CÉRAMIQUE DE L'ÂGE DU BRONZE

EN SYRIE

I

LA SYRIE DU SUD
ET LA VALLÉE DE L'ORONTE

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Les fouilles récentes à Tell Mardikh/Ebla ont fourni du matériel stratifié qui permet d'établir une séquence du Bronze ancien IV au Bronze moyen IIB. C'est ainsi qu'avec la séquence de Tell Mardikh combinée avec celle de Hama on peut fixer chronologiquement d'autres trouvailles, essentiellement des tombes (Tell Masin, Tell Moureik, Khan Sheikhoum, Ansari, Tell Abou Danné...).

La céramique du Bronze moyen de la Syrie du Nord intérieure montre une grande homogénéité. On la retrouve sur une zone allant du nord au sud d'Alep à Hama et d'est en ouest de l'Euphrate et le Matakah jusqu'au Ghab, au Ruj et au Bas et Moyen-Oronte. Le Bronze moyen se divise en quatre phases principales. La conclusion essentielle exposée dans cet article est la mise en évidence de l'ensemble céramique de la première phase (Bronze moyen IA). La culture céramique de la Syrie du Nord intérieure présente dès ses débuts une individualité forte qui diffère de celles de la côte, de la Syrie centrale et du Sud de la Syrie du Sud.

Trois centres politiques et économiques majeurs (Tell Mardikh, Hama, Aleppo) ont influencé la naissance et le développement de la culture matérielle de leur province respective, donnant naissance à trois traditions céramiques qui se recoupent, toutes incluses dans un même ensemble. Un quatrième groupe céramique se détache dans les vallées du 'Amaq et du Bas-Oronte (voir le matériel de Tell 'Atchana).

La subdivision chronologique et typologique du Bronze moyen en quatre phases, qui suit principalement la stratigraphie de Tell Mardikh, se trouve particulièrement justifiée pour les productions particulières telles les Painted Wares, Black-Burnished Ware, Miniature Ware et Cooking Ware mais perd de sa pertinence avec la céramique commune.

The recent excavations at Tell Mardikh/Ebla have provided a number of stratified materials, which allow to build up a ceramic sequence from Early Bronze IVB to Middle Bronze IIB. Thereafter, the Tell Mardikh sequence, integrated with the Hama one, has made it possible to fix the other contexts, mainly tombs or burials (from Tell Masin, Tell Moureik, Khan Sheikhoum, Ansari, Tell Abou Danné...).

The Middle Bronze pottery horizon of Northern Inner Syria shows a great homogeneity. It may be recognized in an area extending North-South from Hama to Aleppo and East-West from the Euphrates and the Matakah to the Ghab, the Ruj, and the Middle and Lower Orontes. The Middle Bronze Age has been subdivided in four successive phases. One major result of this study is the emergence of the pottery horizon of the first phase (Middle Bronze IA). The Northern Inner Syrian ceramic culture presents, already in its beginning phase, a strong individuality, differing from the coastal, the central and Southern Syrian pottery horizons.

Three major political and economic centres—Tell Mardikh, Hama, Aleppo—have influenced the genesis and development of the material culture of their own province, giving rise to three overlapping ceramic traditions, all included in a unique pottery horizon. A fourth local pottery group may be singled out in the 'Amaq and Lower Orontes valleys (cf. materials from Tell 'Atchana).

The chronological and typological subdivision of the Middle Bronze Age into four phases, which mainly follows the stratigraphy of Tell Mardikh, fits very well the evidence when specialized productions are concerned, such as the Painted Wares, the Black-Burnished Ware, the Miniature Ware and the Cooking Ware, but partly loses its reliance when Simple Ware is involved.

ن.ب. - The footnote 1 is on the following page.
Besides the two capital sites of Tell Mardikh/Ebla and Hama, reliable pottery assemblages from Northern inner Syria are rare and always unstratified, as they include materials found in tombs or burials. Thus, in order to build up a pottery sequence one has to rely on these two main sites, trying to fit in a continuous chronological grid the available materials. Secondarily, a good help is offered by the stratified materials from Tell ‘Atchana, a site that shares the inland and the coastal pottery horizons.

Thanks to the recent excavations in the lower town North at Tell Mardikh (Area P North), which have given a complete architectural stratigraphy from the Early Bronze IVB to the initial, central and final phases of the Middle Bronze Age, it is now possible to draw up a continuous pottery sequence, which can be used to fix also the relative position of the materials from the tombs of the road to Salamiyeh (near Hama), Tell Masin, Mourek, Khan Sheikhooun, Ansari, Tell Abou Danné, the river Qouweiq survey and Tell Jinderes.

The Middle Bronze horizon of northern inner Syria shows a great homogeneity, the major differences occurring between the middle (Hama) and the lower (Tell ‘Atchana) Orontes valley, the ‘Amuq Plain and the Tell Mardikh-Aleppo region. If compared with the coast or with central or southern Syria, the ceramic culture of this region clearly identifies a cultural province. The core of this province is the Aleppo-Tell Mardikh area, while to the north it comprises the river Qouweiq, to the east it reaches the Euphrates valley, and to the west the Orontes and the Afrin valleys, which frame an open boundary, where the Syrian inland, coastal and southwestern Anatolian horizons overlap. As regards the southern limits, the Homs region (Mishrifeh, Qal‘at al-Homs, partly Tell Nebi Mend) and the Eleutheropolis province have to be considered as belonging to different neighbouring horizons, which seems to have closer relationships both with the southern tradition and with the coastal one. Thus, notwithstanding the broad scantiness of materials, inner Syria may be divided into five major pottery provinces: the southernmost regions with the Hawran, the Jebel el-‘Arab and the Jawlan; the Damascus area; the central region represented by Mishrifeh and Homs; Tell Nebi Mend and the Eleutheropolis valley up to the ‘Akkar Plain, and the northern region which includes Hama, perhaps Tell el-Ascharné, Tell Mardikh and Aleppo. As it is evident, Tell Mardikh occupies a central position in the northern region, thus the Tell Mardikh sequence has to be considered highly representative of its own ceramic province.

From the technological point of view, a broad homogeneity existed among the productions of the provinces of inner Syria, testifying their belonging to a larger regional horizon. The various assemblages share a great number of features, such as the ordinary use of the fast wheel, the ways of manufacturing clay, the high specialisation of fabrics and shapes, the range of the firing temperatures in the different productions (Simple Ware, Preservation Ware, Painted Ware, Cooking Ware), the use of organic or mineral tempers according to vessels functions, the adoption of similar decorative patterns, namely the combed bands, or surface treatments in peculiar shapes or wares. Especially the materials from Tell Mardikh and Hama reveal, in the majority of cases, not only a strong technological closeness, but also very similar typological characteristics and thus clearly belong to the same pottery horizon. In the broad realm of Simple Ware (or “Coarse Ware”), more inclined to regionalism, this homogeneity may be extended to the whole province at Dnbi, Osmaniye, Tell ‘As, Tell et-Tin (DU MUSEUM Du BURBON 1930: pp. 160-63).

6 - The pottery horizon of northern inner Syria may be usefully compared with that of the ‘Amuq Plain (SWAT 1958), even though, more than in Early Bronze, the ‘Amuq inventory seems to share more the coastal productions than the inland ones.

7 - The neighbour pottery province to the South is that represented by the materials from Mishrifeh (especially from Tomb I, DU MUSEUM Du BURBON 1927). Further to the South the Eleutheropolis valley, the Damascus region, and the Hawran constituted three different provinces, albeit with strong reciprocal interconnections.

8 - MATTHAEI 1989a: p. 216.

9 - However, the sites in the Euphrates valley belong to another ceramic province: TURBI 1980: p. 61; DÖRRENMANN 1992: p. 81; LEBEAT 1987 and ORTMANN 1988: pp. 73-74. For the Khabour region see NIGRO 1998.


11 - SEIDEN 1986; AL-MAQDISI 1987a; 1988a; b, c, and 1991.


13 - For instance, H. Seiden’s general enlightening observations about the Bosra ceramic materials fit very well also the Tell Mardikh evidence (SEIDEN 1986: pp. 19-23).

14 - The prevalence of footed forms (with ring or pedestal bases) in Hama probably descends from its close relationships with the southern and coastal ceramic cultures.
pottery material from northern inner Syria, as shown by several findings.

Since the stratified pottery assemblages of Tell Mardikh constitute the largest sample of the period, they may be confidently used to build up a reliable pottery sequence, that can be chronologically fixed thanks to the historical reference points available (see below Conclusions). The Tell Mardikh sequence is particularly reliable, because it has been checked in various areas of the site (P South, P North in the Lower Town, and E and G on the Acropolis) and is corroborated by several groups of complete vases, such as those from the Royal Tombs or from the Favissae of the Sacred Area of Ishtar, but also because of the political, economic and cultural role played by the Eblaic kingdom, especially before its submission to the sovereigns of Yamkhad. Moreover, because of the abrupt conquest of the site, the latest phase of Middle Bronze is largely represented by the ceramic materials found in the destruction layers of the Northern Palace and the Western Palace.

15 - The ten tombs discovered in 1980 along the road to Salamiyeh, 7 km from Hama, contained pottery materials belonging to this pottery horizon. Also the sites of the Ruj and the Ghâb valleys present Middle Bronze ceramic materials ascribable to the same horizon (the most interesting archaeological site of this area seems to be Tell Hassane, but also Tell Qerqah and Tell Da’ud have a significant Middle Bronze occupation).

16 - More than 200 complete vessels have been recovered in the Royal Hypogea in 1978 and 1979.

17 - Two cisterns used as sacred pits to throw cultual materials and votive offerings have been discovered in the Sacred Area of Ishtar (Matthiae 1993a: pp. 656-61/fig. 22-25 and Marchetti & Negro 2000). They have provided more than 400 complete vessels.

18 - P. Matthiae has convincingly proposed to recognize in this destruction the hand of the Hittite king Mursili I (Matthiae, Pinnock & Scandone Matthiae 1995: p. 88).

19 - A centralized typology of the pottery horizon of Mardikh IIIB has been put forward by F. Pinnock, N. Marchetti, and L. Negro, studying the pottery assemblage of the Northern Palace, mostly representative of the last phase of occupation of the site in the Middle Bronze Age (Mardikh IIIB).

20 - Matthiae 1979a: pp. 145-49/fig. G.
The situation in Hama is quite different. The stratigraphic reliability of the pottery materials of this site is minor, because in the squares H 10-11 and J 10-11 where the layers attributed to Period H were extensively excavated, they were deeply cut by the massive foundations of the buildings of Periods G and A. Furthermore, there are only few materials, which may be ascribed to precisely stratified deposits. After H. Ingholt’s preliminary report, E. Fugmann reconstructed, with remarkable care and skill, the pottery sequence of Level H on the basis of the stratified materials, increasing his sample with the assemblages from the silos, which actually did not have a clear stratigraphic collocation. Thus, he ascribed to different levels (H5-H1) specimens not always found in stratigraphic succession, but which he thought could confidently illustrate the pottery assemblage of each period. The criterion adopted by E. Fugmann for the attributions fits the evidence as far as the initial and central phases of the Middle Bronze Age are concerned, as the parallels with the stratified materials of Mardikh IIIA1-IIIB1 clearly demonstrate (see below). Problems arise if one follows Fugmann’s suggestion (put forward without taking into account H. Ingholt’s opinion) that the sequence H5-H1 should cover the entire Middle Bronze Age. Actually, as no Mardikh IIIB2 diagnostic type finds a convincing counterpart in the Hama assemblages, it seems that the Middle Bronze II is represented there only in its first phase (Middle Bronze IIA: 1800-1700 B.C.) by the materials ascribed to Levels H2 and H1. The shapes of the final stage of the Middle Bronze II does not appear in the published and unpublished materials from the site, as it was already noted by H. Ingholt, C.F.A. Schaeffer, J.N. Tubb, P. Gerstenblith and P. Matthiae. Unfortunately, a correct evaluation of the Hama evidence has been hampered by the emphatization of this hiatus, which has been interpreted as a confirmation of the final crisis of the Middle Bronze Age urbanization in inner Syria. However, although it has been surely misleading to use the sequence of this site to assert a presumed gap in the occupational history of northern inner Syria, this fact does not necessarily imply the rightness of S.J. Bourke’s antithetical conclusion that Hama should correspond to Mardikh IIIB. If one accepts Bourke’s conjecture, the two sites, which share almost completely their pottery horizons in the Early Bronze and in the Middle Bronze I, should strikingly differ in the Middle Bronze II.

