THE MIDDLE BRONZE AGE IN THE LEVANT

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THE MB POTTERY HORIZON OF TELL MARDIKH/ANCIENT EBLA IN A CHRONOSTATICAL PERSPECTIVE

Lorenzo Nigro*

INTRODUCTION

More than thirty-five years of excavations at Tell Mardikh/ancient Ebla have produced an incomparable mass of data, and a detailed stratigraphy, useful for the chronological assessment of Northern Inner Syria (Fig. I) and the neighbouring regions. It is, thus, not by chance that the archaeological periodization of Syria proposed by Paolo Matthiae has gained an undisputed consensus. The key of the Ebla chronological system, and the period which has been most extensively investigated at the site, is the Middle Bronze Age (Mardikh III), named Old-Syrian Period by Matthiae.

Quality and number of finds at Ebla and their precise stratigraphic attribution allow to follow the development of the ceramic horizon of Mardikh III, stressing the most interesting features suitable for comparisons and interconnections in a chronological perspective.

The long duration, the enormous base of data, the complexity of intra-site cross-controls of stratigraphy and pottery series, and, last but not least, the possibility of some tentative links to absolute chronology via inscribed items, make the Ebla sequence one of the most interesting of the Levant. The possibility of exploiting stratified pottery for chronological assessment and correlations is based upon some procedures and conventions in filing and studying such an archaeological evidence – pottery – that I deem not superfluous to forward to the following observations.

![Map of Northern Syria during the Middle Bronze Age](image)

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3. The extraordinary results of the Ebla Expedition had, in the field of stratigraphy, an important forerunner in Inner Syria, that is the Danish Expedition to Hama, directed by Harald Ingelbøll in the 30's of the last century. Although the lack of a real control over the stratigraphic method during the excavations, and the a posteriori attribution of material finds to stratified strata basically hamper a reliable utilization of these data, in the light of the Ebla sequence, stratum II at Hama has provided a valuable set of comparable materials.
A METHODOLOGICAL PREMISE: POTTERY AS A CHRONOLOGICAL INDICATOR

The basic assumption is that pottery is - due to its overwhelming diffusion - a favourite find for comparing cultural horizons; secondly, that pots retrieved in different sites and even regions, if identical or similar, i.e. belonging to a unique technological and morphological tradition, were in use contemporaneously. This would allow establishing chronological interconnections. However, this is not axiomatic, and only when the whole ceramic horizon (i.e. shapes, types, functions, clays, fabrics, treatments) is reasonably comparable, a relation of simultaneity is convincingly demonstrated.

Pottery can thus provide a very general indication (the latter, moreover, also depends on the find spot of the ceramic materials used for dating), and can hardly be used for a detailed periodization (decades). Moreover, the use of pottery for chronological aims is more reliable within areas which exhibit a strong cultural unity, such as Syria-Palestine, but much more complicated when dealing with imports between culturally different areas (such as Cyprus, Syria-Palestine and Egypt). The ceramic sequences can be built up only, or preferably, on largely excavated sites: that means sites with a solid stratigraphy and a variety of archaeological contexts (those commonly called "key-" or "reference-sites"). This makes it possible to study the pottery horizon taking into consideration all of the functional classes of pottery (Simple Ware, Table Ware, Kitchen or Fire Ware, Preservation Ware, Painted Wares), carefully distinguishing specialized and non-specialized productions, as ancient potters did (and unfortunately rarely do modern archaeologists in their publications), and examining the technological procedures through accurate petrographical analyses. This is the case of the pottery horizon of Tell Mardikh/ancient Ebla, the development of which is briefly illustrated herewith in a preliminary presentation - according to the main stratigraphic phases distinguished by its excavators.¹

1. MARDIKH IIIA1 – MIDDLE BRONZE IA (2000–1900 BC)

Excavations at Ebla in the 90ies have definitely demonstrated that the city was completely reconstructed at the very beginning of the Middle Bronze Age, possibly some years before 2000 BC. When the ceramic tradition is taken into account, the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age marks the definitive end of the Ugaritic culture, which dominated over Northern Inner Syria during the last four centuries of the 3rd millennium BC.

1.1. Archaeological Contexts and Stratified Pottery Assemblages

The very beginning of the Middle Bronze Age is known from a few contexts at Ebla, especially in area P North. The discovery of the Archaic Palace (Fig. 2) in this area of the northern Lower Town has in fact provided a clear structural sequence, with stratified pottery materials illustrating the very beginning of this period, as the palace was founded directly over EB IVB domestic remains. The sequence of Area P has been integrated by data collected in the contemporary private-houses of Area T (North-western Lower Town), while the inventory of pottery types has been enriched by materials retrieved in the graves sunk in the inner slope of the western ramparts (Areas V, Z, AA) soon after their erection.

A rather advanced phase of MB IA is represented by the pottery of Hama Level Hs, by some vessels from Graves III and VI of the same site; the ceramic inventories of these tombs show close relationships with that of the grave excavated in the inner slope of the ramparts at Ebla.

Other contexts for this early phase of Middle Bronze Age are available to the north, in the Nahar Quweiq basin and in the region of Gaziantep, in the Middle Euphrates Valley, both to the north (Jerablos) and to the south (Tell Biya), although within a different regional ceramic horizon. Problematic is the identification of this phase at Alalakh, though some shapes, as the bowl with high disk pedestal, hint at a dating within MB IA.

To the south and on the Levantine coast, MB I is well known at Ugarit and Byblos from sporadic deposits, but especially in central and northern Palestine it is beginning to be properly identified by scholars only recently, so that a real gap exists in the documentation, which possibly is responsible for the low chronology of Palestinian MB IA in respect of Syrian MB I. The first century of the Middle Bronze Age, i.e. Syrian MB IA, does not correspond to Palestinian MB IA, and has yet to be properly described in Southern Levant.

1.2. Technological and Typological Features of the MB IA Ceramic Horizon

The growth of Syrian urban society in MB IA did not follow a crisis as it was for Palestine, and many technological abilities were thus inherited from the highly
Fig. 2 Diagnostic pottery types of Mardikh IIIA1. MB IA, 2000-1900 BC. scale 1:3.
developed urban culture of EB IVB. As regards pottery, the latter was the so-called “Painted Calicoform” culture, with high degree of standardization both in technical processes and in functional distinction of types. Nevertheless, Ebla MB IA ceramic horizon shows some important changes in pottery technology, which can be summed up as follows: 1) systematic use of the fast wheel; 2) specialization of wares according to their functions (in terms of clay, tempers and treatments); 3) changes in clay preparation and sieving, exemplified by the affirmation of mineral sand tempers instead of straw; 4) general decrease of the firing temperature, which hints at changes in the shapes and structures of pottery kilns; 5) frequent use of a wooden tool (a stick) for smoothing and regularizing the vessels surface; 6) combed bands as decorative motives in crucial turns of shapes; 7) coating of vessels surface with slips, usually made of the same clay of fabrics, applied before firing.

1.2.1. Ordinary productions

Simple Ware – In the earliest assemblage of the Archaic Palace at Ebla, the most distinctive open form is the bowl with rounded (slight) carination and thick walls (Figs. 3.3–4, 6–8). At Hama Level H3, the same shape shows a thinner profile, and is made of a fine whitish fabric, tempered with black mineral sand (Figs. 3.10–11). Some specimens present a wavy incised or combed decoration (Fig. 3.2) which recalls EB IVB motives, and usually occurs on various types of small jars (Fig. 3.1). On the floors of the second and third reconstruction of the Archaic Palace other diagnostic open shapes appear such as carinated bowls, with short out-folded rim, imitating a metallic prototype (Figs. 3.12–15). A kindred – almost contemporary – type is the so-called proto-collared bowl, which exhibits a rounded carination and a corrugated or grooved out-folded rim (Figs. 4: 7–1). The metallic origin of both shapes was pointed out by W. F. Albright, who, on the basis of the silver and bronze specimens from the Mount Jar at Byblos (dating to the final decades of MB IA), named it “Cubite bowl.” The latter is usually made of a black burnished ware, with a lustrous surface clearly recalling that of silver.

Small jars of Simple Ware have out-folded rims and collared necks (Figs. 3.16–17); similar types are also attested in burials. Medium size jars with horizontally grooved rim (Figs. 3.24–25) prosecute a strong EB IV tradition at Ebla. Large jars, usually.

