

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF A LONG LASTING POWER: THE EBLA PARADIGM. A SYNTHESIS

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The starting point for my paper is a recent article by P. Matthiae in which he deals with the final events in the history of Ebla, the Amorite city¹ through the archaeological evidence of the remarkable destruction of this great and powerful kingdom of pre-classical inner Syria. Here, instead, I intend to present those pieces of archaeological evidence that enable us to reconstruct, beyond the destruction, the lengthy life of this site over a span of more than one thousand years, a reconstruction made possible by decades of excavations and philological research.

I must stress that, in the case of Ebla, retrospective analysis *per se* can never be exhaustive given the ever-increasing body of data and the often-unexpected discoveries, such as we recently saw with the north wing of Royal Palace G (Fig. 1)². Such data not only help us to define better the essential lines of certain cultural and historical phases of the city and its urban settlement³ but also lead to modifications of any reconstruction and open up new perspectives in our knowledge of the history of Ebla between one destruction of the city and another.

I.

Briefly tracing the earliest phase of Ebla known to us (Fig. 2)⁴, we shall concentrate on the Acropolis (Fig. 3), where relatively modest but extensive architectonic structures have been brought to light⁵. From one of these, previously named G2⁶, on the south slope of the hill, a series of medium and small-sized rooms (from a minimum of 2,4 × 2,5 m., in L.3748, to a maximum of 5 × 2,7 m. in L.3740) has been recovered, 15 in all (Fig. 4a). These lie below another two levels that also predate the level of the Age of Archives, which again documents a storage structure. Most of the pottery associated with G2 recalls the early horizon of Hama (phase K) and 'Amuq (phase H)⁷, pointing out that the building belongs to EBIII

¹ Matthiae 2006a.

² Matthiae 2004 :306 ff.; Dolce 2008a.

³ the reconstruction is often also provided from valuable details regarding the ruling dynasty and the political context in which this operated, thanks to sources in the Archives: Archi 1991; Archi 1993; Archi, Biga 2003; Biga 2003.

⁴ the author is currently preparing more detailed studies on this topic.

⁵ here we refer to the excavations undertaken in the 1980s: cf. Matthiae 1987.

⁶ Matthiae 1987: 136 onwards.

⁷ at Ebla, there are occasional remains of Khirbet Kerak pottery and painted globular bowls; the most common types are, however, Hama K and 'Amuq H: Matthiae 1987: 138, and note 5; and, according to Mazzoni, there are also sherds that correspond to the earlier Hama G phase Mazzoni 1991: 173. Mazzoni, in fact, identifies two or even three cultural phases in the pottery assemblage, corresponding

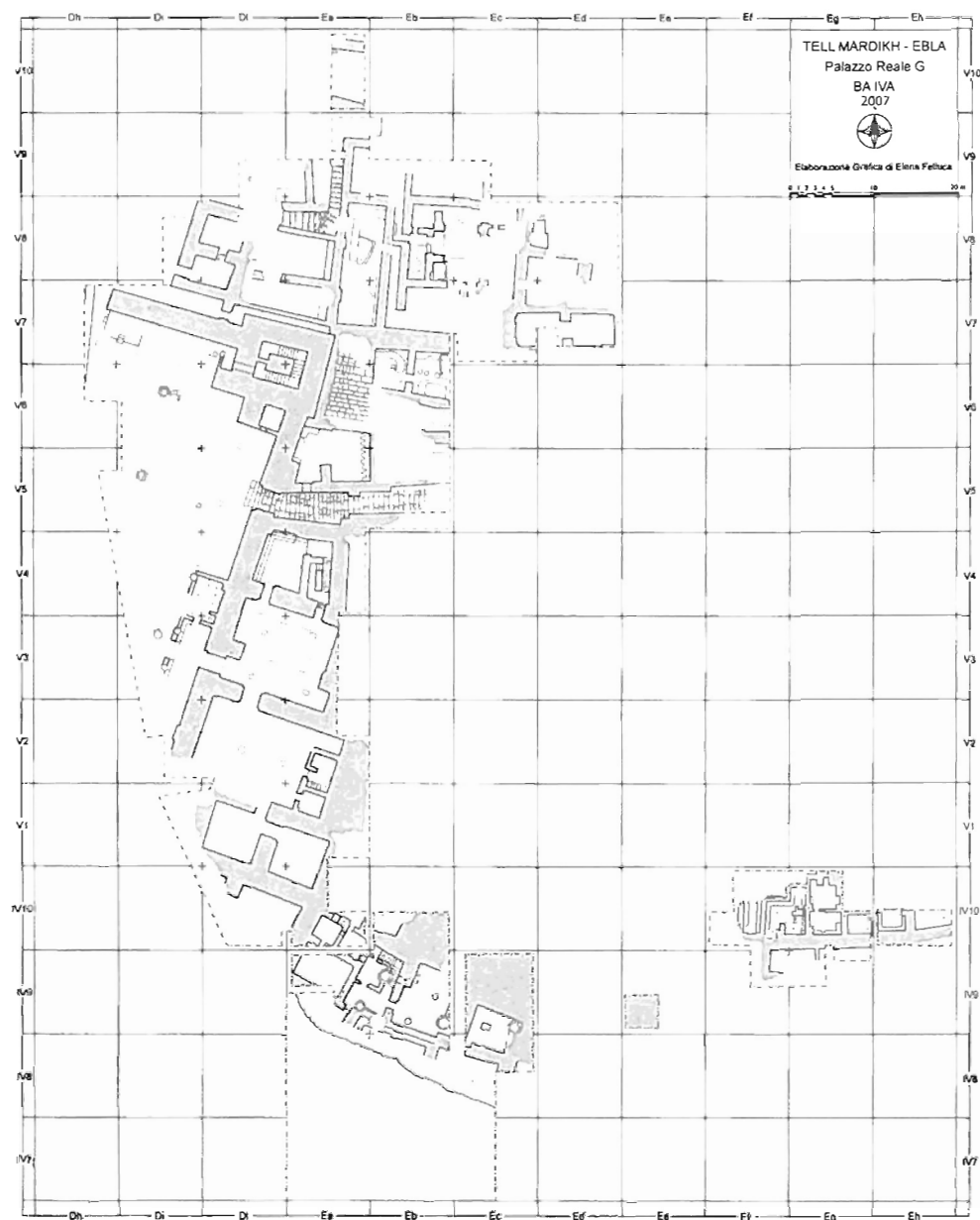


Fig. 1 – Tell Mardikh-Ebla: the Royal Palace G.