The latest Hama H assemblage includes high carinated bowls of the types also found in the lower layer of the Faviassa F.5238 of Tell Mardikh and a large number of carinated bowls with everted rim of the so-called Gublite type belonging to the tradition of the Middle Bronze I. Also the large jars with expanded rim and the dishes in Cooking Ware find their more convincing parallels at Tell Mardikh among the specimens from the Tomb of the Lord of Goats, dated to the second half of the 18th century B.C. Finally, the presence in the latest Hama assemblage of the degenerated collared bowl with high grooved rim, similar to the specimens from the upper layers of the Faviassa F.5238 and from the Tomb of the Lord of the Goats, confirms the
attributio of the Periods H2 and H1 to the first phase of the Middle Bronze II. Furthermore, as an indirect evidence for the existence of a gap in the Hama sequence—that does not necessarily mean an interruption in the occupation of the site—may be recalled the lack in Hama of several outstanding features of Mardikh IIIB2 (Middle Bronze IIIB), such as the bowl made of coarse ware with turned rim and concave walls or the round bowl made of fine ware with outgrooved rim, which, on the contrary, are attested in the Grave XIII and are well known in the assemblage of the Period G 40.

The existence of a gap in the stratigraphic and ceramic sequence of Middle Bronze Hama does not prove the presence of a gap in the occupational history of the site (and extensively of central inner Syria). Thus, in order to deny this interruption of the urban development, it is no longer necessary to postulate a continuity of the ceramic sequence of this site, which cannot be supported by comparative evidence. The lack of Middle Bronze IIIB materials in Hama is evident and it may be due either to a reduction or an abandonment of the site 41, or, more convincingly, to the deep levelling suffered by the Middle Bronze II layers in Squares H 10-11 and J 10-11 42. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that also in the other areas, unfortunately badly damaged by later plundering and superimpositions, materials dating to Middle Bronze II are scanty, but not completely absent 43, thus hinting to a stratigraphic reason and not to an occupational one for the Middle Bronze IIIB hiatus. Although the ceramic materials found in Squares F 11 44, N 14-15; O 12 45 surely belong to the Middle Bronze I 46, the sherds found in the Silo 30 (Q 15) have to be dated to the Middle Bronze IA 47 together with the vessels rightly ascribed to this phase by E. Fugmann 48. In conclusion, it is possible to assert that a hiatus does actually exist only in the pottery sequence of Hama, which covers the period 1700-1625/1600 B.C., while the hypothesis of a complete abandonment of the site has to be rejected, as a few materials and some structures seem to suggest a continuous occupation until the Late Bronze Age 49.

THE POTTERY HORIZON OF THE MIDDLE BRONZE IA (2000-1900 B.C.)

CONTEXTS AND RELATED MATERIALS

Few pottery assemblages are available from northern inner Syria dated, on stratigraphic grounds, to the very beginning of the Middle Bronze Age. A sound picture of the Middle Bronze IA pottery horizon may be achieved by means of an interrelated analysis of the materials from Tell Mardikh and Hama. However, while at Tell Mardikh the stratigraphy of this period has been definitely established in Area P North and in Area T 50, where a complete series of superimposed floors with in situ materials has been excavated, the materials from Hama probably do not extend their chronological range up to the first half of the 20th century B.C. (see above). Thus, the pottery found in situ on the floors of the two later reconstructions of the Archaic Palace of Tell Mardikh constitutes the only stratified assemblage available from inner Syria for the time span 2000-1900 B.C. 51. In the second half of the century the inventory may be enlarged including the materials from Hama ascribed by E. Fugmann to the Level H5 52 and some vessels from the Graves III and VI 53.

40 - FUGMANN 1958 : fig. 143/O485 and O487.
41 - A possible crisis of the settlement might be conjectured during the last century of the Middle Bronze II, if one considers the contemporary sudden growth of the nearby Tell Ashnir, that presumably had an important role also during the subsequent period (COURT 1973 : pp. 63-65).
44 - The jug 4B971 has a precise parallel in Grave II, containing multiple burials ascribable to Middle Bronze IB (19th century B.C.). Moreover, the female clay figurine 4A497 is dated on the basis of the stratified Tell Mardikh parallels to the second half of the Middle Bronze I (Nicolò Marchetti: pers. comm.).
45 - The presence of a goblet (5A522) still in the tradition of the Early Bronze IVB Caliciform Ware points to the very beginning of the Middle Bronze Age also for the associated bowls 5A529, 5A528 (FUGMANN 1958 : fig. 132b).
46 - FUGMANN 1958 : fig. 127c and 132a. The bowls with intumed rim 2C942 and 4C306 belong to a distinctive final Middle Bronze IB type, also attested in the Fa'issa F.5238 of Tell Mardikh.
47 - It has to be stressed the fact that this silo shows a peculiar building technique (FUGMANN 1958 : p. 89/fig. 112).
49 - Actually, Fugmann’s dating of the later phases of Hama II is based on a very low dating of three presumed sherds of Tell al-Yahudiyah Ware (INGHOLT 1940 : p. 56/NOTE 8 "3B406, 3F460, 5B265" and FUGMANN 1958 : pp. 115-16), which R. Amirian rightly deemed not ascribable to this production (AMIRIAN 1957). This specialized production is not attested in northern inner Syria (KAPLAN 1980 : pp. 47-60), apart from some rare finds, probably arrived from southern Syria (BAFFI GUARDATA 1988 : fig. 2/1).
50 - A series of private houses have been excavated in Area T, in the lower Town North-West (MATHIAE 1993a : pp. 634-37), which have provided a continuous Early Bronze-Middle Bronze stratigraphic sequence. A distinct assemblage of the very beginning of the Middle Bronze has been found, comprising small jars and proto-collared bowl (MATHIAE, PINNOCK & SCANDONE MATHIAE 1995 : pp. 452-453/Mnos. 350-354).
51 - The Archaic Palace is an impressive foundation dating from around 2100 B.C. (MATHIAE 1994a : pp. 36-37). Its first floors have provided late Early Bronze IVB pottery materials, while its second architectural phase, which did not change the main planimetric scheme, consisting in a simple raising of the floors, has given ceramic materials of the very beginning of the Middle Bronze Age. A third rebuilding, with the addition of a new wing to the east, occurred during the Middle Bronze IA (probably around 1950 B.C.). Thus, the complete sequence of structures and related materials, which covers the last century of the Early Bronze Age and the first century of the Middle Bronze Age (MATHIAE 1995), has provided the first series of stratified pottery assemblages for the transition from the Early and the Middle Bronze Age in northern inner Syria.
52 - FUGMANN 1958 : fig. 109.
53 - Apart from Grave X, the pottery assemblages of the Middle Bronze tombs of Hama included more vessels than those published by E. Fugmann in the final report of the pre-classic periods (FUGMANN 1958 : pl. X). According to the excavation records, in Grave I, which housed several burials, 92 vases were found; Grave II yielded 90 vessels, while 57 vases have been found in Grave VI and 30 in Grave III.
MIDDLE BRONZE IA TECHNOLOGICAL AND TYPOLOGICAL FEATURES

An important change of the typological and technological features marks the transition from the pottery horizon of Mardikh IIIB2 to that of Mardikh IIIA1. In spite of the occurrence of remarkable transformations both in clay preparation and in treatments, some technical features of the Early Bronze Age continue in the following period. The clay used for the Preservation jars or for the big jars of the Simple Ware is similar to that of the vases devoted to the same functions in Early Bronze IVB. The Preservation Ware is usually greenish with frequent organic inclusions, but also a whitish quartz-sand tempered paste appears. On the contrary, the technique of building up the vases is now different, the fast wheel being widely used, though several spiral coiled shapes are known among storage jars. Despite these elements of continuity, the material culture registers a crucial transformation, with a complete substitution of the Caliciform tradition, that undoubtedly represented a cultural high point, not comparable with the initial Middle Bronze ceramic culture, still rough and uneven, especially as concerns the clays and the fabrics. The formative stage of the pottery technology of the 20th century B.C. is also shown by the thick walls of the vases and by the low range of the firing temperatures. However, in respect of Early Bronze IVB, the Middle Bronze IA pottery horizon exhibits a broader standardization of the technical procedures, together with a growth of mass-produced vessels, such as the Middle Bronze I bowls with high carination and the Middle Bronze II inturned rim bowls or the medium size jars with double everted rim.

Due to the insufficiency of reliable stratified materials it is still not possible to draw up a complete typology of the initial phase of the Middle Bronze, nevertheless some characteristic shapes of this phase may be singled out.

In the assemblage of the latest phases of the Archaic Palace of Tell Mardikh a distinctive type is the slightly carinated bowl with thick walls and vertical simple rim (pl. XLVI: 4-5 and 10-11). This type is attested at Hama in Graves VI and II. A comparable contemporary Hama bowl is characterized by a thinner profile of the rim (pl. XLVI: 7-8). Some specimens present a wavy combed decoration below the rim (pl. XLVI: 2), which also occurs in a series of small jars with thickened rim and biconical shape (pl. XLVI: 1). This type, which sometimes has no neck, is also attested in the burials of the beginning of Middle Bronze Age at Tell Mardikh, and is always made of a coarse reddish or brownish clay, tempered with mineral sand and organic materials. The scumbled wavy decoration may be considered a trait of continuity in respect of the Early Bronze IVB tradition, while the combed horizontal bands are a peculiar Middle Bronze decoration. The bowls with slight carination and vertical rim are made of a simple buff or grey fabric, while another widespread type made of fine ware is characterized by the yellowish (2.5Y8/2-8/4) extremely sieved fabric. Usually this fabric is used for bowls with thin walls, biconical profile, and small everted rim, which imitate metallic prototypes, as the sharp carination clearly demonstrates (pl. XLVI: 12-13 and XLVII: 14-15).

Bowls 14 and 15 represent a widespread type in the second half of the century lasting also in the Middle Bronze IB; it corresponds to the so-called Gublite Bowl of the Levantine tradition, as the comparison with the silver bowls from Byblos demonstrates. In any case, in its various outcomes, the carinated bowl represents, since the beginning of the period, the ubiquitous shape of the Simple Ware. Another hallmark of the Middle Bronze I, which perhaps is less distinctive than the latter one, is the open carinated bowl with thick walls and expanded rim (pl. XLVI: 9). It may be easily distinguished because of the outer inclination of the rim.