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16 The economic foundations of the EB urban society were rooted at a deeper level in Syria than in Palestine: Matthews 1980:529–530; Dever 1985:226.
19 Some EB highly specialized fabrics with vegetal and mineral tempers, however, remain in use, as is shown by conservative functional classes, such as Preservation Ware.
23 This type also occurs at Hama in Graves VI and H (Perkins 1956:pl. X, 58747; and the unpublished specimen 51866).
24 The so-called wavy decoration is a clear trait of continuity in respect of EB IV, while comb horizontal bands represent a standard decoration of the Syrian MB horizon (it is noteworthy that this pattern already appears in some EB IV ceramic families of Palestine): Holland 1980.
28 From 1956:pl. X, 57528 (Grave HI); this type, which sometimes has no neck, is also attested in the burials of the beginning of Middle Bronze Age at Ebla (Burial D166).
33 The so-called “water jar”; Mazzoni 1982:173.
without neck, have horizontally expanded rims (Figs. 3:18–19, 26), recalling the hole-mouth shapes of EB IV.\(^{29}\) Another diagnostic type is the small jar with double out-folded rim, which is largely attested also in the final phase of EB IV, especially in the Euphrates Valley.\(^{29}\) SW water jugs are either of a fine yellowish ware with a large trefoil-mouth, or of a coarser fabric, decorated as the corresponding jars with three combed parallel bands. Wine jugs are possibly attested in the Graves of Hama and show a cylindrical heavily combed and incised neck.\(^{31}\)

Miniature vessels made of SW are also attested in this phase (on the specialized Miniature Ware see below). Frequent shapes are carinated and binomial bowls with pedestals, small bottles (used as unguentaria), large trefoil-mouth juglets.\(^{32}\)

**Kitchen Ware** – Cooking pots and platters are made of rough fabrics, fired at a low temperature, which often show a reddish brown colour in section. Open shapes are commonly coated with a thick slip, while surface burnishing is rare: vessels are usually hand smoothed. Common types are bowls or platters (diam. exceeding 30 cm) with hammer-like rim and ring base, and globular pots with grooved body, with out-folded rim or a hole-mouth. The latter type is a clear EB IV reminiscence, as it recalls well known KW jars of Mardikh IIIB1 and Hama A.\(^{33}\) To this class also belong the so-called incense-burners with high fenestrated cylindrical pedestal.\(^{34}\) Flat base basins so common in Palestine are almost not attested in Syria.

**Preservation Ware** – A variety of storage jar types are known in MB IA, and public or palatial standards cannot yet be identified at Ebla, possibly because large pithoi were used for a long time, and were thus retrieved in strata later than the one they were produced. Hole-mouth jars continue to be favourite shapes in Inner Syria also during the first phase of the Middle Bronze Age, with the standard application of a fingered ridge all around the mouth. Common storage jars have a shallow out-folded neck, with embolded or outfolded rim (Figs. 3:20, 24–25). As regards their manufacture, evident changes are the substitution of vegetal with mineral temper in fabrics and the realization of big pithoi by enveloping clay coils. The rope-like applied decoration, which also appears in this phase on jar shoulders, descends from the impressions left by the rope used in this process. The most noticeable change of jar shapes is the progressive abandonment of flat bases in favour of convex bottoms. Large pithoi are characterized by a thick horizontally expanded rim (Fig. 3:26), which represents a diagnostic feature of MB IA.\(^{35}\)

### 1.2.2. Specialized Productions

The ceramic inventories of Ebla and Hama allow to distinguish several productions specialized in view of function, fabric, decoration and shape. The appearance of these wares is a typical phenomenon of the Middle Bronze Age and testifies to the complexity and standardization of the productive system of this period.

Among wares imitating metal productions the most common is Black Burnished Ware, which probably descends from the EB Metallic Ware.\(^{36}\) However, ...
The MB Pottery Horizon of Tell Mardikh/Ancient Edna

when compared with its forerunner, termed “metallic” for the physical characteristics of the clay after firing. MB Black Burnished Ware results completely different, since its pastes are fragile, and only the outer thick highly burnished slip is aimed to imitate a metal, possibly silver. The range of shapes is limited, including bottles and jugs with inner stepped rim, carinated bowls, and inturned rim bowls. Black Burnished Ware seems to be mainly a funerary production, having been retrieved almost exclusively in tombs or burials.

A typical Table Ware also frequent in tombs assemblages, though barely attested in this early stage of the Middle Bronze Age, is Red-Slip Ware. This highly burnished production is mainly present on the coast and in Palestine in the following MB IB (1900–1800 BC). During MB IA only a few vessels are known, which, however, testify to its metallic descent, since they are clearly distinguishable imitations of bronze or silver jugs (Fig. 5) and bowls.

Although the inventory of types of this phase is limited, the existence of a specialized Miniature Ware is also demonstrated by various finds. The most common type is the bowl with high pedestal, made of a whitish highly sieved well-fired fabric.

1.2.3. Painted Productions

Painted Wares also develop from an already affluent tradition, being the preceding period in Northern Inner Syria that of the so-called “Painted Caliciform Ware”. At a first level of analysis it is fundamental to distinguish between painted simple wares and proper painted wares, i.e., specialized productions, which are distinguished not only by a painted decoration, which adopts specific motives, but also by favourite fabrics and shapes. During MB IA only a common painted ware is known, characterized by dark brown horizontal bands and vertical strokes on the neck and on the rim on small jars and sometimes on slightly carinated bowls (at Alalakh with high pedestal base): another frequent decoration is the frieze subdivided by tryglyphs and butterfly motives. No other specialized painted productions can be identified so far in this early MB I phase, however, it is probable that luxury painted wares did exist, albeit with simple geometric decorations.

2. MARDIHK IIIA2 – MIDDLE BRONZE IB
(1900–1800 BC)

In the following phase of Mardikh IIIA2, Middle Bronze IB of Inner Syria, the development of the ceramic horizon involves mainly the number and specialization of shapes and productions (functional standardization, typological segmentation), without significant technological changes.

2.1. Archaeological Contexts and Stratified Pottery Assemblages

The earliest stage of this phase is clearly illustrated by materials from Hama Level H3 (the more conspicuous MB stratum at the site) and some of the so-called Silos (ns. 10, 12, 13, 16).

At Edna MB IB is represented by three main sets of ceramic materials. The pottery found in the building directly overlying the Archaic Palace, called Intermediate Palace (Fig. 5), because the Northern Palace was built over it at the beginning of the following period, is the Intermediate Palace was partially explored in 1993–1997, when two main structural phases were identified, yielding pottery virtually identical to that found in the earliest strata of the facies excavated in Area P South. The second ceramic assemblage is in fact represented by pottery from E.5238 and from the lower layer of E.5327 and from the lower layer of E.55238, two cisterns discovered in the Sacred

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32 Two specimens retrieved in the Parisen E.5238 (Marchetti and Nigro 1997:figs. 7:30–31) have the same shape of the silver carinated bowl from the Tomb of the Lord of the Gods (Arch and Mathies 1979).
33 Marchetti and Nigro 1997:figs. 7:26–28.
34 This feature may depend on the content of BBW vessels, possibly a precious stuff (a drug, an oil, a wine, a perfume, salt, sulphur, frankincense) to be included in funerary assemblages. On this topic see Nigro in press.
35 Such as pitchers, globular jugs, globular bowls, or short jugs with wide trefoil mouth.
36 Heinz 1992:pls. 88–89.
38 This building is completely covered by the Northern Palace: Mathies 1993a:675–676.
39 Four soundings have been excavated inside the northern boundary wall of the Northern Palace within rooms L.4063, L.4061, L.4055 and in the Throne Hall L.4062, leading to the identification of the Intermediate Palace foundation wall; Mathies 1993a:figs. 7, 19.
40 However, all pottery materials retrieved belong to the latest structural phase, ascribable to Mardikh IIIA2b (MB IIIb, c. 1850–1800 BC).
Area of Ishtar in front of Temple P2, which were used for throwing food offerings and objects dedicated to the Great Syrian Goddess. More than 800 complete vessels were retrieved in these facsimile in a clear stratigraphic order, since both votive pits were carefully sealed after their ritual utilization.

The third ceramic assemblage from MB IB Ebla is that from the Tomb of the Princess, the earliest MB royal hypogeum discovered beneath the Western Palace. It has provided a homogeneous inventory of 75 complete vessels, in association with several luxury items. Stratigraphic observations within the filling and the structural phases of the Royal Tombs allow to state that this hypogeum was sealed some decades before Pharaoh's Hotepibre (1770–1760 BC) ascent to the throne of Egypt.

In year 2000 excavation has been resumed in the area of the Western Palace, with many important discoveries. One is the monumental entrance of a further group of MB royal tombs, partly violated in Late Roman time, which are still unexplored.

The Ebla-Hama sequence allows to ascribe to MB IB also the pottery found in a group of tombs discovered on the road of Selimiyah, and in Tomb I of el-Mishriheh/Qatna, as well as important occupation layers excavated at Unna el-Marra, in the Jabal

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46 For a comprehensive presentation of data and interpretations see Marchetti and Nigro 1997; Marchetti and Nigro 1999; Nigro 1999; Nigro in press: 334–335.


