the whole room) and finally deliberately burned. The former inhabitants disappeared completely, and the whole settlement was abandoned. The last phase of Bazi had been a rich, flourishing one, and the enlargement and reduction of some households were not the result of growing social tension or poverty, but were the consequence of the normal development of a living, functioning community brought

about by births and deaths within a household, inheritance distribution, property transactions, additional economic tasks, prestige, etc.¹¹

The radiocarbon dates of the destruction levels were assembled in **Table 2**. They show several peaks within the period 1420-1300 BC, but there is only one date slot around 1325-40 BC which matches best all the radiocarbon results (bold line on **Table 2**). This may indicate a supra-regional event, which caused destruction at many sites. There are no traces of any Hittite objects or ceramics in the pre-destruction levels, but in the few sites, which continue after the destruction. It is tempting therefore, although it cannot yet be proven, to attribute this series of destructions to the Hittite expansion in the mid-late 14th century, around 1330 BC, when the forces of Suppiluliuma I put an end to the Mittani supremacy over the whole region, and brought Western Syria under their control.

Emar and Qitar are, among the investigated sites, the only settlements which flourished in LB II under the new Hittite domination, and Emar had a new peak in occupation especially in LB II times. Karkemish too seems to have lived on splendidly, as the seat of the Hittite viceroy. It seems as if these developments were due to the new Hittite policy. The Hittites established Karkemish and Emar as their strongholds along the Euphrates, forming the Hittite south-eastern corner. Since Emar served as southernmost outpost of Karkemish, and since it always functioned as the main harbour at the Euphrates bend, it may have been spared and even extended. But the Hittites erased diligently all the other, formerly powerful settlements. Only el-Qitar was spared and rebuilt, since it lay midway between these two Hittite centers and controlled the strategically important narrow passage of the Euphrates, where the valley could be blocked easily. It is not yet certain if Qitar existed already before the collapse of Hadidi, Bazi-Banat and the other sites, or if it was rebuilt after this event.¹²

Another outcome of this conference is the realization that some differences in the ceramic material were due to functional zones and areas. G. Schwartz (this volume, p. 35) had already warned: “Since no quantitative data are available, it will be difficult to determine whether

¹¹ OTTO 2006a: 273–275.

¹² See the forthcoming final publication of Qitar by McClellan. In this volume, the synchronistic table of McClellan (fig. 24) and Otto (Table 1) differ slightly as concerns the position of Qitar III. This is done on purpose in order to illustrate what is possible at the present state of knowledge. I thank Tom McClellan for intensive discussions on this matter.

¹⁰ REIMER ET AL. 2013; BOARETTO IN ASSCHER ET AL. 2015: 77.