Less chronologically diagnostic is the deep bowl or large jar with expanded (sometimes uppergrooved) rim (pl. XLVII: 20-21). This kind of vase was a piece of the banquet service and is usually decorated by means of combed or scumbled wavy lines and, more frequently at Hama, with applied ridges modelled in the shape of ropes, which makes it similar to storage jars. The body is carinated with a round

54 - Fugmann 1958: pl. X5B747.
55 - The unpublished bowl 5B605 is a vestigial type of the Middle Bronze IA in a slightly later assemblage.
56 - TM 91.POA11 is one of six identical bowls retrieved in a bothros (F5242) excavated in the Square of the Cisterns in Area P South. This votive pit is surely dated, on stratigraphic grounds, to Mardikh IIIB2, i.e. to the very beginning of the Middle Bronze Age (Marchetti & Nigro 1997). A second bothe is in the same area and in an analogous stratigraphic situation has provided two other complete bowls of this kind (TM.94.1012/1-2).
60 - W. Albright rightly recognized the metallic origin of this type of bowls (Albright 1933: p. 69), largely spread in the coastal and Palestinian Middle Bronze I assemblages (Middle Bronze IIIA according to Palestinian chronology), but also present with some variations, in the inventories of northern inner Syria at Tell Mardikh and Hama. The metallic bowls of the Montet jar have convincingly been dated to the first quarter of the second millennium B.C. (Tufnell & Ward 1966: p. 214; Porada 1966: p. 254, and Tinn 1963: pp. 49-50). On the grounds of the Tell Mardikh and Hama ceramic imitations, the maximum diffusion of this shape in northern inner Syria occurred during the time span 1500-1850 B.C.
61 - Amiran 1969: p. 90 (pl. 25 (1) and Montet 1929: p. LXXI/50. 605.
62 - The high representativity of this shape as hallmark of the beginning of the Middle Bronze is shown by its huge geographic diffusion from northern Syria to Palestine (Amiran 1969: p. 27/1-3 and 5-6), where it sometimes differs for the purpose of a high pedestal (Amiran 1969: p. 27/4-5).
63 - Fugmann 1958: fig. 127/D430.
64 - Middle Bronze IA specimens may be distinguished only on the grounds of the fabrics. The two most widespread fabrics of this period are a whitish one, tempered with black-sand, and a reddish-brown one tempered with chalk inclusion, appearing on the outer surface.
65 - Fugmann 1958: fig. 109/D3583 and fig. 117/3K162.
or a flat base. The Middle Bronze IA specimens show a high
carination, while in the successive phase, it descends to the
middle of the body and disappears in favour of a globular
shape during the Middle Bronze IIA 66.

Among the Simple Ware jars, the kind with double rim
is not yet dominating, and a series of different types may be
singled out. It is noteworthy the rarity of the combed
decoration on the small jars with ovoid body (pl. XLVI : 3),
if compared with the large diffuse it will have in the
subsequent phase. The combed bands appear only on the
jars of coarse reddish clay with triangular rim
(pl. XLVII : 17-18). A common type is that with outfolding
rim and thin walls (pl. XLVII : 23), generally made of a highly
fired buff clay 67. Perhaps related with the Early Bronze IVA
triple grooved rim jar is the type with a triple corrugation on
the vertical rim, sometimes swollen or slightly everted
(pl. XLVII : 16 and 22), which is also attested among the
storage jars (pl. XLVII : 24-25). Depending from the Early
Bronze IVB hole-mouth tradition is the type without neck,
with oblique shoulder culminating with a flat horizontal rim 68
(pl. XLVII : 26). A general characteristic of the Middle
Bronze I jars, which sharply differentiates them from those
of the Early Bronze, is the round base. This feature,
depending from the fact that the jars are entirely wheel-made,
explains the large diffusion of the pot stands in this period.
They present a flaring or a cylindrical body and, during
Middle Bronze IA, have a simple round rim or, towards the
end of the period lasting also in Middle Bronze IB, a triple
grooved everted rim.

It is not yet possible to single out peculiar Middle
Bronze IA jug types. A common type of long duration is the
jug with loop handle and simple or everted rim. As shown
by two specimens from Grave VI at Hama 69 the Middle
Bronze IA jugs may have a combed decoration and scratched
bands on the neck. This shape is characterized by the use of
a porous buff or of a high fired reddish fabric. As regards
juglets, both the shape descending from the stepped rim bottle
and the trefoil mouth pitcher appear in the assemblage of
Grave VI at the end of the period 70.

Another typical Middle Bronze production is the
Miniature Ware. Albeit strongly connected with the Simple
Ware, of which it imitates the forms, the Miniature Ware
has to be considered an independent domain both in fabrics
and shapes. From a chronological point of view, up to now
just a few types of Middle Bronze IA miniature vessels are
known, as the shapes are very simple and do not undergo
many changes in time. The most representative specimen is
a small carinated cup with flaring neck and high disk base 71.
The disk base is more or less the same of the Early
Bronze IVB painted goblets, but the cup is the typical
carinated bowl of the Middle Bronze I 72.

The Cooking Ware vessels may be divided into big
and small cooking pots, bowls and dishes. The big pots with
slightly carinated body have an expanded rim with round
top (pl. XLVII : 19), while the small pots usually have a
simple everted rim and a globular body 73. The deep dishes
usually present the ring base, and an inner and outer expanded
rim (hammer-like), with a distinct groove below the rim itself.
They have always a greenish-red slip, usually reinforced by
means of a circular burnishing.

Though made of Cooking Ware, the incense-burners are
an independent class. At Hama high footed specimens are
known, decorated with continuous horizontal indented
ridges 74, while a smaller type with plain fenestrated
pedestal 75, is attested also at Tell Mardikh 76.

The Painted Ware is also deeply rooted in the Early
Bronze tradition. A group of painted sherd, found in Area H
at Tell Mardikh 77, testify for the transition from Early
Bronze IVB to Middle Bronze I painted wares 78. Middle
Bronze IA jugs show a painted reddish-brown decoration
constituted by hatched triangles and horizontal bands on the
neck 79. Besides the Tell Mardikh sherd, also a painted
pitcher from Hama 80 demonstrates this strong dependence
from the Early Bronze IV tradition, as its shape and

66 - Matthiae 1979a : p. 165/fig. O (3).
67 - Though attested during the entire Middle Bronze Age, this type differs
from its successive developments because the rim has not yet become
a band and is still separated from the neck (pl. XLVII : 23). In the subsequent
periods this will be the rim of a common class of jugs.
68 - This type sometimes presents upper grooves. A thinner profile with an
acute angle of the rim characterizes the earlier specimens.
69 - Fugmann 1958 : pl. X/5B814 and 5B387.
70 - Ibid. : pl. X/5B167 and 5B370.
72 - At Tell Mardikh a stratified specimen of this type (TM. 92.T.501/2)
has been found in a house of Area T, where a continuous occupation through
Early Bronze IVB and Middle Bronze I has been detected (Matthiae 1993a :
p. 634).
73 - At Hama the spherical cooking pot with horizontal grooved surface
(Fugmann 1958 : fig. 109/3C551 and 117/3B78), deeply rooted in the Early
Bronze tradition (Mazzoni 1993 : fig. 4-5), continues to be produced. The
Middle Bronze IA pots may be distinguished thanks to the reduction of the
everted rim.
74 - Fugmann 1958 : fig. 109/3C204.
75 - Ibid. : fig. 109/3B546 and 3H476.
76 - E. Fugmann reconstructed the shape of the burners with a simple
horizontal rim, similar to that of the Middle Bronze II cooking dishes. On
the contrary, considering the Tell Mardikh specimens, one has to reconstruct
a high arched grooved rim for the two pieces from Level H5 and for the
specimen from Silo 15 (Fugmann 1958 : fig. 110/3C29).
77 - These important materials (TM.70.H.1113/31, TM.70/1154/3,
TM.70.H.1160/1, 2, and TM.70.H.1173/5) have been studied by S. Mazzoni
(Mazzoni 1988a : pp. 124-29/fig. 2-4).
79 - Two jars (TM.68.A.40/2 and TM.68.D.604/3), which surely belong to
the Middle Bronze IA horizon, exhibit the horizontal bands on the neck
(Mazzoni 1988a : fig. 4). In the Middle Bronze IA the painted decoration
sometimes occurs on the neck rather than on the shoulders as in the following
phase.
80 - Fugmann 1958 : fig. 109/3H127.
decoration is clearly derived from that of the Early Bronze IVA painted pitchers 81. Both materials from Tell Mardikh 82 and Hama present the same painted motives and foreshadow a regional style. Although a connection has been suggested by S. Mazzoni between the Tell Mardikh Painted Ware and the Khabour Ware 83, it seems more convincing to consider this production as the northern inner Syrian parallel of the Levantine Painted Ware, differentiated, however, from the former (see below), and descending, as a more common ware, from the North Syrian Cilician Painted Ware. The latter was the luxury painted production of the Tell Mardikh-Aleppo region since the very beginning of the Middle Bronze 84, reaching its floruit in the following Middle Bronze IB phase (see below).

THE POTTERY HORIZON OF THE MIDDLE BRONZE IB (1900-1800 B.C.)

DATED CONTEXTS

From the 19th century contexts we have more abundant pottery material. The great majority of it is constituted by vessels found in burials or tombs of arduous chronological attribution. A large sample of types of the first half of the century is offered by the Silos 16 (= J 11), 12 (= H 11), 10 (= H 11), 13 (= H 11) of Hama, which give a homogeneous and wide typology if compared with the tombs of the same site, usually of multiple and long utilization. Among the stratified materials are the sherds found in situ on the floors of the Intermediate Palace of Tell Mardikh 85. On the base of the stratigraphic analysis and for their typological features, these specimens can be considered immediately preceding those found in the Faviissa F.5327 and F.5238 (lower layer) of Tell Mardikh, which complete the Middle Bronze IB sequence in the site covering the time span 1850-1800 B.C. 86. Other groups of vases, ascribable to the first half of the century, are the assemblages of the burials D10, D11, D15, D22, D23, D26 of Tell Mardikh. The presence of the slightly carinated bowls and of the so-called Gublite Bowls in association with Middle Bronze IB types confirms the persistence of these two Middle Bronze IA forms also in following phase 87.

The bulk of the Middle Bronze pottery materials found in Hama can be confidently assigned to the 19th century B.C. The pottery assemblage assigned to Level H3 makes up in fact the most reliable and representative ceramic inventory not only in Fugmann’s subdivision, but also among the assemblages up to now available for this period (Silos 16, 12, 10, 13, belonging to the same phase, integrate strongly this sample too). To the central and final part of the 19th century B.C, belong also Silos 15 and 17 (the latter probably had a longer utilization until the first quarter of the Middle Bronze II) and Burials D12 and D14 of Tell Mardikh 88.

In the Tell Mardikh pottery sequence, the second half of the 19th century B.C. is illustrated by the vases recovered in the Faviissa F.5327 and in the lower layer of the Faviissa F.5238 89. Of course, one has to take into account the particular function of these deposits, however, they provide a good insight in some specialized classes of pottery, possibly used for votive offerings, such as the Miniature Ware, the Black-Burnished Ware and the Metallic Ware. Another series of Tell Mardikh burials may be attributed to the same phase: D2, D13, D20, D24, D27, while to the last quarter of the century is dated the rich assemblage of the Tomb of the Princess, the oldest hypogeum of the Royal Necropolis, which was probably closed in the last years of the century 90.

A third important group may be added to the two main assemblages of Tell Mardikh and Hama, namely the pottery materials found at Ansari, which may be ascribed to the central phase of the Middle Bronze (Middle Bronze IB-IIA).