48 Recent criticisms to Hotepibre's scepter as a reliable chronologial piece of evidence (Byhout 1997: 1998) are not based upon a direct examination of this object, neither on a direct analysis of its decoration. On the basis of a direct scrutiny, the Egyptian origin of the piece is certain. Its chronological and historical significance for the archaeology of Syria-Palestine has been stressed many times by G. Scande Louf (1979: 1978; 1985: 1995). The outcome of this retrieval for the ceramic chronology of Syria-Palestine has also been recurrently analysed by P. Mathieu and the present writer (Nigro) in press: 35–38; since it allows to link the stratified assemblages of Tell Mardikh with Egyptian absolute chronology (it was associated with a complete pottery assemblage illustrating a ceramic horizon well known from other stratified contexts of Mardikh [HIB]).

49 I wish to deeply thank Dr. Abdel-Rasir Zanzuri, director of the Archaeological Museum of Hama, who has enabled me to take vision of the ceramic materials found in these tombs and to mention them.

50 De Misnay de Brissin 1927a: 1927b: the latter, however, should be more properly evaluated taking into consideration the fact that Qatna belongs to a slightly different ceramic province, that of central Inner Syria (including el-Mishriheh, Tell Nebi Mend, Tell Safina Noah, etc.).
Plain, at Tell Jenderes in the Afrin Valley, and at Tell Rifa‘at, Tell Hilane and Tell Akhtemer in the northern River Quweiq basin.

The reciprocal stratigraphic setting of Elba and Hama contexts is based upon a very close comparison of material culture, which is especially possible for MB IB, when stratified materials available are numerous. A tentative periodization of MB in Northern Inner Syria is illustrated on Tab. 1. Even though the absolute setting of this sequence can be discussed, its duration, inner articulation, and mutual relationships of contemporaneousness seem reliable. The major problem is, then, to connect it with neighboring areas, a task we deal with in the paragraph dedicated to the next chronological phase, when some links are made possible by inscribed evidence.

2.2. Technological and Typological Features of the MB IB Ceramic Horizon

2.2.1. Ordinary Productions

Simple Ware – As regards the open shapes, the MB IB pottery assemblage is characterized by the bowl with high carination and out-folded rim (Figs 7.5–14), which lasts in use until the end of MB II, thus providing only an approximate chronological indication. The large diffusion of this diagnostic form in functionally differentiated archaeological contexts epitomizes the great success of mass-produced shapes during MBA.

However, what can be considered the hallmark of the period in Inner Syria is the so-called collared bowl, possibly another metallic imitation, with vertical grooved rim and biconic body (Figs. 7.2–5, 8). The collared bowl is widespread over Inner Syria, but almost absent on the coast and in Palestine. It lasts in use until the earlier part of MB II, disappearing around 1700 BC.

As regards closed shapes, the diagnostic MB IB type is the double out-folded rim jar (Figs. 7.18–22), as exemplified by the funerary equipment of the Tomb of the Princess, where this vessel represents more than 50% of the entire assemblage (Fig. 9). In spite of small differences in rim diameters (8–13 cm), the height of these jars varies from 20 to 50 cm. They usually present one to three combed bands on shoulders, sometimes with a scratched wavy decoration in between them (Figs. 10:1–2). In Inner Syria they always have a rounded bottom, thus being usually associated with cylindrical pot-stands.

SW jugs have a high neck and rim-handle, with a cylindrical section. Other popular Simple Ware jug types are the trifoil-mouth pitchers, or the jars with cylindrical neck, outfolded rim and globular body. A morphological trait shared by several types of jugs is the disk-base, clearly depending on their function of containers of liquids.

Kitchen Ware – Kitchen Ware provides useful insights for pottery phasing. MB IB materials from Elba and Hama show again a strong similarity and a limited typological variety (Fig. 11). Among open shapes, the diagnostic MB IB type is a large bowl or dish with hammer-like inturned rim and disk- or ring-base (Fig. 11:1); the body is coated with a thick reddish-brown slip (5YR/5/0), horizontally burnished (radial burnishing is instead more frequent during MB II). Cooking pots usually have a carinated profile with simple out-folded rim (Fig. 11:2) and often a grooved surface (this is aimed to absorb heating variations), sometimes an incised decoration is also present on the shoulders.

A very diagnostic KW type of this period is the so-called incense-burner, a kind of fruit-stand with cylindrical fenestrated pedestal, and carinated upper dish (Figs. 11:3–6). The MB IB type has a shaven surface same function will be possibly achieved by the carinated bowl (actually a small jar) with high flaring rim (Marzetti: 1979: fgs. M.6, N.2).

A good comparison, again in the realm of funerary equipment, is offered by the tombs of Baghuz on the Euphrates, where the vast majority of pottery finds are double rim-jars (cf. MeskII, B. Russo 1948: passim).

Contemporary Palestinian jugs usually have a slenderer body and – sometimes – a pedestal base. Moreover, they are always provided with a couple of vertical handles, which instead do not appear at all in Syria (Amiran 1969: 102 fgs. 102–103, pls. 31:1–4).

By contrast, in the following period (MB III), these jugs always have bar-handles, with a shallow oval section.


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Table 1
Fig. 8 A group of Mardikh IIA2 collared bowls from *Firison* E5235 of the Sacred Area of Ištart at Ebla, 1850-1800 BC.

Fig. 9 Mardikh IIA2 double-rim jars (one upon a pot-stand) from the assemblage of the Tomb of the Princess at Ebla, MB IB, 1850-1800 BC.

and a single small triangular window below the dish. The out-folded rim of the latter is usually incised by a series of inner grooves, while its bold carination sometimes becomes a prominent ridge. Cylindrical pedestals are of two types with indented ridges (Fig. 11:4) or incised and hatched bands; a general decrease of plastic decorations (largely attested especially at Hama; Fig. 11:6) occurs during this phase.

*Preservation Ware* — As far as Preservation Ware is concerned, a technological standardization is shown by the progressive abandonment of porous raw tempered fabrics, commonly attested during MB.

Fig. 10 MB IB: (1-2) beaker; (1) and OBW wine jug (4) from the Tomb of the Princess: KW bowl imitating a metallic prototype (5) from *Firison* E5235; scale 1:4.

IA, in favour of finer mineral sand tempered pastes, which often result in fabrics with a reddish-grey core. MB IB storage jars have a slightly out-folded collared rim and are made of a whitish fabric (10YR 5/1). A new type appearing in this period is the *dolium* with swollen rim and plastic rope-ridges.

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Marchetti and Nigro 1997, fig. 10:18.
Fig. 11 MB IB Kitchen Ware from Hama and Ebla: incised and burnished dish (1); cooking pot (2); upper dish of an incense-burner (3); fenestrated pedestals of incense-burners (4–6); scale 1:3
applied, exemplified by the specimens found in stratum H3 at Hama (Fig. 12).62

2.2.2. Specialized Productions

Various specialized wares imitating metallic productions were produced in Northern Inner Syria in this period, as well as in other regions of Syria-Palestine. Their vast diffusion is a characteristic feature of MB I B in Inner Syria, pointing at a special significance attributed to metal vessels or their content in funerary and religious rites. The most largely attested are Black Burnished Ware and Orange/Red Burnished Ware,63 though metallic shapes are occasionally produced also with Simple Ware (usually for stepped rim bottle) and Kitchen Ware (carinated bowls) fabrics.64

Black Burnished Ware – Black Burnished Ware vessels are coated with a thick black slip, refined by means of circular and vertical burnishing; the most frequent shape of BBW is the juglet or bottle with inner stepped rim, cylindrical neck, avoid or piriform slender body and ring-base (Figs. 13, 22:8).65 Open shapes are also known, such as the round bowl with profiled intumescence of the rim (Fig. 7:23, 24), and ring-base,66 along with the Gubkite carinated bowl. The type lasts also in the following period, with simple transformations, being equated to the classic BBW piriform juglet, a type largely attested in southern Levant. One should pay attention to the fact that this juglet is often confused with the widespread piriform juglet of Tell el-Yahudiyah Ware, actually belonging to a slightly later production, possibly originating from the South (Hauran and Julian), where it seems widely attested in tombs. The confusion between BBW and Syrian TYW is perhaps the base of several misunderstandings in chronological interconnections (Nigro, forthcoming).