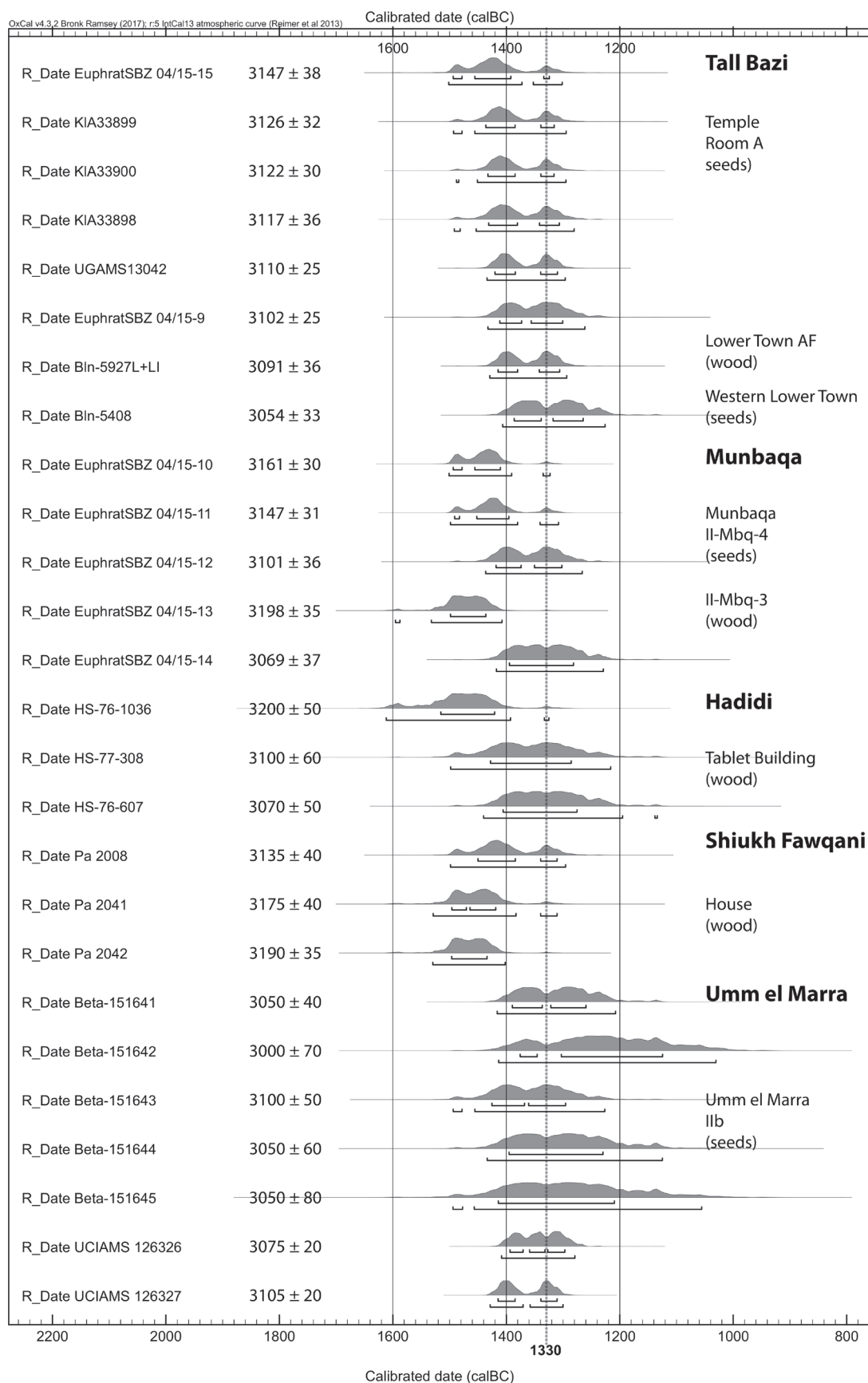


Table 2: Radiocarbon dates of wood and short-lived samples from the destruction levels at Bazi, Munbaqa, Hadidi, el-Qitar, Shiukh Fawqani and Umm el-Marra (Table assembled by B. Einwag).

differences between the groups of pottery are the result of chronological developments or ... of contextual differences or bias in the selection of sherds for study.”

The pottery from Tall Bazi comes from two completely different functional zones: from the cella of the main temple of the site on the one hand, and from contemporary individual houses in the lower town on the other hand. In this case, the functional differences can be addressed properly. However, some ancient pots and jars seem to have been kept in the temple for some time, possibly longer than in the houses. This may be one reason why the pottery from the temple seems less homogeneous than that from the houses. Moreover imported vessels seem to have been brought there, possibly containing offerings which were presented by individuals to the venerated deity.

Temples in general were obviously not the place where one would find the most typical local pottery of the time. The case studies from the temples at el-Qitar, Emar, Munbaqa and Bazi all show that the temple assemblages not only contained some ancient tools, jewellery, seals and tablets, but also old ceramic pieces, which must have been kept for quite a while. Other ceramics were clearly imports and were brought from far abroad, possibly by pilgrims to the sanctuary.

To sum up, the Upper Euphrates region underwent considerable developments and changes between 1600 and 1200 BC (MC). The synchronized time-table shows, that there is a break in occupation between the MB II and LB IA period at several sites (Table 1). But the LB IA period develops slowly and without significant break into the LB IB period. The LB I period seems to be one of the most flourishing periods of Syria. Historically it may be explained by a stable phase under the hegemony of Mittani, which allowed ample scope for the local economy and society to prosper. Since not a single site exhibits any traces of an official administrative building (such as a palace), it may be assumed also from the archaeological record that the settlements were collectively governed. This period seems to have been one of the very few in Syrian history, when there was so little danger of conflicts that even city-walls were no longer needed. But apparently the people in the Upper Euphrates region underestimated the danger threatened by the imperial ambitions of their neighbours to the north. The prosperous period came to an abrupt end around 1325-40 BC: most settlements suffer their final destruction or a temporary decline. The division of the Late Bronze Age into an LB I period (Euphrates region under Mittani hegemony, c. 1600-1330 MC) and an LB II period (Euphrates region under Hittite hegemony, c. 1330-1200 MC) therefore seems

appropriate. The fine-tuning (LB IA and IB) is achieved by material changes at many of the investigated sites.

The whole Euphrates region changed considerably from LB I to LB II: the relatively even distribution of prosperous towns in LB I was replaced in LB II by the two major centres Karkemish in the north and Emar in the south, backed by a handful of hamlets and strategic strongholds such as Qitar. Thousands of people must have lost their homes, and – if they survived – must have gone elsewhere, perhaps contributing to the wealth of the surviving cities Karkemish and Emar. Whether these dramatic changes were caused by the Hittites, or whether these took advantage of already existing turmoil, has to be answered by future research.

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