MIDDLE BRONZE IB TECHNOLOGICAL AND TYPOLOGICAL FEATURES

As far as the general development of pottery technology is concerned, Middle Bronze IB marks the definitive

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81 - This pitcher was included by Fugmann in the assemblage of Level H5 (FUGMANN 1958 : fig. 109/SH197). Nevertheless it might also belong to an Early Bronze IV production, as it is indicated by the ovoid shape of the body, the flat base and the vertical wavy lines of the painted decoration, which have suggested the comparison with the Early Bronze IVA trefoil mouth pitchers of Tell Mardikh (MAZZONI 1994a : pp. 250-51/fig. 6 (1, 3)). It may alternatively be attributed to the Early Bronze IVB.

82 - The various outcomes of the Tell Mardikh Middle Bronze I Painted Ware are shown by two jars (TM.69.B.171/2 and TM.69.B.186/1) with high shoulders and grooved everted rim, which find certain parallels in the achrone jars of the burials of this period, and by another painted jug found in a stratified Middle Bronze I deposit of Area G (TM.82.G.493/3).

83 - The link between the Levantine Painted Ware of the Middle Bronze I and the Khabour Ware was originally proposed by R. Amiran (AMIRAN 1969 : pp. 113-14 and pl. 35), at a time when a relationship with this production seemed essential to define any painted production. However, as already demonstrated by J.N. Tubb, the resemblances between the two productions are "purely fortuitous" (TUBB 1983 : p. 55).

84 - TUBB 1983 : pp. 50-52.

85 - A building founded over the structures of the later reconstruction of the Archaic Palace has been discovered during the 1994 campaign at Tell Mardikh (MATHIAE 1995). This Palace was superseded by the Northern Palace around 1800 B.C. A small sounding below the floor of room L.4035 in Northern Palace, conducted along the inner face of a wall (M.6202) belonging to the Intermediate Palace, has revealed the floor related to this wall (L.6250) with a group of in situ vases, among which are the carinated bowls with everted rim of the same type of Hama H4 (FUGMANN 1958 : fig. 117/3B294 and 3B278).

86 - A weak terminus ante quem is provided by a cylinder seal found in the upper layer of F.5238, which P. Mathiae has dated of stylistic grounds to the second half of the 19th century B.C. (MATHIAE 1994b).

87 - BAFRI GUARDATA 1988 : fig. 3/8 (12-13).

88 - Ibid. : p. 4/fig. 4 (1-4).


90 - MATHIAE 1979a : p. 162.
abandonment of the Early Bronze tradition, with the disappearance—also in the Preservation Ware—of the fabrics with organic inclusions in favour of more efficient mineral tempers, among which black sand prevails, especially for jars and other large vases. Pots of the Simple Ware, made of whitish, yellowish-brown or greenish clay, usually well fired (700°-800° C), show an increased standardization in preparations and treatments, surely depending on more specific functions. The great variety of vessels also testify for the enlarged specialisation of shapes. Fabrics and shapes are strongly connected. A buff porous paste is used for small jugs; while a pinkish well sieved fabric characterizes the Painted Ware pitchers. A widesapsa fabric of the Simple Ware is the pale brown paste (10YR7/3-4) with medium size limestone inclusions. Generally characterized by a whitish or pinkish self-slip, it is used for carinated bowls, also of the deep type with expanded rim, and small jars. Another popular fabric is made of a reddish-brown clay tempered with big chalk inclusions. It is employed especially for medium size jars and jars with horizontal expanded rim. Another typical paste is that of the Miniature Ware, a very pale yellow (2.5Y8/4) fine textured fabric, highly fired, which is identical in Tell Mardikh and in Hama. As concerns the Cooking Ware, two main fabrics may be distinguished, depending on the fire exposure to which the pot is destined. The cooking pots are made of a raw grey-reddish paste, with numerous sand inclusions and a heavy light-brown slip, whilst the dishes, not to be put directly on the fire, are made of a reddish-brown fabric 91, and always show a greenish slip and an inner circular burnish aiming at making the surface water-proof.

To summarize this discussion of the Middle Bronze IB pottery technology, the prevalence of whitish high sieved and fired fabrics together with the widespread utilization of mineral sands in the place of straw tempers have to be pointed out. Nevertheless, while a standardization of the procedures may be inferred from the technological developments, on the other hand, a major transformation of the Simple Ware seems to be the progressive wider diffusion of very coarse fabrics for everyday-life vessels, such as the carinated bowls and the small jars with double everted rim.

The Middle Bronze IB inventory of the Simple Ware is characterized by the appearance of the closed carinated bowl with vertical grooved rim, of two different sizes (height between 9-10 cm or 13-14 cm), usually made in Tell Mardikh of a high fired very pale brown clay or, sometimes, of a reddish fabric, while in Hama a greenish-yellow paste is preferred. The specimens from Tell Mardikh (pl. XLVIII: 28-31) are all dated to the second half of the 19th century, while those from Hama testify for the initial shape of this vessel, that shows a globular profile and the grooves extended also to the shoulders (pl. XLVIII: 27) from Silo 16: 3B913, 3B912, 3H982; from Silo 17: 3A989, 3A900, 3A985, 3A987; from Silo 15: 3B926. The first stage of this bowl is also represented by the specimens from Grave I (5A791, 5A792) at Hama and by the bowl 8M102 of the tomb of Mourek. 92 At Tell Mardikh the earlier specimens are characterized by the shortness of the vertical neck (TM.95.PC.5/22), that gradually becomes higher and flaring (compare pl. XLVIII: 29-31 and LIII: 56-58). More than 50 bowls of this type have been found in the lower layer of the Faviissa F.5238 93. The recurrent presence of this bowl in the pottery assemblages of inner Syria, and its peculiar shape, seem to suggest to regard it as a hallmark of the central Middle Bronze pottery culture of Inner Syria. In respect of the Tell Mardikh specimens, at Hama the collared bowls usually have a slighter carination, always present the ring base and a number of grooves on the neck and also on the shoulders.

Another major trait of the Middle Bronze IB Simple Ware horizon is the huge diffusion of the bowl with high carination, everted rim and flat base (pl. XLVIII: 32-37 and 41-43). Perhaps this form descends from the simple carinated bowl of Middle Bronze IA, with an upward shift of the carination below the rim 94, as it is hinted by the earlier specimens (pl. XLVIII: 35). This is a mass-produced type, as the bowls show the concentric impression of the string-cut on the bottom, and present a large series of out-turned profiled rims, which do not correspond to a precisely established typology 95. However, some differences between Middle Bronze I and Middle Bronze II rim-shapes may be recognized 96. A typical Middle Bronze IB rim is that with a large shallower outer groove 97, which in the Faviissa assemblage appears also among the miniature vessels of high sieved yellowish fabric (pl. XLVIII: 39-40).

The presence of the round bowl with ring base is sure, even though its attestation is rare. It is a particular shape which still descends from the Early Bronze IVB tradition 98.
(pl. XLVIII : 38). Also simple bowls with round or straight walls and intumescent triangular rim are known, but in a small number 100.

Of outstanding interest is a carinated bowl with two long bar-handles and four knobs (pl. L : 53), ring base, and highly burnished brownish slip, perhaps imitating a metallic prototype. It has precise parallels in several Palestinian sites, such as Tell el-Mutesellim 101, Ras el-'Ain, Tell es-Sultan 102. At Ras el-'Ain a similar bowl comes from locus 7195 of Palace I (Stratum X17), dating from around 1875-1850 B.C. 103, a date that is confirmed by the chronology of the lower layer of the Faviissa E 5238 of Tell Mardikh.

As far as the closed shapes are concerned, the Middle Bronze IB registers the affirmation of the small or medium size jar with everted double rim and ovoid body 104 (pl. XLIX : 46 and 48-50). In spite of the small differences in rim diameters (8-14 cm), the height of these jars vary from 20 to 50 cm 105. They usually present one or three combed bands on the shoulder, sometimes composed with a scrubbed wavy decoration (pl. LII : 72). Their bases are generally convex, so that the use of pot stands was generally necessary 106. Three main fabrics are used for these jars. A coarse one, with a pale brown core and whitish or pinkish outer surface, a reddish one of homogeneous texture and a highly fired one, with a porous greenish-grey or buff fabric. Small jars usually have a globular body and often present scrubbed and incised decorations together with the common combed bands 107 (pl. XLIX : 47). They are usually used as pieces of furniture of tombs and burials, as the numerous findings of Tell Mardikh and Hama (tombs along the road to Salamiyeh, tomb of Mourek) testify. Especially the small jars of yellowish or whitish fabrics are a standard offering in simple burials 108. The function of votive or offering vessels is also suggested by their large attestation in the Faviissae of Tell Mardikh.

In the inventory of the Tomb of the Princess double rim jars constitute an important group 109. Some specimens show a more slender body (pl. L : 51-52), which make them similar to the many double rim combed jars found in the cemetery of Baghouz 110, thus showing the widespread diffusion of this type. A great variety of simple rim jars is known from Middle Bronze IB contexts. A slender type is known from the tomb of Mourek (8M20); it has a shallow neck and a simple everted rim and is made of a greenish-grey highly fired paste 111 (pl. LI : 54). Similar fabrics and rim shapes occur in a series of jugs with small arched handle, pronounced shoulders and ring base (pl. LI : 55). Other common groups are those of the jars with expanded square rim, oblique shoulders and prominent ridge on the neck 112 and of the neckless jars, with short vertical double swollen rim 113.

A distinct Middle Bronze IB ceramic class is the Black-Burnished Ware. The surface treatment characterizes this production. The vessels are coated with a thick black slip, refined by means of circular and vertical burnishing. The most frequent shape is the bottle with inner stepped rim, cylindrical neck, ovoid or piriform slender body and ring base. The type lasts also in the following period (pl. LVII : 92), with several transformations and is related to a descending class of piriform juglets 114. Characteristic features of this shape are the combed band at the bottom of the neck and the highly fired fabric used, which, together with the outer burnishing, makes the outer surface of the vase lustrous. This type is surely the Middle Bronze derivation of the Early Bronze Metallic Ware Syrian Bottle and is a common complement to the burials assemblages 115. Several bowls found in the two Faviissae of Tell Mardikh belong to the same production. They have a shallow round profile with intumescent triangular rim and ring base and are made of a porous dark-grey fabric, tempered with black

100 - SULEMAN & GRITSENKO 1987 : pl. I/55. From Tell Mardikh: TM.92.P110065. 101 - A specimen identical to the Tell Mardikh one has been retrieved in Tomb 3162 assigned to Level XIV, but probably to be ascribed to Level XIII or XII (LOUD 1948 : pl. XV/15).
102 - This shape is known from wooden bowls found in several Middle Bronze tombs. It may be suggested that wood was used like pottery to produce imitations of the metallic prototypes (KENYON 1965 : pp. 235-36/ fig. 110 and 130).
103 - A central Middle Bronze IIA phase according to the Palestinian terminology: BECK 1985 : pp. 190-192/fig. 5 (1).
104 - The plentiful affirmation of this type at the end of the Middle Bronze I is shown by the large group of double rim jars retrieved in the Tombs of the Princess at Tell Mardikh (MATHIAE 1979a : p. 158 and MATTHAEI 1979b : fig. 5/20s. I-6).
105 - A progressive restriction of the neck during the Middle Bronze IB may be identified (BAFFI GUARDA 1988 : fig. 4/2 and FUGMANN 1958 : pl. X/6A301).
107 - Several specimens found in the tombs of the road to Salamiyeh, at Hama (2D215, probably H4, unpublished), and in the Faviissa E 5238 of Tell Mardikh, decorated on the shoulder with an indented pattern, may be also included in this class of small jars.
110 - DU MESSNIL DU BUSSON 1948 : pl. LXVIII-LXXII.
111 - Several jars of the slender type with everted rim have been found in the tomb of Mourek and are still unpublished (8M20). The specimens of this tomb provide the earlier stage of the type in respect of those from the Tomb of the Princess of Tell Mardikh.
112 - BAFFI GUARDA 1988 : fig. 4/1. This features characterizes also a type of preservation jars (MATTHAEI 1989a : fig. 48/4) and several squat jars or kraters with expanded rim (FUGMANN 1958 : fig. 110/3K163 and fig. 120/2D492).
113 - FUGMANN 1958 : fig. 110/3D284; MATTHAEI 1979a : fig. L/2; MATTHAEI 1989a : fig. 45/16 and DORRENANN 1992 : fig. 18/4.
114 - The most representative is the specimen SB167 from Graves VI of Hama now in the Museum of Aleppo.
115 - The funerary function of this vessel is indicated by its more frequent attestation in tombs and burials. At Tell Mardikh it appears in burials D20 and D26 (BAFFI GUARDA 1988 : fig. 5/2 and fig. 6/13) and in the Tombs of the Princess (MATTHAEI 1979a : fig. L/15). At Hama it is known from Grave I (FUGMANN 1958 : pl. X/SB185, SB662, SB683 and SB690), Grave II (ibid. : SB607), Grave VI (ibid. : SB381, SB382, SB379 and SB402).
quartz-sand and coated of a heavy burnished black slip (pl. XLIX : 44-45).