Orange Burnished Ware – Another peculiar metallic production, which makes its appearance in Inner Syria during MB I B, is Orange Burnished Ware. A unique jug was found in the Tomb of the Princess at Ebla (TM.78.QIA.63, Fig. 10:4). As a difference in respect of the Red Slip widespread on the coast and

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62 ForNAS 1958, fig. 1263A26.
63 In Palestine the repertoire of metallic imitations is first represented by Red-Slip Ware (MB I-II), which is gradually substituted by Black Burnished Ware (AMIRAS 1989: 94-95, 106-107).
64 The employ of KW for metallic shapes is well exemplified by the case of a bowl with two long bar handles around the rim, ring base, and highly burnished brownish slip (Fig. 3:5).
65 In Frey F.5238 at Ebla (Marchetti and Nigro 1997: 18, fig. 7:29). This type finds close parallels in several Palestinian sites, such as Tell el-Mutesellim (from T.3142 of level XII; LOUIS 1948, pls. 15:15, 116:18), Ras el-Ain (B87K 1975:45-56, fig. 4:17; B88X 1985:192, fig. 5:4); Tell es-Sultan (Nigro 2000:1198).
in Palestine, its typological inventory comprises only jugs and juglets. The orange fabric is coated by a reddish slip, burnished vertically and horizontally. A similar ceramic production is attested also in the Levantine coast, and one may suggest to locate there its homeland; it seems a specialized funerary ware. The favourite shape in this case is the globular juglet (attested in the necropolis of Ruweisë and at Tell 'Arqa: Fig. 14).\textsuperscript{35}

A unique specimen of the Collection Tabet, now in the Louvre (Fig. 15),\textsuperscript{36} shows how these specialized productions were interrelated. This is a juglet of Orange Burnished Ware, which bears the same white punctured decoration of Tell el-Yahudiya juglets.

**Miniature Ware** – Another neatly distinguished ceramic class in MB IB is Miniature Ware, made of a yellowish\textsuperscript{37} high sieved fabric, frequent as far as specialized contexts (public buildings, religious areas, burials) are involved. Miniature Ware shapes are usually reduced replicas of SW vases, such as jugs, stepped rim bottles, trifoil-mouth pitchers, and deep carinated bowls. They should symbolically substitute real offerings.\textsuperscript{38} Sometimes also BBW miniature vessels were found, although the specialized fabric mentioned above is the common standard. It is also fired at a high temperature (900\textdegree). Miniature Ware is also known in the neighbouring regions of Syria, as it is shown by a group of miniature vessels found in a jar burial at Mishrifë/Qatna,\textsuperscript{39} and by other assemblages of miniature pottery vessels from sacred areas at Naharia.\textsuperscript{40} Byblos (deposit 9445-9462 of the Chapelle Orientale)\textsuperscript{41} and Ugarit.\textsuperscript{42}

### 2.2.3. Painted Productions

During Middle Bronze IB Painted Productions exhibit a marked increase, so that they have been recurrently used for assessing cultural links and chronological connections.\textsuperscript{43} However, Syrian painted wares

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\textsuperscript{35} GURDÉ 1937:63-64: Figs. 23a, 24; GURDÉ 1938:30, figs. 47, 59, 60; fig. 93c: h.

\textsuperscript{36} AO 29886.

\textsuperscript{37} Munell coloum 2.5N 41: White.

\textsuperscript{38} Marchetti and Xiao 1997:12-13, figs. 7:13-29.

\textsuperscript{39} De Menil de Buisson 1927:pl. LXIX:3.

\textsuperscript{40} Marchetti and Xiao 1997:30, especially notes 109-111.

\textsuperscript{41} Denard 1939: pl. LXX.

\textsuperscript{42} Schaeffer 1949:figs. 110.1, 8, 14, 23, 27, 37.

\textsuperscript{43} See e.g. the discussion on the so-called “Khabur Ware” (Parayer 1986; Mazzaoni 1988a; NGO 1990:287-289).
have not yet been exhaustively filed and studied. Actually, direct and more careful examinations and analyses are needed before comparisons, import/export as well as reciprocal chronological setting could be established. Moreover, it must be stressed that the more specialized a ware is and therefore has an intrinsic value, the longer it has presumably been in use, thus achieving a scant chronological reliability.

Simple Painted Ware – In a general classification of painted wares, a basic distinction is that between SW vessels embellished with an ordinary painted decoration (called in our region “Inner Syrian Common Painted Ware”), and proper painted wares, where fabrics, shapes and decorations are an independent realization for specific symbolic, cultic or funerary functions. The inventory of more frequently painted shapes of Common Painted Ware includes carinated bowls, collared bowls, small jars with horizontal rim, globular juglets, trifoil-mouth pitchers with twisted handle and tapering body (Fig. 16); jugs with high neck and truncated spout.

Specialized Painted Wares

During Middle Bronze IB at least three specialized painted productions are spread over Inner Syria, sharing many common traits (horizontal bands and hatched triangles or oblique lines filling continuous friezes) with the productions of the neighbouring regions (the Levantine coast, Cyprus, proper Assyria and the River Khabur basin, the Middle Euphrates Valley), but also keeping very clear distinguishing features.

North Syrian/Cilician Painted Ware – The foremost painted production of Northern Inner Syria is the so-called North Syrian/Cilician Painted Ware, which originated in the Elba-Aleppo region, as sug-

Fig. 16 Simple Painted Ware - trifoil-mouth pitcher with twisted handle from Tell Tuqan, MB II

Fig. 17 North Syrian/Cilician Painted Ware - trifoil-mouth pitcher with crouching ram depicted in the medallion on the shoulders, from the Tomb of the Princess at Elba, Mariidakh IIIA2, MB III, 1850-1800 BC

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36 A preliminary assessment is proposed by T. Bach in this volume.

37 In general on this distinct production: Seton-Williams 1953:56-68; Hrouda B57:27 31; Swiet 1958:15 17, fig. 2; Merrillees and Tubb 1970:fig. 2, pt. XXIV 2: Tubb 1983:54.
gested by pitchers found in the Tomb of the Princess at Elba,\(^2\) by those now in the Aleppo Museum,\(^3\) and in the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford.\(^4\) Typical of its decoration are groups of brown lines forming large bands, which create trygiphs, tents or lozenges on the vessel shoulders. The hallmark is however, a crouching ram filling the melopae. Decorated fragments of NS/CPW are attested at Alalakh XI-IX.\(^5\) Tell Juedelah VIII-VII (Amuq L).\(^6\) Umm el-Marra,\(^7\) Tell Riba‘at; as well as in Cilicia at Mersin XI-IX, and Tarsus.\(^8\) Although the distribution of this ware extends beyond the limits of the Elba-Aleppo ceramic province, it seems reasonable to locate the painter workshop in one of these two major centres, where the only complete specimens of it were retrieved. As regards the typological inventory of NS/CPW, it is restricted to a very few forms: the carinated bowl (always painted with trygiphs and melopae over the carination); the globular juglet with small double arched handle, which also never shows the figured decoration; the trefoil-mouth pitcher of fine ware with twisted handle, known of two dimensions, which frequently exhibits the crouching ram (Fig. 17). The chronology of NS/CPW spans over two centuries, around 1900-1700 BC. Its earliest attestations are in the pottery assemblages of Graves VI (5B386) and II (5B485, 5B900) at Hama, in the unpublished multiple Tomb of Murek (SM145), and in the Tomb of the Princess at Elba.\(^9\) Specimens found in the Tomb of the Lord of the Gatts at Elba testify to its diffusion until the end of the 18th century.\(^10\) Shortly afterwards NS/CPW ceases to be produced, perhaps as a result of cultural and economic changes following the affirmation of the kingdom of Yamkhad.

Khobar Ware – Scholars apparently have overestimated the role of Khobar Ware in interregional connections, as this ceramic production is not yet properly defined and studied.\(^11\) Actually, KW has been often confused either with North-Syrian/Cilician Painted Ware, with Levantine Painted Ware,\(^12\) or with Simple Painted Ware. As stated elsewhere,\(^13\) proper Khobar Ware is barely attested in inner Syria during MB IB,\(^14\) as this region had already its own

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\(^7\) Matthai 1979a: fig. 5; Matthai 1989: 303-312, figs. 1-4, pls. 55-561; Matthai, P. and Samson, D. Matthai (eds.) 1999, p. 499-500.

\(^8\) TUR 1983:31 52, fig. 12; MAYER 1911:79, fig. 1, pl. IX.

\(^9\) Pitcher n. 1907:1505; MOOREY 1983:114, 114A.


\(^11\) Swift 1956:45.

\(^12\) CURVERS and SCHWARTZ 1997:fig. 28:10.

\(^13\) Goldsich 1957:pl. 201, n. 218.

\(^14\) Matthai 1989 with exhaustive comparisons.

\(^15\) Matthai 1989:367-311, figs. 5-7.

\(^16\) M. E. L. Mallowan was the first to identify this distinguished painted production at Chagar Bazar (Mallowan 1936:12: 1937:102 104, figs. 21-24), although it had already been found by S. Speiser at Tell Riba‘ (Speiser 1935:4 passim). Since that time, every site of Upper Mesopotamia where MB II layers were excavated has provided Khobar Ware vessels. The first to carry out a monograph study of it was B. Hulten (1957-1975), who fixed the period and the geographic distribution of Khobar Ware. Successively, the unnecessary association of Khobar Ware with ethnic and political elements dominated the studies, until C. Hamlin proposed a new social interpretation (Hamlin 1971:1974), starting from the analysis of the painted inventory of Biddina Temple IV. The ethnic-political interpretation was again put forward by H. Kramer, who suggested a direct relationship between this production and the political affirmation of Assyria around 1900 BC (Kramer 1977). A further step towards a less “eventual” explanation is due to D. Pardee (1986), while M. Stier (1984), has proposed a finer chronological stratigraphy for this production.

Apart from the interpretations of the hypothetical relationships between this pottery and any ethnic group, the historical reliability of which is not proved, another important branch of the studies is that descending from R. Amiran’s identification of Khobar Ware in Palestine (Amiran 1969:113-118). For a long while, almost every MB II painted ware of Northern Mesopotamia and Syria-Palestine was considered “Khobar Ware” (Gerstenhuth 1985:59-64), with quite low consideration of the important role played by the many painted productions of the coast of the Levant (TUR 1983:54-55). Among these studies, a reversing one is the identification by S. Mazzoni of Khobar Ware at Elba (Mazzoni 1988), which is an excellent basis to distinguish Northern Inner Syrian painted productions either from Levantine painted wares, or from locally manufactured Khobar Ware. Moreover S. Mazzoni has pointed out the deep roots of Northern Inner Syrian painted wares into EB III tradition. Nonetheless, excavations in the Khobar Basin and in Assyria have shown that Upper Mesopotamia was the homeland of this distinguished painted production (e.g. Saxon 1990:figs. 11:21), which, however, spread also outside of this region.

\(^17\) The connection between the Levantine Painted Ware of the Middle Bronze I and the Khobar Ware was originally proposed by R. Amiran (1969:113-114: pl. 33), at a time when a relationship with this production seemed essential to define any painted production. However, as already stressed by J.N. Tubb the resemblances between the two productions are few (TUR 1983:35).

\(^18\) At least two KW jars were identified by Stefania Mazzoni in the Elbaite repertoire (Mazzoni 1988).
luxury ceramic productions. Sometimes decorative motives of Khabur Ware appear on Simple Painted Ware, thus demonstrating the popularity of this eastern tradition, as well as the common patrimony of decorative motives shared by different but coeval painted productions.

Lycanoite Painted Ware – Another specialized painted production, spread along the coast of the Levant and over inland Syria up to the Homs region (a famous LPW jug was discovered in Tomb I at Qatna). It is Lycanoite Painted Ware. As pointed out by J.N. Tubb, it is characterized by the simultaneous use of various colours (black, brown, red, cyan) and the predilection for circular and continuing painted waves and bands. LPW is, at some extents, the coastal-Palestinian luxury counterpart of North-Syrian/Cilician Painted Ware of inland Syria and Khabur Ware of Upper Mesopotamia.

3. MARDIKI IIIB1 – MIDDLE BRONZE IIA (1800–1700 BC)

The passage to a different horizon, though with multiple elements of continuity, is underscored by several groups of pottery materials retrieved in the stratigraphic phase called Mardikii IIIB1, which shows the last extended reconstruction of the city of Ebla during Middle Bronze Age. From the point of view of political history, the transition to Middle Bronze II is marked by the submission of the kingdom of Ebla to the sovereigns of Aleppo-Yamkhia; this event is possibly reflected in the reconstruction of the major palaces of Ebla, sometimes with significant functional transformation and reductions. Temples, instead, preserve their magnificent aspect, without being drastically reconstructed (some were obviously refurbished).

3.1. Archaeological Contexts and Stratified Pottery Assemblages

The pottery repertoire of this period at Ebla displays a consistently different distribution of wares and types, as well as the emergence of new productions and shapes, albeit in a continuous technological development. The same figure is represented at Hama, where, however, only the first part of MB II is attested (Tab. 1). The unification of the region under the kings of Aleppo is reflected by the closer relationship between the pottery assemblage of Ebla and Hama.

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91 GÖRTZ 1983: 76-78.
92 DU MÉSNIL DU BOCXSON 1927b: plX:1-1, X11+: 2 ns. 61, 83.
93 TURR 1983: 54.
94 This seems to have been a “peaceful” event: MATTHIEI 1985:118, 119; KLENGEL 1992: 49; OTTO 2000.
96 MARCHETTI AND NIGRO 1999: 6, 37.
97 MATTHIEI 1989a: 216.
those of sites such as Ansarî and Umm el-Marra in the Matkh, Tell Hassan and Tell Kharqi in the Raj, Tell Jenderes in the Arin Valley, and Tell Atchana/ancient Ablakh in the 'Amuq Valley, which were part of the Kingdom of Yamkhed. Especially Ablakh provides a comparative inventory, which in some respects balances the lack of data from Hama for the last phase of the period (MB IIIB).

3.1.3. Contexts and Chronology

The earliest MB II pottery assemblages of Ebla are those from the lowest floors of the Northern Palace, which were investigated in various soundings during the restoration works and from the upper layers of Favissa F.5238 (i+i). A very interesting stratified pottery sequence was also provided by a 40 m large waste pit (F.3601), which was excavated in the area just north of the Northern Palace. The pit lasted in use during the entire Middle Bronze II. Materials from these Ebla contexts may be further increased with those attributed by E. Fugmann to Levels H2 and H1 of Hama.

The second half of MB IA is enlightened by the large inventory of the Tomb of the Lord of the Goats at Ebla, and by pottery from strata X–VIII at Ablakh. At Hama Levels H2 and H1 partially illustrate this phase, since a gap in available documentation does not allow to follow up the local development.

The main chronological reference point for this phase—and possibly for the whole Ebla sequence—is the ritual mace of Pharaoh Hotepibre Hornefer-uyetef found in the Tomb of the Lord of the Goats (Fig. 18). G. Scandone Matthiae and P. Matthiae have already pointed out, on the basis of consistent historical and archeological observations, that this tomb was closed between 1750 and 1700 BC, a datum confirmed by the analysis of many artefacts of the funerary equipment, such as bronzes and jewellery. The setting of the ceramic assemblage of

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88 SULEIMAN and GRTNOSKO 1987.
89 Especially Tell Hassan, that I visited in 1994 together with Nicolò Marchetti, seems to have a significant MB 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.
90 These have been brought to light in two soundings carried out in L.3072 (1994 season) and in the Throne Hall L.4038 (1995 season).
93 No Silos can be assigned to MB II, while the utilization of Grave II probably lasted until mid-18th century BC, as indicated by some diagnostic types, such as small jars and jugs with ridge at the bottom of the neck (PUGLIA 1958:pl. X, 5P20, 5B47), a miniature basket with loop handle (PUGLIA 1958:pl. X, 5B59), or a SW painted jug with hatched triangles (PUGLIA 1958:pl. X, 5B59).
94 As already noted by P. Matthiae ceramic materials found in the Western Palace, though belonging, on the stratigraphic grounds, to Mandikh H1B2 (MB IIIB), still show many MB IA features (MATTHIAE 1979:148–149; 1982). Thus, they may join the materials from E.5591 and from the Tomb of the Lord of the Goats, representing the second part of Mandikh H1B1 (MB II, c. 1750–1700 BC).
95 This outstanding object (T.1.76.4.433) was found in Hypogeum C in 1976 (SCANDONE MATTHIAE 1979: 1987; 1988:71–73, pl. XV, 1, 3, 4; MATTHIAE 1980; WEINSTEIN 1992:37–38; MATTHIAE PINNOCHIO and SCANDONE MATTHIAE eds. 1995:144, 465, n. 381). The pottery assemblage of this tomb was grouped in Hypogeum B1, B2, and the corridor connected to the Tomb of the Princess (closed when the Tomb of the Lord of the Goats was sealed). As already stated by P. Matthiae, the scepter offers a valid terminus post quem for the tomb ceramic assemblage. The same conclusions also arrived WC.

DOVER (1992:8), who, however, does not consider the inscription on Pharaoh’s Hotepibre mace, and questions the contemporary attestation of the fenestrated axes of the broad and duckbill types. As regards these axes, both a later chronological diffusion of the types in Inner Syria and a presumable Egyptian origin of the broad fenestrated specimen may answer Dover’s doubts (MATTHIAE 1980c; MATTHIAE PINNOCHIO and SCANDONE MATTHIAE eds. 1995:423, n. 297). Nevertheless, also data available from the tombs along the road to Salamiya testify for a longer duration of the duckbill axe in Syria, which lasts until the end of the Middle Bronze IA (BRISTAN 1998:19).