Due to the wide geographical and chronological diffusion of the large jar with outward expanded rim, it is somewhat arduous to recognize the distinguishing features of this shape in Middle Bronze IB. As it is shown by the specimens from Level H3 from Hama 116, from the Tomb of the Princess at Tell Mardikh, and from Stratum 5 at Ansari 117, a number of different types are attested. The Hama H3 specimens do not present the combed decoration, which appears, on the contrary, on the contemporary Tell Mardikh pieces of the Tomb of the Princess,118 probably because of their everyday use 119.

A particular shape known from Hama is a large round basin, with incurved rope-modelled walls, concave base and swollen rim 120. This kind of container was probably related with food processing activities or was used as temporary water reservoir; it is not attested at Tell Mardikh, where a similar function was probably accomplished by the large rectangular basins common in private houses 121.

The most common Middle Bronze IB jug has a large high neck and a rim-handle. It presents a combed band or a series of grooves at the bottom of the neck or, sometimes, on it. It is known from Graves III, VI, and I of Hama 122. While the latter type usually is made of fine wares (its larger attestation in funerary contexts is perhaps not casual), other popular Simple Ware types are the trefoil mouth pitchers 123 or the jugs with cylindrical neck, outfolded rim and globular body 124. A morphological trait shared by several types of jugs is the disk base.

The Miniature Ware is frequently attested as far as specialized contexts (public buildings, religious areas, burials) are involved. The Middle Bronze IB assemblage includes many shapes not surely descending from those of the Simple Ware, as it is proved by a peculiar small jar with grooved neck (pl. LI : 60-61 ; sometimes with high disk base) or by small bowls with everted rim and round profile (pl. LI : 89). Stepped rim bottles, trefoil mouth pitchers (Hama Grave II: 5B456) and deep carinated bowls are frequently imitated vessels 125.

The Middle Bronze IB is the flourishing period of the inner Syrian Painted Ware, as it is demonstrated by the number and the quality of the findings. The foremost painted production is the North Syrian Cilician Painted Ware 126, whose origin in the Tell Mardikh-Aleppo region is suggested by the pitchers found in the Tomb of the Princess 127 and by those now in the Aleppo Museum 128 and in the Ashmolean Museum 129.

Besides the North Syrian Cilician Painted Ware a common Painted Ware of the middle Orontes valley and Tell Mardikh-Aleppo region may be singled out, corresponding in the northern inland region to the Levantine Painted Ware 130, but differing from the latter because of the lack of the circular motives and the use of only one colour 131. The reddish-brown painted decoration generally includes horizontal bands on the neck and in correspondence of the maximum diameter, bordering a frieze on the shoulders made of hatched triangles or vertical lines (Hama 5B487a-b) 132. In the latter case, a metopic arrangement of the frieze results, which, however, does not usually comprise figured decorations filling the gaps between the vertical lines. The hatched triangles motive generates an unfragmented band. Among the favourite shapes of this production the trefoil mouth pitcher with twisted handle and large tapering body occupies a leading position, being attested both in the luxury and common wares 133. In respect of the North Syrian Cilician Painted Ware the Common Painted Ware shows a wider range of shapes, also including slightly carinated bowls 134, piriform and globular juglets, and, sometimes, jars 135. Several sherds

116 - FUGMANN 1958 : fig. 110/3K153.
118 - MATTHIE 1979a : fig. L1/1 and 3.
119 - The Tell Mardikh specimens are usually smaller than the Hama ones, due to their function of pieces of the banquet service (they occur in number of two both in the Tombs of the Princess and in the Tomb of the Lord of the Goring: MATTHIE, PINNOCK & SCANDONE MATTHIE 1995 : p. 495/no. 443).
120 - These vats are largely represented in the Level H3 assemblage (FUGMANN 1958 : fig. 110/3C800 and fig. 120/2D511, 2D513 and 2D519).
122 - FUGMANN 1958 : pl. X/5B696 and SA988.
124 - The trefoil mouth pitchers may have a shallow pouring lip or a symmetric mouth.
125 - Some miniature black-burnished bottles and cups have been retrieved in the Pavissa F.5327.
126 - The main traits and the distribution of this production have been summarised by TUBR 1983 : pp. 50-52 and MATTHIE 1989b.
129 - MARQUIERON 1968 : pp. 75-79/fig. 1 and pl. IX.
130 - The Palestinian origin of the J.N. Tubb’s Levantine Painted Ware has been convincingly questioned by M. ARZTY (ARRZY 1995 : pp. 19-20/no. 20). It actually was the main central and northern coastal painted production. As far as northern Syria is concerned, however, the relationships pointed out by J.N. Tubb with the Early Bronze IVB tradition are strongly demonstrated by the painted materials from the urban sites of the inland or the coast, such as Tell Mardikh, Jbeil and Ras Shamra.
131 - TUBR 1983 : p. 54.
132 - Sometimes the upper surface of the lip is decorated by painted stripes (MATTHIE 1978 : fig. 1958).
133 - In the specimens of the North Syrian Cilician Painted Ware the twisted handle is usually decorated by horizontal lines against a narrow below it (MATTHIE 1979a : fig. P and MATTHIE 1989b : fig. 1b, 2b, 3b and 4b), while the trefoil mouth is embellished by painted eyes to either sides of the pinched lip.
134 - To the second Middle Bronze IB specimens from Afrin (SULEMAN & GRITSENSKO 1987 : pl. I/23 and 24) may be added a painted bowl found at Tell Mardikh in the Pavissa F.5327 (TM.95.P.259.56) and some sherds from the Level XII at Tell Atchana (WOOLLEY 1955 : pl. XCI, ATR/47/ 149, XXII, ATR/47/64 and McCLELLAN 1989 : p. 207).
135 - MATTHIE 1978 : fig. 10/56.
and vases from Tell ‘Achanada point to the strong links between the southwestern Anatolian, the ‘Amuq and the northern inner Syrian Painted Wares. The simpler decoration, characterized by the presence of vertical or oblique lines in the frieze, has a larger diffusion towards the end of the period, and lasts also into the Middle Bronze II (37).

The Cooking Ware exhibits a conservative behaviour as far as the simple globular pots are concerned, while a certain increase in the grooved and corrugated specimens may be pointed out (TM.92.17723). Small globular pots have a slight middle carination (TM.94.11091) and may present grooves or corrugations on the body, probably to absorb heating variations. The most widespread cooking dish is characterized by the intumescence at rim and bottom groove immediately below the rim. As the same shape continues in the Middle Bronze II, the later specimens may be distinguished by the prominence of the inner fold of the rim (42).

Incense burners are composed of an upper bowl with round everted rim, marked by a series of inner grooves and by a sort of carination below the rim itself, which tends to become a prominent ridge (TM.94.11092-26). The cylindrical pedestals are still of the two types with indented ridges or incised and hatched bands, but a diminution of the plastic decorations seems to occur in this phase.

As far as the Preservation Ware is concerned, a technological standardization may be recognized too, with the prevalence of the reddish-grey core fabric and the progressive abandonment of the porous raw tempers of the Middle Bronze IA in favour of finer sands. Conservative Middle Bronze IB storage jars still present the expanded horizontal rim and they are made of a whitish fabric tempered with black sand, while a new type of dolium with swollen rim and ridged neck appears. This type is known from Silos 13 and 12 at Hama. It shows a large mouth, short vertical shoulders and a combed or applied decoration. A prominent indented ridge usually marks the maximum diameter or the bottom of the short neck (42).

THE POTTERY HORIZON OF THE MIDDLE BRONZE AGE II A (1800-1700 B.C.)

Though from the point of view of political history the passage to the Middle Bronze II is marked by the submission of the Eblaic kingdom to the sovereigns of Yamkhad, the urbanistic and architectural history of Tell Mardikh does not show incisive changes (43). However, the transition to a different historical phase is evident in the material culture and chiefly in pottery, where it is displayed by the different distribution of the already existing shapes and by the appearance of new types, albeit in a continuous typological and technological development (44). The same continuity is shown by the materials of Hama, where, however, only the first half of this period is attested (see above). In the Middle Bronze II a closer relationship between the inland and coastal pottery horizons may be observed observing the assemblages of the sites of the Ruj, of Tell Jinderes in the Afrin valley, and Tell ‘Achanada (Strata IX-H). Thus, it may be stated that during the Middle Bronze II the kingdom of Yamkhad had a strong cultural unity, the assemblage of Tell ‘Achanada being more than a comparable inventory (as it was, on the contrary, in the Middle Bronze I, Strata XVI-X).

CONTEXTS AND CHRONOLOGY

The earlier Middle Bronze II pottery assemblages of Tell Mardikh are those from the lowest floors of the Northern Palace (45) and from the upper layers of the Favisula F.5238. A complete stratified pottery sequence has been provided by a 40 m large waste pit (F.5861), excavated in the area north of the Northern Palace, whose utilization lasted during the entire

136 - WOOLLEY 1955: pl. XC-XCIII.
137 - FUGMANN 1955: pl. X/V5901 and WOOLLEY 1955: pl. LXXXV/a, ATP/47/12; highly representative is also a pitcher recently found in Tell Touqan: TT.93.LN.4673.
139 - The type is largely attested in the Simple Ware during the entire Middle Bronze II (FUGMANN 1955: pl. X/V6594 from Grave XIII).
140 - A painted specimen in the Museum of Damascus is probably of northern provenance (AL-MAGHUSHI 1992a: fig. 75b).
141 - As stated above, this feature mostly occurs in the Hama specimens (FUGMANN 1958: fig. 110/3/135, 3/132, and fig. 117/3BD78).
142 - MATTHAEI 1989a: pl. 49/5 and TM.94/1109/2.
144 - FUGMANN 1958: fig. 120/3/22.
148 - Especially Tell Hassane, that I visited in 1994 together with N. Marchetti, seems to have a significant Middle Bronze II occupation. A modern cut on the western side of the tell has exposed the mudbrick city-wall of this period for a length of almost 50 m.
149 - These have been brought to light in two soundings carried out in L.4035 (1994 season) and in the Throne Hall L.4038 (1995 season).
Atchana and at Ras Shamra. A general trend of this period is the widespread diffusion of the rim base, which, as already observed by P. Matthiae, corresponds to the contemporary affirmation in Palestine of the types with pedestal base.

One of the most typical Simple Ware bowls, not attested in previous Middle Bronze periods, is the deep bowl with large flat base, high gentle carination and swollen rim (pl. LIV: 77-78 and 82), largely attested in the Western and Northern Palaces.

While carinated bowls exhibit a squatted everted rim (pl. LIV: 79-81) and further diminish in number, the bowl with inturned rim and concave walls remains the classical mass-produced type also during the Middle Bronze IIB. Large carinated bowls with outwards expanded rim, which frequently presents upper grooves, still constitute one of the main banquet types.

The Simple Ware double rim jar usually presents a flaring neck and a thinner rim, while the body tends to become more slender. Since many shapes may be hardly distinguished from those of the Middle Bronze IIA, the fabric is the unique clue available for making a distinction. During the Middle Bronze IIB, a progressive affirmation of the reddish or pinkish fabrics takes place at Tell Mardikh, perhaps due to a new firing method. Also the jar with simple horizontally out-turned rim is typical of this period. It has pronounced shoulders and a distinct ridge at the bottom of the neck. This features also characterizes a Middle Bronze IIB diagnostic type of jugs (pl. LV: 90), thus defining—as stated above—a complete class of “necked” vessels. The other Simple Ware pouring vessels are the jug with band rim, which is now more flared, and the piriform juglet derived from the stepped rim bottle, which appears in Grave XIII at Hama. Pot stands have a simple shape with thick walls and simple or round expanded rims.

Much more indicative of the continuity of the cultural development from the Middle to the Late Bronze Age is the Painted Ware. The stratified Middle Bronze IIB painted vessels show features which will be typical also of the Late Bronze I specimens. A new figured decoration spreads: the frieze on the shoulders is frequently occupied by metopae filled in with naturalistic scenes. The horizontal bands are now up to 2.5 cm high and triangles and oblique lines are largely employed. The favourite shape is a large necked krater, which at Tell Mardikh is attested in the private houses of Areas A and B (TM.69.A.450/1; TM.68.B.186/1) and in the destruction layer of the Western Palace. The presence of birds and goats in the decorative scenes points to close connections with the coastal and the Palestinian painted traditions.

The cooking pots have a round profile and two different kinds of rim: either simple everted or outward expanded with swollen upper surface. An innovative type of dishes appears in the later assemblages of the Middle Bronze II. It has a large everted rim with a small outer groove below it (pl. LIV: 83-85). The disk base is another characteristic of this shape, although it may also present a ring base. Stratified Tell Mardikh specimens are those from the Western Palace and the Tomb of the Cistern.

The big storage jars, made by spiral-coiling, are common in this phase and present a swollen rim with high ridges or combed grooves at the bottom of the wheel-made neck. This type continues without significant changes in the Hama G assemblage. These jars have a round base, so that they are usually fixed into the floor or in benches, like those found in the Northern Palace of Tell Mardikh.

In order to summarize the main features of the Middle Bronze IIB pottery horizon, its twofold character as to be pointed out. A conservative inventory, where some Middle Bronze I vestigial forms, such as the degenerated collared bowl, may be still recognized, is in fact mixed with an innovative horizon, where several new shapes or productions, such as the “necked” vessels or the round bowls with outgrooved rim clearly foreshadow the successive period.

CONCLUSIONS

ARCHAEOLOGICAL PHASING AND CONTEXTS

The recent excavations at Tell Mardikh, ancient Ebla, have given a continuous stratigraphic sequence with structural layers covering the time span Early Bronze IVB-Middle Bronze IIB. Especially the archaeological deposits ascribable to the three main architectural phases singled out in Area P have provided a number of stratified materials,

188 - Group IV and V in K.M. Kenyon’s classification of the Jericho tombs (KENYON 1965: fig. 235 and 231).
189 - To the published specimens from the Western Palace (MATTHAE 1979a: fig. G/1, 8-9) may be added others from the Northern Palace (TM.87.P.157/7 and TM.88.P.54/3). At Ras el-'Ain this shape marks the post-palatial Stratum II in Area A (BECK 1975: fig. II/405, 1 and 6).
190 - A diagnostic Middle Bronze IIB derivation is the bowl with outward inclined grooved rim (HEINZ 1992: pl. A18).
191 - At Ras Shamra it is attested in the latest layers of Ougarit Moyen 2 (SCHAEFFER 1949: p. 246/fig. 104, no. 22), while it appears at Tell 'Atchana in Stratum VII (WOOLLEY 1955: pp. 328-37/pl. CXIX, no. 106b). The "necked" class is also known in the Middle Euphrates ceramic province (DORNSMANN 1979: p. 139/fig. 23 (44); 1992: fig. 3/17, 20).
196 - These are the jars TM.78.Q.3421/2 from rooms L.2975 and L.3149; MATTHAE 1980a: pp. 107-8/fig. 9, 13 and MATTHAE 1982: pp. 48-50, 53.
197 - MATTHAE 1982: p. 67, especially note 86.
199 - MATTHAE 1987: fig. 12.
200 - Archaic Palace: Early Bronze IVB-Middle Bronze IA, 2100-1900 B.C.; Intermediate Palace: Middle Bronze IB, 1900-1800 B.C.; and Northern Palace: Middle Bronze IIA, 1800-1600 B.C.
Middle Bronze II. To the Tell Mardikh groups may be added various materials attributed by E. Fugmann to Levels H2 and H1 of Hama. The second half of the Middle Bronze IIA is represented by the large inventory of the Tomb of the Lord of the Goats at Tell Mardikh, while it is missing in the stratified sequence of Hama (see above). Moreover, materials from Strata IX-VIII of Tell ‘Atchana offer some important comparative references.

The main chronological reference point for this period is represented by the mace of the Pharaoh Hotepibre Hornejbreyatl found in the Tomb of the Lord of the Goats. G. Scandone Matthiae and P. Matthiae have already pointed out, on the basis of consistent historical and archaeological observations, that this tomb was closed between 1750 and 1700 B.C., a datum confirmed by the analysis of many artefacts of the funerary equipment, such as the bronzes and the jewels. The precise location of the ceramic assemblage of the Tomb of the Lord of the Goats within the stratified pottery sequence of Middle Bronze Tell Mardikh (to the late phase of Mardikh IIIIB) has been made possible by the large amount of contemporary vessels provided by Layer 2d of the waste pit F.5861.

**MIDDLE BRONZE IIA TECHNOLOGICAL AND TYPOLOGICAL FEATURES**

Middle Bronze IIA is marked by an improvement of the coarse productions with the progressive disappearance of the typical Middle Bronze I fine whitish clays in favour of rough reddish-brown fabrics. Highly sieved and well fired clays are rare and also specialized productions, such as the Black-Burnished Ware and the Miniature ware decline or are not made of the same fabrics of the Simple Ware. Nevertheless, new buff and light grey fabrics appear, especially among jugs. An interesting change in distribution regards the prevalence of the reddish-brown over the pale brown fabrics, a reversed figure as confronted with the Middle Bronze I evidence.

Though the Middle Bronze IIA pottery horizon inherits the majority of the Middle Bronze I types, several new shapes appear at the beginning of this period, thus pointing to a series of changes in vessels functions. The prevalence of the carinated bowl ends in favour of a sudden and large diffusion of the mass produced inturned rim bowl, albeit the bowl with high carination keeps an important role in the Simple Ware inventory. Common bowls are made of two main fabrics, one of a very pale brown clay, the other of a reddish-brown clay, both with conspicuous limestone or chalk inclusions.

The Middle Bronze IIA contexts of Tell Mardikh yielded a lot of coarse bowls with inturned rim, slightly concave walls and disk base (pl. LIII:62). The rim is generally folded inwards in a way that produces a concavity in the walls. Since this common bowl is not attested in the Middle Bronze I contexts, it may be confidently regarded as a hallmark of the Middle Bronze II. The range of the rim varies from folded and tapering to triangular ones (pl. LIII:66 and LIV:74). A shape related to the latter is the bowl with inturned rim, straight walls of data available from the tombs along the road to Salamiyet testify for a longer duration of the duckbill axe in Syria, which lasts until the end of the Middle Bronze IIA (BIETAK 1991: p. 49).

151 - No Silo may be assigned to the Middle Bronze II, while the utilization of Grave II probably lasted until the middle of the 18th century B.C., as indicated by the presence of several pottery types, such as the small jars and jugs with ridge at the bottom of the neck (Fugmann 1958: pl. X/SF202 and 5B476), the miniature basket with loop handle (Fugmann 1958: pl. X/5B509) or the painted jug without hatched triangles (Fugmann 1958: pl. X/5B901).
152 - As already noted by P. Matthiae the ceramic materials found in the Western Palace, though belonging, on the stratigraphic grounds, to the Middle Bronze IIB (Mardikh IIIIB), still shares many features of the Middle Bronze IIA horizon (Matthiae 1979a: pp. 148-49 and Matthiae 1982). Thus, they may join the materials from F.5861 and from the Tomb of the Lord of the Goats, representing the very end of the Middle Bronze IIA (Mardikh IIIIB).
153 - This outstanding object (TM.78.9.453) was found in Hypogeum C in 1978 (Scandone Matthiae 1979; 1987, and 1988: pp. 71-73/pl. XV 1, 3-4; Matthiae 1980a: p. 100; Weissen 1992: pp. 37-38, and Matthiae, Pincock & Scandone Matthiae 1995: pp. 464-65/fig. 383). The pottery assemblage of this tomb was grouped in Hypogeum B1, B2, C and in the corridor connected to the Tomb of the Prince (actually closed when the Tomb of the Lord of the Goats was sealed). As already stated by P. Matthiae it offers a terminus post quem for these ceramic materials. To the same conclusions also arrived W.G. Dever (Dever 1992: p. 8), who, however, does not consider the inscription on the Pharaoh’s mace and questions the contemporary attestation of the fenestrated axes of the broad and duckbill types. As regards these axes, both a longer chronological diffusion of the types in inner Syria and a presumable Iranian origin of the broad fenestrated specimen may answer Dever’s doubts (Matthiae 1980b and Matthiae, Pincock & Scandone Matthiae 1995: p. 425/fig. 297). Nevertheless, also
more sieved clay (pl. LII : 69-70). This type is actually descending from a later Middle Bronze IB type, as the attestations in the Favissa F.5238 and at Hama testify.

It is arduous to distinguish the Middle Bronze IB carinated bowls from the Middle Bronze IIA ones, and only some general trends may be outlined. With regard to the Middle Bronze I, the progressive elevation of the carination and the round everted rim of the archim are noteworthy (pl. LII : 63-65 and 68). Later on, a progressive flattening of the rim occurs, which causes a successive transformation of the carination into a thin edge (pl. LII : 65). A particular type of carinated bowl with light carination and outer lines below the short inclined rim may be also ascribed to the beginning of the Middle Bronze IIA; it may derive from some slightly carinated bowls of the foregoing period.

The collared bowl is still produced, albeit in a restricted quantity and may be distinguished from that of the previous period for the slender profile and the high neck, now with small everted rim (pl. LII : 56-58). It remains one of the few shapes which may be referred to metallic prototypes, as sharply carinated bowls and black-burnished bowls are almost not attested in the Middle Bronze IIA.

Large jars with expanded horizontal rim still have oblique decorated shoulders, but show a round continuous profile, having lost the central ridges usual in Middle Bronze I (pl. LIII : 71).