Notwithstanding the large comparative work of P. MATTHIAE (1981), C. Lévy has questioned the dating of the Royal Tombs on the basis of jewellery technology comparisons (LÉVY 1993:45). Her bowing of the Tomb of the Princess to the first half of the 18th century BC and of the Tomb of the Lord of the Goats to the beginning of the 17th century BC (following CATLES 1988:67, note 3) cannot be accepted on the grounds of the interrelated analyses of the pottery assemblages, stratified materials and objects at Ebla. On the contrary, WC. Dover, though confirming Matthiae’s dating, has suggested a possible slightly higher chronology for the Tomb of the Princess (DOVER 1992:8), which is equally difficult to be accepted. Both proposals simply reflect the absolute chronological grids followed by each single scholar, while, of course, our dating of the Royal Tombs is coherent with the general chronological system of Tell Mandikh.
the Tomb of the Lord of the Goats within the stratified pottery sequence of Ebla is, moreover, based upon internal comparisons with materials from well-stratified deposits in the Western and Northern Palaces, in the private houses (Area B), in Layer 2d of the abovementioned waste pit F.5861, and by the inner stratigraphy of the Royal Hypogeum. All of these data confirm the attribution of the Tomb of the Lord of the Goats, with its rich funerary furnishings, the second half of the 18th century, two or three decades after the death of Hotepibra.

3.2. Technological and Typological Features of the MB IIA Ceramic Horizon

The MB IIA pottery horizon is characterized by the neat improvement of Simple Ware fabrics with the disappearance of some typical MB I fine whitish clays in favour of rough reddish-brown ones. Highly sieved clays and well-fired fabrics are rare and also specialized productions, such as Black-Burnished Ware and Miniature Ware are, at some extents, abandoned: their shapes are now part of the inventory of Simple Ware. Nevertheless, new buff and light grey fabrics appear, especially among jugs. An interesting change in distribution regards the prevalence of reddish-brown over pale brown fabrics, a reversed figure if compared with MB I evidence.

From the typological point of view, although the majority of shapes are inherited from MB I, several forms appear at the beginning of MB II, 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 turned-rim bowl (Fig. 19). The bowl with high carination maintains a certain role in the Simple Ware inventory, especially in funerary contexts. Ordinary bowls are usually made of two fabrics, one with a very pale brown (10YR 7/4) core, the other with a reddish-brown (5YR 6/6) clay colour, both with conspicuous calcite inclusions.

3.2.1. Ordinary Productions

Simple Ware - Ebla MB IIA contexts yielded a lot of SW bowls with slightly concave walls and disk-base, which have been called turned-rim bowls (Figs. 204:4–6), because of the rim, which is folded inward. Since this shape is not attested at all during MB I, it may be confidently regarded as a conspicuous hallmark of MB IIA. By contrast, it is arduous to distinguish MB IB and MB IIA bowls with high carination (Fig. 21). Only the general trend of development of the latter form can be described, with a progressive elevation of the carination and flattening of the rim (Figs. 20:9–12). This causes the gradual transformation of the carination into a ridge.

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This chronology of the stratigraphic sequence has been confirmed by the finding of a "Hyksos" scarab, retrieved in Layer 2d of F.5861, and dated by several parallels to the late 13th Dynasty (1750-1700 BC): G. SCAHIO, MATTHIAS, p.c.). It provides an external chronological reference point for the pottery materials.

References to clays and fabrics colours is conventional, as a complete petrographic database of archaeological sites of Northern Inner Syria is not yet available. Colour is the most rapid, albeit very imprecise label for classifying fabrics and clays.


Even though the Firassine F.5228 and F.5327 have provided the greatest amount of these 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 MB IB types disappear in MB II.

A particular type of carinated bowl with light carination and outer lines below the short inclined rim, known at Alalah (Woolley 1955:pl. XXXVIII:49) may be also ascribed to the beginning of MB IIA.
Fig. 20 Diagnostic types of Mardikh IIIb1, MB II A. 1800-1700 BC, scale 1:3
The collared bowl is still produced, albeit in a restricted quantity and may be distinguished from that of the previous period by its slenderer profile and higher neck, ending with a short out-folded rim (Figs. 20:1-3). Carinated bowls of the so-called Gublite type are still widespread and partially take up the range of functions previously attributed to collared bowls.

The general development of SW open forms may be summarized as follows: intumescence bowls and bowls with flattened high carination become the most common types, substituting the classic Gublite and collared bowls. Kraters with horizontal expanded grooved rim have a vast diffusion too. They still have oblique decorated shoulders, but below show a round profile, having lost the central ridge usual in MB I (Fig. 20:14). As regards closed shapes, the double rim jar with ovoid body continues to be the prevailing type (Fig. 20:13), but also a number of simple out-folded rim jars are attested. Potstands with short cylindrical body and double out-folded rims are the logical complement of these jars with rounded bottoms. MB II A SW jars and potstands are made of coarse pale-brown fabrics, but sometimes pinkish-grey or buff clay is used. Whitish fabrics, largely attested during MB I, disappear in favour of brown or reddish ones.

Several types of jugs are known, which have to be primarily distinguished according to the way they are made of. SW jugs are usually made of a buff or a pinkish fabric (10YR 4/2), with mineral sand inclusions not visible on the surface. The out-folded rim of MB I jugs evolves into a thickened flaring rim, which has the shape of a swollen hand, to which a slim bar-handle joins. Jug bodies may be ovoid, globular or with high pronounced shoulders. Among Table Ware shapes, disk-bases continue to dominate, especially at Ebla, although some finer specimens (made of a highly fired porous buff fabric) present the ring-base: trefoil, bilobate or circular mouths are attested.

The juglet with small double handle has now preferably a piriform body, with high shoulders (Figs. 22:1-2), a shape that foreshadows the final MB II stage, when it presents almost horizontal shoulders. Finally, a long lasting hallmark of the period is the ridge at the bottom of the neck (Fig. 22:3), attested during the entire MB II and LB IA. Besides the trefoil-mouth pitcher with twisted handle, which continues to be largely used for funerary furnishings, another popular jug shape in MB II A is the spherical juglet with small double handle, already largely attested during MB IB (Fig. 22:7).

**Kitchen Ware** - KW bowls present an intumescence rim similar to that of SW bowls, though descending from the previous hammer-like rim. Both cooking bowls and dishes have a greenish or brownish circular-burnished slip, while pots exhibit a thick yellowish-brown slip. Big or medium size cooking pots have straight shoulders and round bottom, while smaller specimens present globular bodies. As in SW jars with expanded rims, the carination almost disappears being shifted downwards.

MB II incense-burners, which are still a peculiar shape of KW, still preserve the general MB IB shape, with cylindrical pedestal and large burner bowl with pronounced carination; the most relevant difference is that the rim is now less high, and the incised decoration heavier.

**Preservation Ware** - In this phase storage jars without neck (hole-mouth jars) almost completely cease to be in use (after at least two millennia), and large *pithoi* definitely take their place. Two main types of storage jars may be identified, one with high

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115 *Matthie 1979a:165.
116 *Small jars with outward expanded rim and gentle ridge on the neck, although already known in MB II (Matthie 1979a:fig. 1:2), are now characterized by the thickness of their walls, which occurs also in examples with expanded rim (Matthie 1979a:fig. 0:1).
117 Matthie 1979a:figs. M.10-11, X.6, 0:3.
118 Matthie 1979a:figs. X.3, 0:1.
119 Matthie 1979a:fig. 54:7.
123 Globular jars are attested in the tombs of Nurek (8877, 8879, 88145), Sabiniyeh, and in Grave 11 at Hanf (Fiebig 1958:pl. X, 5:B45). The type is also known in Palestine (Amiran 1970:pl. 34:7).
Fig. 22: Selected pottery types from Mardikh HII contexts, MB II, 1800-1600 BC; scale 1:5.
neck and a ridge at its bottom, oblique shoulders and
pronounced carination (frequently marked by rope-
ridges), the other with short neck and large horizon-
tally expanded rim. The rim usually has a squared
profile, sometimes with an outer central hollow, that
resembles the double rim of the SW jars. Storage jars
of small and medium size (between 70 to 90 cm of
height) also show rims with upper grooves and simple
out-folded rims.124

3.2.2. Specialized Productions
The process of standardization, which characterizes
MB II pottery, is exemplified by the course of Metalli-
ic and miniature wares, which in this period cease to
be produced with specific clays and fabrics, while
their most popular shapes are now made of Simple
Ware fabrics. This is also the case, for instance, of
Black Burnished Ware, with the inner stepped-rim
juglet made of several different wares: miniature
juglets, small jars and beakers are also made of Sim-
ple Ware, as well as small twin baskets and cups,
which are typical of the period. A special production,
which again is made of SW fabrics, is that of plastic
modelled and applied vessels, usually decorated with
rows of heads of birds.125

Orange Burnished Ware - Ceramics from Royal
Hyposa at Ebla confirm the continue production of
the well-fired orange slipped fabric, with vertical and
horizontal burnishing126 called Orange Burnished
Ware. It is another metallic ware related to the
eastal tradition of Red-Slip Ware, well known from
Tomb 8 and 14 at Kusweis near Sidon.127 At Ebla in
the Tomb of the Lord of the Goats128 and at Tell Nebi
Mend,129 a very distinguished jug with pronounced
shoulders and small arched handle, was found as typi-
ical piece of the funerary assemblage of a high rank
personage (Figs. 23-24). In MB IIA, the inventory of
this production includes also bird-shaped keroi

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124 MATTHIEU 1989a:fig. 53.
125 This particular production, studied by F. PINCHOFF (2000),
is already attested in the MB IB layer of the Faciso
E.5238, where a number of small jars with decorated neck
have been found (Marchetti and Nigro 1995:186, fig. 9). The
MB IIB specimens are usually less accurate than the pre-
ceeding ones.