The development of the Simple Ware open forms may be summarized as follows: carinated bowls are replaced by inturned rim bowls; highly carinated bowls show a tightened everted rim. Large jars with horizontal expanded rim frequently show upper grooves on it. As regards the closed shapes, the double rim jar with ovoid body continues to be the prevailing type, but also a number of simple everted rim jars are attested. The Middle Bronze IIA Simple Ware jars are made of coarse pale brown fabrics, but sometimes a pinkish a grey or a buff clay is used, together with chalk tempers. The whitish fabrics largely attested during Middle Bronze I disappear in favour of brown or reddish ones. Pot stands usually have a symmetric profile, being constituted by a short cylindrical body with an upper and lower double everted rim (pl. LV : 87).

Several types of jugs are attested, which have to be primarily distinguished according to the wares they are made of. The Simple Ware jugs usually present a buff or a pinkish fabric (10YR4/2), with black sand inclusions not visible on the surface. The outfolded rim of the Middle Bronze I jugs evolves into a thickened flaring rim, which has the shape of a swollen band, to which a slim bar-handle joins. The bodies may be ovoid, globular or with high pronounced shoulders. Disk bases continue to dominate, especially at Tell Mardikh, although some finer specimens (made of a highly fired porous buff fabric) present the rim base. Either trefoil, bilobed or circular mouths are attested.

The juglet with small double handle has now a piriform body, with high shoulders (pl. LV : 88), a shape that foreshadows the final Middle Bronze II stage, when it presents horizontal shoulders (pl. LV : 89). The Tomb of the Lord of the Goats has given also a group of jugs made of a well fired reddish-brown fabric, with orange slip and vertical and horizontal burnishing, also retrieved in the later Tomb of the Cisterns (pl. LVII : 93-94), which is probably ascribable to a coastal luxury production also known from Tombs 8 and 14 at Ruweisân near Sidon. Finally, a clear hallmark of the period is the jug with distinct ridge at the bottom of the neck, which will spread during the entire Middle Bronze II and the Late Bronze IA, descending from the ovoid jars with cylindrical neck and double rim.

Besides the trefoil mouth painted pitcher with twisted handle, which continues to be produced, another Middle Bronze IIA popular form, already known in the Middle Bronze IB, is the spherical juglet with small arched handle. It reaches its apogee during this period with the beautiful painted specimens from the Tomb of the Lord of the Goats at Tell Mardikh (pl. LVII : 95). Although the shape is a typical inner Syrian one, since they are largely attested at Hama and Tell Mardikh, the decorated specimens have to be linked with the south-western Anatolian painted tradition, as some sherds from Level IX at Tell 'Atchana suggest.

160 - Fuggmann 1958 : fig. 124/2D926.
161 - A specimen ascribed to Level H1 by E. Fuggmann (Fuggmann 1958 : fig. 127/2D113) is exactly the same of the two bowls found in the Favissa F.5238 (pl. LII : 69-70).
162 - Even though the Favissa F.5238 and F.5327 have provided the greatest amount of carinated bowls (more than 250 specimens), the chronological differentiation of their types is difficult. Only general trends of development may be confidently recognized. Almost half of the Middle Bronze IB types disappear in the Middle Bronze IIA.
164 - Notwithstanding the statement of M. Heinz (Heinz 1992 : p. 150), the Black-Burnished Ware is not attested in Mardikh IIB deposits.
166 - Small jars with outward expanded rim and gentle ridge on the neck, although already known in the Middle Bronze IB (Mathiae 1979a : fig. L2), are now characterized by the thickness of the walls (pl. LIII : 73), which occurs also in examples with expanded rim (Mathiae 1979a : fig. O/1).
167 - Mathiae 1979a : fig. M/10-11, N/6 and O/5.
168 - Ibid. : fig. N/3 and O/1.
169 - Mathiae 1989a : fig. 51/7.
171 - Mathiae 1979a : p. 159, fig. O/2. The earlier specimens have less pronounced shoulders and a larger neck.
172 - Guesques 1937 : p. 63, 67/fig. 23 (a), 24, 29 (i) and Guesques 1938 : pp. 33, 54-55/fig. 53, 60, 77, 93.
175 - It is attested in the tombs of Mureek (8M77, 8M79 and 8M145), Salalim, and in Grave II at Hama (Fuggmann 1958 : pl. X/5B485). The type is also known in Palestine (Amiran 1969 : pl. 34/7).
which allow to build up a ceramic sequence from the transition from the Early Bronze IVB to the Middle Bronze IA until the end of the Middle Bronze II B. Starting from these assemblages, not only the Tell Mardikh pottery has been displayed in a controlled diachronic series, but also the ceramic materials from Hama, which unfortunately had not been recorded according to proper stratigraphic rules, have been reset in a reliable chronological succession.

Two main stratigraphic and structural periods have been identified (Mardikh IIIA: 2000-1800 B.C., and Mardikh IIIB: 1800-1600 B.C.), which may be further subdivided into four successive phases, covering the time span 2000-1600 B.C. Although the transformations of the pottery horizon might be better figured as a continuous development 201, the ceramic materials have been kept in a sequence based on the stratigraphic evidence (namely the superimposed floors of the three palaces of the Area P), in order to grasp the chronological variations of the pottery horizon. Thereafter, the Tell Mardikh sequence, integrated with the Hama one (Table 7 p. 99), has made it possible to fix the other contexts.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE POTTERY HORIZON

The materials found in situ on the floors of the second reconstruction of the Archaic Palace mark the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age. The diagnostic shapes of the Simple Ware ascribable to this initial phase (Middle Bronze IA: 2000-1900 B.C.) are the slightly carinated bowl (pl. XLVI: 2, 4-6 and 10-11) and the large bowl with high carination and oblique expanded rim (pl. XLVI: 5). Among the closed shapes, the jar with simple everted rim, sometimes swollen or out-expanded, made of a whitish or greenish fabric, prevails (pl. XLVI: 3 and XLVII: 16-18 and 22). Only during this phase it is attested the neckless storage jar with shallow rim, a vestigial type of Early Bronze IVB (pl. XLVII: 26). A typical Middle Bronze shape, which makes its first appearance at this time, is the jar with large mouth, outward expanded rim, carinated body and short shoulders, usually decorated by combed bands and scrubbed wavy lines (pl. XLVI: 20-21). It cannot be used as a chronological indicator, because of its long duration until the end of the Middle Bronze II. The apoge of the Middle Bronze IA ceramic culture is reached with the diffusion of the so-called Gublite Bowl (pl. XLVII: 14-15), a metallic type with sharp carination, base-ring and short everted rim, which in northern inner Syria sometimes presents a series of grooves on the neck.

Around 1900 B.C. the diffusion of the collared bowl (pl. XLVIII: 28-31), presumably evolved from the Gublite Bowl, as it is shown by the short grooved neck and the carinated profile, indicates the passage to the mature phase of the Middle Bronze I (Middle Bronze IB: 1900-1800 B.C.). At the same time, the Black-Burnished Ware reaches its larger diffusion. The favourite shapes of this specialized production are the small ovoid bottle with stepped rim, the piriform juglet with double handle and the round shallow bowl with inturned rim and ring base 202 (pl. XLIX: 44-45). This is also the flourishing period of the inner Syrian Painted Ware, the inland production parallel to the Levantine Painted Ware. It actually represents the ordinary painted ware corresponding to the more valuable North Syrian Cilician Painted Ware 203. Aleppo or Tell Mardikh are the most conceivable localisation for the workshop that produced the magnificent painted pitchers found in the Tomb of the Princess at Tell Mardikh (and also known from Tell ‘Atchana X and from the antique market) belonging to the latter production. Thus, a luxury and a common painted ware of the northern inner Syrian ceramic province may be recognized.

Around 1800 B.C., the transition to a new cultural period is shown by several technological changes, since the achievement of a highly standardized mass production gives rise to coarser fabrics and shapes. Also the distribution of the pottery types is different and suggests many transformations of the functions of the vessels.

The bowl with inturned rim and concave walls (pl. LII: 62 and LIV: 74), which occurs both in the Simple and in the Cooking Ware (pl. LIV: 75-76), is the most characteristic mass produced type of the period. It is the hallmark of the Middle Bronze II, being not attested previously. The typological transformations of the most common shapes of the Simple Ware may be summarized as follows: the jar with double everted rim shows a slimmer body or more pronounced shoulders; the large jar with expanded rim has a gentler carination, which is now lowered at the middle of the body; the bowl with high carination exhibits a squat rim. Also the collared bowl distinctly changes during the Middle Bronze IIIA, showing a higher grooved neck and a slender body (pl. LII: 56-58).

201 - The flourishing central phase of the Middle Bronze Age is characterized by a high standardization of types, fabric and functions of the vases.
202 - This is a typical production of the northern inner Syrian horizon, as to the South the same luxury function is accomplished by the Red-Slip Ware. In the area between Mishrifeh and Damascus both productions are attested, while in Palestine the Red-Slip, wheel-burnished Ware prevails (AMIRAN 1969: p. 90pl. 25).
203 - The common Painted Ware of northern inner Syria has a larger diffusion, a broader typological variety (also comprising open forms) and a longer attestation in respect of the North Syrian Cilician Painted Ware. However, the use of the metopic arrangement, although in a decoration devoid of figures, points to the strict relationship with the latter, from which it differs for the presence of hatched triangles and oblique bands and for the less accurate manufacturing. As regards the Levantine Painted Ware, the main differences are the fragmented decoration of the frieze and the lack of circular motives (TURB 1983: p. 54). On the contrary, these decorative patterns appear on the trefoil mouth painted pitchers found in Tomb I at Mishrifeh (DU MENSIL DU BUISSON 1927: fig. 47pl. VIII and XI), thus suggesting the existence of a painted ware of the Homs province, which was similar to the northern one, but at the same time closer to the Levantine tradition.
As regards the Miniature Ware, the abrupt decadence of the quality of this production has to be stressed. Miniature vessels are now made of the Simple Ware fabrics. Juglets, small jars and beakers are the most common miniature shapes, but also small baskets and cups are known. A parallel production is that of plastic modelled and applied vases, usually decorated with rows of heads of birds. The Cooking Ware is more conservative than the Simple Ware, however it follows the general transformation of the Simple Ware. Thus, Cooking Ware bowls present an inturned rim similar to that of the Simple Ware bowls (pl. LIV : 75-76), though descending from the previous hammer-like upper rounded rim. Both cooking bowls and dishes have a greenish or brownish circular-burnished slip, while the pots exhibit a thick yellow-brown slip. Big or medium size cooking pots have straight shoulders and round bottom (pl. LV : 86), while the smaller specimens present a globular body. As in the Simple Ware jars with expanded rim, the carination almost disappears moving downwards (TM.92.P.177/24).

The Middle Bronze II incense-burners, which are made of Cooking Ware, still preserve the Middle Bronze IB shape, but the outcurved rim is now less high.

As far as the Preservation Ware is concerned, jars without neck almost completely disappear and a large diffusion of horizontal outwards expanded rim jars may be observed. The rim usually has a square profile, sometimes with an outer central hollow, that resembles the double rim of the Simple Ware jars. Nevertheless also upper grooved expanded rim and arched rim are known. Two main types of storage jars may be identified, one with high neck, oblique shoulders and pronounced carination (sometimes marked by rope-ridges), while the second one is an enlarged version of the jar with horizontally expanded rim. It is characterized by the huge central diameter and by the distinct neck, whose bottom is still marked by a series of ridges.

THE POTTERY HORIZON OF THE MIDDLE BRONZE AGE IIB (1700-1600 B.C.)