126 127 128 129 MATTHIEU 1979a:159, fig. 124:2. The earlier specimens have
less pronounced shoulders and a larger neck.
126 GUGGENE 1937-63, figs. 23a, 24, 29b; GUGGENE 1938-33,
54-55. figs. 53, 60, 77, 93; GUGGENE 1939 passim. Some
specimens were also found in Tomb 66 (TRASEL 1957:70).
128 MATTHIEU 1979a:fig. 124:2. NIGRO IN press pl. XCVI.
(Fig. 25: a cultic vessel found at Ebla in the Tomb of the Lord of the Goats and in Temple B), pointing at the existence of originals made of bronze or copper used in religious rituals. One may suggest to identify the bird with the dove, sacred to Ishtar.130 OBW is apparently a luxury brand of the more common Red Slip Ware, and demonstrate that new specialized pottery productions were spread all over the Ebla/Aleppo ceramic province.

3.2.3. Painted Productions

Painted wares continue to be widely attested, although some changes in their distribution occur. In face of a constant and progressive affirmation of Simple Painted Ware, Kabur Ware and Levantine Painted Ware are barely attested in the Ebla/Aleppo ceramic province in this phase. This possibly reflects the change in diffusion and exchanges of goods brought about by the new political situation. After the ascent of the Kingdom of Yamkhad/Aleppo, the Euphrates became a border, more than a frontier of exchange and the previously direct communications between Ebla and the coast (Ugarit, Byblos) were through Aleppo itself.

Simple Painted Ware – Simple Painted Ware has a large diffusion during MB IIA. Schematic motives inherited by North-Syrian/Cilician Painted Ware, Kabur Ware, Levantine Painted Ware (basically horizontal bands separating friezes filled with hatched or dotted triangles), are widely employed for decorating with reddish brown paint SW jugs, small jars or bowls. The decoration is usually extended over the shoulders, the neck and sometimes the rim of vessels.

North Syrian/Cilician Painted Ware – North Syrian/Cilician Painted Ware is attested especially in palatial and funerary contexts. The most beautiful specimens known are those from the Tomb of the Lord of the Goats at Ebla, which are globular juglets (Figs. 22, 8, 26). Other examples are known from sparse finds in tombs of Northern Syria. Level IX at Alalakh has provided a rich inventory of this production as well as the inventory of the East Terrace Building at Kinet Hayuk.131 The workshop of the crouching goat, to be located at Ebla or Aleppo, is still active.

4. MAIDIK III B2 – MIDDLE BRONZE II B
(1700-1600 BC)

The final phase of the Middle Bronze Age in Inner Syria is characterized by the coexistence of two opposite ceramic traditions: one conservative, the other innovative. Some wares continue in a full MB II perspective, others conversely exhibit the gradual affirmation of a new ceramic horizon, which is that of

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Fig. 25: Orange Burnished Ware bowls found in the Tomb of the Lord of the Goats; Maidik III B1, MB II A, 1750–1700 BC

Fig. 26: Globular juglets decorated in the NS/CPW style from the Tomb of the Lord of the Goats; Maidik III B1, MB II A, 1750–1700 BC

131 The same bird appears in the above mentioned class of cult vessels with applied figurines, which Frances Pincock has convincingly related to the cult of Ishtar; Pincock 2000.

132 Heinze 1992, pls. 50:158–163; Gates 2000, 85–86, fig. 6:2 5, 8, 10, 12, 13; other specimen in fig. 6 belong to simple Painted Ware.
the Late Bronze I. Although the Old-Hittite Kings' ephemeral conquest of the kingdom of Yamkhad brought to a sudden end the major centres of the region, the transition from the Mide to the Late Bronze Age took place in a long time span, i.e. from 1650 until 1550 BC, and the Northern Inner Syrian pottery horizon did not undergo any interruption of its continued development.

4.1. Archaeological Contexts and Stratified Pottery Assemblages

MB II B ceramic materials are basically provided by Ebla and Alalakh (strata VIII–VII). The very end of the period is further illustrated by pottery from Tell Tuqmu, Tell Atis, Alalakh (stratum VI) and Hama (G). These materials demonstrate that the MB–LB cultural mutation was a gradual and complex phenomenon.133

4.1.1. Contexts and Chronology

The first half of the 17th century BC is represented by the pottery assemblage of the Western Palace,134 and of some of the private houses of Area B, as well as the pottery associated with the latest burial found in the Tomb of the Cisterns at Ebla.135 A similar horizon is shown by level VII at Alalakh. The second half of the century is illustrated by conspicuous pottery materials found in the destruction layers of the Western and Northern Palaces (Figs. 27–28), the Western Residency of Area Z, and various Fortresses (M. V. AA. DD) built on top of the ramparts at Ebla (Fig. 29).136 Stratum VII at Alalakh provides another important group of materials.137 Since Alalakh first and Ebla immediately after were destroyed by the Old-Hittite kings in a restricted time span, their ceramic assemblages provide a very well-dated comparative set of pottery for the end of MB in Northern Inner Syria. A small group of vessels was found at Ebla dating from just after the violent destruction of the city,138 showing an early LB horizon, which is that of Grave XIII at Hama Level G.139

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134 Some observations led Paolo Matthiae to express the hypothesis that the ceramic set found in this Royal Palace had already been in use from some decades at the time when it was heavily burnt by the Hittites.
135 A specially tomb was added to the existing Royal Hypogea at the beginning of the 17th century BC (Matthiae 1988a: 39–40, fig. 3: Matthiae, Pinney and Nannione Matthiae (eds.), 1995: 181–182), the so-called Tomb of the Cisterns, which has also furnished an early MB II B pottery assemblage (Nigro in press: 247–274).
137 As suggested by M. Heinz, Stratum VII materials correspond to the very end of the Middle Bronze Age, and may be compared to the assemblages of Haladi BC and of Ugarit Moyen H.II (Heinz 1992: 188).
138 In the Square of the Cisterns, another one of these cisterns was excavated filled with offerings and materials apparently resulting from the destruction of the nearby Temple P2. The pottery from this cistern, P3213, illustrates this early Late Bronze horizon, previously almost unknown at Ebla.
139 The round bowl G332 and the spherical juglet G694 have also been found on the latest floor of Northern Palace at Ebla (TM 261491, TM 261522) and in Stratum VII at Alalakh (Heinz 1992: pls. 2:12, 9:29).
4.2. Technological and Typological Features of the MB II B Ceramic Horizon

In the first part of this phase no major changes of pottery technology are noticed, while in the second part new wares and clays appear, pointing at the forthcoming transformation of the ceramic tradition of Inner Syria. As regards shapes, a basic distinction has to be stressed between ordinary wares, where coarse and mass-produced shapes become oversimplified, and specialized wares, which show a number of new vessels (kernoi, juglets, metallic imitations, platters, incense burners, chalices, decorated kraters).

4.2.1. Ordinary productions

Simple Ware - No significant technical transformations occurred during the last century of the Middle Bronze Age, even though SW shows new whitish or pale yellowish highly fired clays, used for innovative shapes, such as the bowl with high flaring rim, pronounced shoulders and ring-base (Figs. 22:4; 30), or the round bowl with outgrooved rim (see below). The bowl with high flaring rim (which actually is a closed shape) 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 the bottom of the high flaring neck, a very common type in this period. It is attested in palatial contexts at Ebla.\(^1\)

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\(^1\) Northern Palace: TM.88.PB3/3; TM.87.P.I81/2; TM.86.P.B02; Western Palace: MATTHAEI 1956a, fig. C10.
thus indicating its belonging to table ware, and it also largely occurs in stratum VII at Alalakh. Ugarit, and elsewhere in the Ebla/Aleppo ceramic province. A general trend of this period is the widespread diffusion of the ring-base, which, as already observed by P. Matthiae, corresponds to the contemporary affirmation in Palestine of types with pedestal base.

While classic carinated bowls exhibit a squatted degenerated rim (Figs. 31:6-9) and further diminish in number, the bowl with inturnd rim and concave walls remains the classical mass-produced type also during MB III. Another diagnostic MB II SW shape is the deep bowl with large flat base, high gentle carination and swollen rim (Figs. 31:4-5), largely attested in the Western and Northern Palaces at Ebla, which was an essential piece of the banquet service (both in funerary and palatial assemblages), together with the carinated krater with expanded grooved rim.

The SW jar with double rim usually presents a flaring neck and a thinner rim and a slenderer body in respect of the preceding period.

Since many shapes can be hardly distinguished from those of MB IIIA, fabrics are the only clue available for making a distinction. During MB IIIB a progressive affirmation of reddish or pinkish fabrics takes place at Ebla, due to the employ of new tempering and firing methods (clay sources are, instead, the same of MB IIIA).

The jar with simple horizontally out-turned rim is another typical shape of this period. It has pronounced shoulders and a distinct ridge at the bottom of the neck. These features also characterize a MB IIIB jug (Fig. 22:3), thus defining - as stated above - a whole class of vessels. Other SW 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. Pots, still needed because of the frequent lack of pedestals or ring bases, have a simple shape with thick walls and round rims (Fig. 31:14).

Kitchen Ware - Cooking pots have a round profile and show two different kinds of rim: either simple out-folded or outward expanded with swollen upper surface (Figs. 31:13). An innovative type of dishes appears in the later assemblages of MB II. It has a large out-folded rim with a thin outer groove below it (Figs. 31:10-12), and disk- or, more rarely, ring-base. Stratified specimens from Ebla are known from the Northern and Western Palaces and the Tomb of the Cisterns.

Preservation Ware - Big storage pithoi, 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 (Fig. 32). This type continues without significant changes in the Hama G assemblage. In spite of their dimensions these jars have a round base, as they were usually fixed into the floor or in benches, like those found in the Northern Palace at Ebla. Deep square basins (Fig. 33) for water are common facilities in buildings and houses of this phase.

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112 Matthiae 1976a:163, especially note 71.
113 Jericho Groups IV and V according to Kenyon’s classification (Kenyon 1965:figs. 233, 251).
114 A diagnostic MB IIB descendant is the bowl with outward inclined grooved rim (Heinz 1992:pl. A18).
115 To the published specimens from the Western Palace (Matthiae 1976a:fig. G:1, 8-9), some others may be added from the Northern Palace (TII:87, P.157/7; TM.358.534-3).
116 At Ugarit it is attested in the latest layers of Ugarit Mound 2 (Schaeffer 1949:246, fig. 104, n. 22), while it appears at Alalakh in stratum VII (Woolley 1955:328-337, pl. CIXIX, n. 1059). The class is also known in the Middle Euphrates ceramic province (Dörpfeld 1975:138, fig. 23:44; 1992:fig. 3, ns. 17, 29).
120 Matthiae 1987:fig. 12.
Fig. 31 Selected pottery shapes from Mardikh HIR contexts. MB IIIB, 1700–1600 BC; scale 1:3.
4.2.2. Specialized Productions

Like in the foregoing period, miniature vessels are made of SW, as well as ritual vases with applied decorations, which are now simplified to the single motive of bird heads projecting from the walls of small jars.

**White-Slip Ware** – Especially in the last decades of MB II B an extremely fine metallic production appears, characterized by the high purity of clay, and by an outer whitish, sometimes pinkish, finely sieved slip. Favourite shapes are usually the bowl with pronounced shoulders and high flaring rim (Fig. 34), but also hemispherical bowls, small jugs, always with ridges at the base of the neck, attesting to the metallic inspiration of this ware. Inner Syrian White-Slip Ware has been found almost exclusively in palatial contexts, having been thus called at Ebla Palace Ware. It continues to be produced during LB I.

**Orange Burnished Ware** – Some jugs found in the Tomb of the Cisterns (Figs. 22-3-6) testify to the popularity of this luxury production (perhaps related to wine) also in MB III B.
4.2.3. Painted productions

North Syrian/Cilician Painted Ware – In the last phase of Middle Bronze North-Syrian/Cilician Painted Ware is apparently not attested. Echoes of this production may be detected in Simple Painted Ware, where figured motives find their maximum popularity and foreshadow the future developments of figured painted decorations.

Simple Painted Ware – For many respects, MB II B Common Painted Ware announces the typical features of LB I painted productions. A new figured decoration appears: the frieze on the shoulders is frequently divided into metope filled in with naturalistic scenes (including birds, gazelles, goats, fishes).\(^{33}\) The horizontal bands are now up to 2.5 cm high and triangles and oblique lines are widely employed.\(^{32}\) The favourite shape is a large necked krater, which at Ebla is attested in private Houses of Areas A and B (TM.69.A.450/1; TM.68.B.186/1, Fig. 35) and in the destruction layer of the Western Palace.\(^{50}\) The presence of birds and goats among decorative motives points to close connections with the coastal and the Palestinian painted traditions.\(^{54}\)

V. Conclusions

This very fast presentation of the ceramic horizon of Northern Inner Syria during the Middle Bronze Age does not allow to illustrate completely the ceramic sequence which descends from the stratigraphy of Ebla and related sites. However, it should be sufficient to give an idea of the general grid of pottery periodization, with which chronological systems based upon pottery phasing elaborated in Syria-Palestine have to cope. Four stratigraphic phases have been identified at Ebla, grouped into two main chronological periods (Mardikh IIIA and Mardikh IIIB), covering a time span of about four centuries (2000–1600 BC). The absolute setting of this sequence is based upon the mace of Pharaoh Hotpe-br, and other interconnections made possible by the integrated study of Ebla material culture and stratigraphy.\(^{53}\) In the light of the Ebla chronology, two basic observations may be put forward for the sake of interregional cultural and chronological correlation. The first regards the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age, since the ceramic inventory of Ebla permits to know the early stage of development of MB pottery. It is a quite isolated case in Syria-Palestine, as this early MB pottery horizon is not attested at all in other areas, especially Palestine. This would explain the consistent gap (up to a century) existing between the two regions for the beginning of MB IA, paradigmatically reflected by the traditional Palestinian denomination of this phase given by W. F. Albright (MB II A). MB I A of Inner Syria, confidently dated between 2000 and 1600 BC, apparently lacks in Palestine (a few assemblages of this phase have been recently identified), where in this period there were no large city-states. As soon as this horizon emerges from the earth,\(^{59}\) it should be logically called MB I like in Syria. This, on the other hand, means that it is not automatically necessary either to raise Egypto-Palestinian chronology if Middle Chronology is adapted for Ebla, or to low Eblate chronology to fit the chronological grid of Palestine. The demonstration is simply given by the mace of Hotpe-br, the Egyptian dating of which, roughly at

\(^{32}\) Mazzioli 1988:35 i36.
\(^{33}\) These are the jars TM.78.Q.342/1-2 from rooms L.2925
and L.3149. Matthee 1980a:107 108. Figs. 9, 13:

\(^{54}\) Matthee 1982:67, especially note 86.
\(^{55}\) Matthee 1995b.
\(^{56}\) See the contribution of S. Cohen in the present volume.
and L. Negri forthcoming.
the mid of the period here taken into account fits very well the general chronology of Ebla.

A similar figure is shown if we take into account the end of the Middle Bronze Age, when for political reasons the destruction of Ebla and Aleppo and the affirmation of a new cultural horizon under the hegemony of the kingdoms of Khatti and Mitanni – that of the Late Bronze Age – took place earlier in Syria than in Palestine (again up to a century), where it is linked with the 18th Dynasty Pharaohs’ conquest of the region. Only the very beginning of that cultural phase, clearly distinguished in Palestine as MB IIc (better MB III), is known in Northern Inner Syria, thanks to the ceramic assemblage of Alalakh VI and Hama G.

Material culture and pottery in particular cannot be easily used for interregional connections with the aim of a chronological synchronization, without taking into consideration the existing differences in the historical and cultural development of the various areas and several methodological problems (I deal with them in the introductory paragraph). However, as the case study of Ebla demonstrates, they are the most suitable piece of evidence for internal periodization in the light of stratigraphy. The project we are co-operating with, when oriented to build up a complex net of relationships, will surely lead to a more precise chronological assessment, if it is able to look for connections not necessarily forcing local experimented systems to a general rule, but trying to find reliable links to start with.