The final phase of the Middle Bronze Age may be subdivided into two different stages, the first one continuing in a full Middle Bronze II tradition, and the latest one already exhibiting the gradual achievement of the Late Bronze Age material culture. Although the Old-Hittite kings’ ephemeral conquest of the reign of Yamkhad brought to a sudden end the main sites of the region, the transition from the Middle to the Late Bronze Age took place in a long time span, i.e. from 1650 until 1550 B.C. and the northern inner Syrian pottery horizon did not undergo any interruption of its progressive development. The ceramic materials ascribable to the initial stage are those from the Tell Mardikh destruction layers, while those displaying this transitional phase, are provided by Tell Touqan, Tell Afis, and Hama (G). They suggest that the Middle Bronze-Late Bronze cultural mutation was a progressive and complex phenomenon.

CONTEXTS AND CHRONOLOGY

It is difficult to distinguish for sure the pottery horizons of the initial and final Middle Bronze IIB. Nevertheless, this subdivision may be put forward on the basis of the stratified materials. The first half of the century is represented by the vessels found in the Tomb of the Cisterns at Tell Mardikh and the early Stratum VII at Tell ‘Atechana, while the second half by the conspicuous pottery materials found in the destruction layers of the Western and Northern Palaces at Tell Mardikh and by the materials from Stratum VII at Tell ‘Atechana, both presumably destroyed by the Old-Hittite king Hattushili I. A typical transitional Middle Bronze-Late Bronze assemblage is offered by Grave XIII of Hama.

MIDDLE BRONZE IIB TECHNOLOGICAL AND TYPOLOGICAL FEATURES

No significant technical transformations occurred during the last century of the Middle Bronze Age, even though the Simple Ware registers the diffusion of a different whitish or pale yellowish highly fired fabric, used for new shapes, such as the bowl with high flaring rim, pronounced shoulders and ring base or the round bowl with outgrooved rim (see below). The former bowl presumably represents the latest development of the collared bowl, with the definitive disappearance of the grooves on the neck, but it is also connected to the small jar with a ridge at bottom of the high flaring neck, belonging to a large class of “necked” vessels. It is attested in the Northern and Western Palaces at Tell Mardikh, and also largely occurs in Stratum VII at Tell Tomb of the Cisterns.
During the 18th century B.C. the Black-Burnished Ware sharply decreases, while, as concerns the Painted Wares, the North Syrian Cilician Painted Ware is no more attested, and a unique painted production may be identified. The decoration of the piriform jugs and of the spherical juglets is limited to hatched triangles and, more often, to oblique bands framed by horizontal lines (pl. LV.6: 95).

The final pottery horizon of the Middle Bronze Age presents a number of new types, which will continue in the Late Bronze Age. They are the jar with a ridge at the bottom of the high cylindrical neck, the closed bowl with pronounced shoulders and high flaring rim (pl. LV.6: 91)—which replaces the collared bowl—and the round bowl of fine ware with ring base and outgrooved rim. The vessels with a distinct ridge at the bottom of the high cylindrical neck represent the most typical class of the period. A diagnostic Middle Bronze IIIB type of the Cooking Ware is the dish with everted swollen rim and disk or, more often, ring base (pl. LV: 83-85). As regards the Painted Ware, a new development of the figured decoration occurs, consisting in a metopic arrangement of the frieze on the shoulders, where naturalistic scenes appear. The large diffusion, during the Middle Bronze IIIB, of the footed and necked shapes and of the naturalistic motives in the Painted Ware points to renewed strong relationships with the coastal and Palestinian horizons, which at the same time exhibit an analogous development 204.

**Geographical Extension of the Pottery Horizon**

The development of the pottery horizon described above may be recognized in an area extending north-south from Aleppo to Hama (reaching northwards the valley of the river Qouweiq) and east-west from the Euphrates and the Matakh to the Ghab and the Raj and the middle and lower Orontes. Not only the specialized productions, such as the Black-Burnished Ware and the Painted Wares show the same typological and technological characteristics in the sites included within these geographical limits, but also the vases of the Miniature Ware, of the Preservation Ware, and of the Cooking Ware from various sites in this region share their shapes and fabrics. For instance, the highly sieved yellowish (2.5Y 8/4) paste of the Miniature Ware is exactly the same at Tell Mardikh and Hama. Also in the huge realm of the Simple Ware the assemblages from this region present many common traits, such as the neck-grooved Gublite Bowl, the collared bowl, the bowl with high carination, and the jar with double everted rim, which, on the contrary, are not ubiquitous in the neighbouring ceramic provinces. The strong technological homogeneity of the area must be pointed out, which is much more significant for the clays used are usually local, while the highly standardized manufacturing techniques (temper, firing method and temperatures, surface treatments) are common. On the other hand, from the typological point of view, several geographic differences may be noted. For instance, at Hama the ring base prevails, while at Tell Mardikh the same shapes have almost always simple flat bases.

The geographic limits of the northern inner Syrian ceramic province correspond to the presumable extension of the kingdom of Yamkhad at the time of its maximum expansion. However, they do not descend from the political primacy of the sovereigns of Aleppo, for the cultural unity of this region is already evident since the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age and continues also after the Old-Hittite destruction of Aleppo and Tell Mardikh. The materials available from small or medium size archaeological sites or necropolis, such as Tell Afs, Tell Touqan, Tell Mastoumeh and Tell Hassane (Raj) in respect of Tell Mardikh, Mourek and Salamih in respect of Hama, Ansari and Tell Rifat in respect of Aleppo reveal that these three major political and economic centres influenced the genesis and the development of the material culture of their own province, giving rise to three overlapping ceramic traditions, all included in an unique pottery horizon. A fourth local pottery group may be singled out in the ‘Amuq and lower Orontes valleys, sharing either the southwestern Anatolian, the coastal and the Aleppo pottery types, as indicated by the materials from Tell ‘Atchana and, partly, Tell Jinderes. Nevertheless, much more data are necessary to define the various characteristics of each local production and pottery group included in the vast regional horizon of the northern inner Syria.

**Archaeological Phasing and Chronology**

The chronological and typological subdivision of the Middle Bronze Age into four phases, which mainly follows the stratigraphy of Tell Mardikh, fits very well the evidence when the specialized productions are concerned, such as the Painted Wares, the Black-Burnished Ware, the Miniature Ware, and the Cooking Ware, but partly looses its reliance when the Simple Ware is involved. Actually, the development of the types and the fabrics of the latter took place as a gradual transformation and may be better outlined distinguishing an initial phase (2000-1900 B.C.), a long flourishing central phase (1900-1700 B.C.), characterized by the simultaneous attestation of the double everted rim jars, of the bowls with high carination and of the collared bowls, and a final phase, when the inverted rim bowl prevails. Nevertheless, in the realm of the Simple Ware, the stratigraphic and chronological bipartition of the Middle Bronze Age may be detected if the numeric distribution of the types is taken into account. For

example, one of the most popular Middle Bronze IB types, i.e. the collared bowl, though still attested, is a rare vessel in the Middle Bronze IIa assemblage, or the bowl with high carination, which currently occurs during the Middle Bronze IB-IIA and gradually decreases in number in favour of the intumet rim bowl.

One major result of this study is the emergence of the pottery horizon of the first phase of the Middle Bronze Age, previously known only from the limited sample from Hama. On the basis of the new Tell Mardikh evidence, it is possible to distinguish the materials of the first half from those of the second half of the Middle Bronze I (namely Mardikh IIIA1 and IIIA2). The northern inner Syrian ceramic culture presents, already in its beginning phase, a strong individuality, differing from the coastal, the central and southern Syrian pottery horizons. In northern inner Syria the Middle Bronze I appears as a coherent cultural development of the urban growth, which began during the last part of the Early Bronze IVB 205, presumably under the benefits of the new commercial and economic links established with the Pharaohs of the Twelfth Dynasty and the Mesopotamian kings of the Third Dynasty of Ur 206. Within this cultural phenomenon, the conservative attitude of the pottery production of northern inner Syria in respect of the coast testify for the strong cultural continuity between the Early and Middle Bronze Age in the inland region 207.

As regards the Middle Bronze II, the discovery of the Faviissa F.5238 in the Ishtar Sacred Area at Tell Mardikh has permitted to identify the initial assemblage of the period. The lower layer of the votive cistern contained final Middle Bronze I materials, while the upper ones (Layers II and III) pottery and objects of the very beginning of the Middle Bronze II 208. These stratified ceramic assemblages have confirmed the attribution of the Tomb of the Lord of the Goats to the second half of the 18th century B.C. as already proposed by P. Matthiae 209 and G. Scandone Matthiae 210 also on the grounds of a stratigraphically anchored pottery analysis. Since the only clue to establish an absolute dating for the transition from the Middle Bronze I to the Middle Bronze II in northern inner Syria is the ceremonial mace of the Pharaoh Hotepibra found in the Tomb of the Lord of Goats in association with a wealthy pottery inventory of almost 70 complete vessels, the importance of these new data lies in the fact that they enlarge the ceramic evidence ascribable to this period on the basis of reliable stratigraphic grounds. While the mace with the inscribed name of the Pharaoh gives only a terminus post quem (after Hotepibra’s accession to the throne, i.e. after 1770 B.C.) or, more properly, a terminus ante quem non (not before Hotepibra’s accession), the typological comparisons with the new ceramic materials testify that, according to the Tell Mardikh stratigraphic pottery sequence, the inventory of the Hypogeum B1, B2, and C belong to a mature phase of Mardikh IIIB1, definitely confirming the dating of the tomb to the second half of the 18th century B.C. The upper layer of the Faviissa F.5238, the first floors of the Northern Palace and the waste pit F.5861 in Area P North in fact provide the complementary pottery assemblage of the very beginning of the Middle Bronze II (beginning of Mardikh IIIB1), which differs either from that of the Tomb of the Princess—which is earlier—either from that of the Tomb of the Lord of the Goats, which is later. Filling a time span of ca. 50 years, which separates the two major princely tombs, these materials suggest for the beginning of the Middle Bronze II a date around 1800 B.C., when, according to the historical sources, Ebla fell into the hands of Yarim-Lim king of Yamkhad 211. A change of the political status of the town is also testified by several urbanistic operations, such as the repaving of the Square of the Cisterns in the Sacred Area of Ishtar (Stratum 3b in Area P South) and the foundation of the Northern Palace over the Intermediate Palace, happened during the same stratigraphic phase (beginning of Mardikh IIIB1).

As suggested by the discussion above, the possibility to build up a reliable pottery chronology for northern inner Syria lies in the capacity to keep the pottery materials within a strictly controlled stratigraphic sequence. In order to achieve this goal, large-scale excavations and long-time research projects are necessary. Thanks to P. Matthiae, who, for more than thirty years has been conducting, with remarkable methodological accuracy and skill, the excavations in Tell Mardikh/Ebla can now offer a substantial tribute to our archaeological and historical knowledge.

208 - A detailed description of the stratigraphy and of the finds from the Faviissa has been presented by the Author and N. Marchetti at the 42th RAI held in Leuven in July 1995 (Marchetti & Ninno 2000).
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N.B. “Fabric Colour” refers to the inner core: TM = Tell Mardikh; SW = Simple Ware; KM = Kitchen Ware; PW = Preservation Ware; PtW = Painted Ware; MW = Miniature Ware; BBW = Black-Burnished Ware.

Plate XLVI – Middle Bronze IA.
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Plate XLVII – Middle Bronze IA-B.
Plate LI - Middle Bronze IB.

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Plate LII – Middle Bronze IB-IIA.
Plate L – Middle Bronze IB.

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<th>Surface Treatment</th>
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Plate LIII – Middle Bronze IB-IIA.

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Plate LIV – Middle Bronze IIA-B.
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Plate LV – Middle Bronze IB-IIA.
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Plate LVI – Middle Bronze IIA-B.