Period, corresponding to the beginning and the middle phases of Archaic Early Syrian Ebla⁸. Here, two factors are to be stressed: the clear east-west alignment of

to those of 'Amuq F, G and H, and dating to EBII and EBIII. The last of these phases in pottery development appeared in the level that preceded the construction of the southern storerooms, relating to the time of Royal Palace G: Mazzoni 1991: 172-173, 179-180.

⁸ cf. note 7 for Mazzoni's evaluation 1991 of phases EBIII A, B represented by the pottery assemblage found in building G2, with reference to characteristic shapes for each of the two phases. Of differing

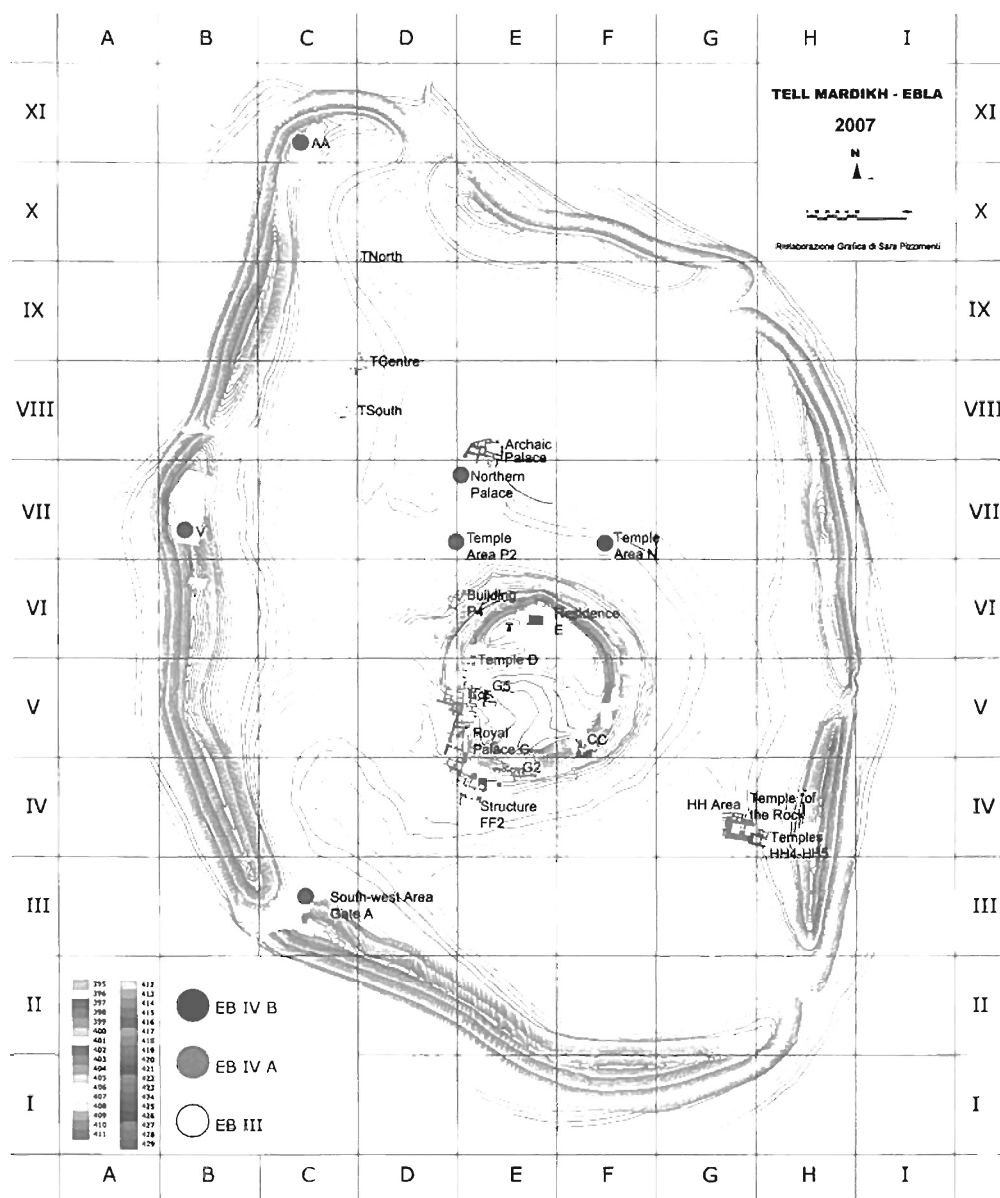


Fig. 2 – Tell Mardikh-Ebla: the EB Settlement.

the building, and the situation documented for the final phase of its use, with the remains of a partial destruction by fire in the east wing and the voluntary abandonment of the west wing.

However, we must also note that, alongside G2, another building exists that also dates to this earliest phase of Archaic Early Syrian Period. This is Building CC

opinion, Matthiae 1993: 624, note 22 who considers the pottery material from G2 to belong to the earliest phase of the EBIII Period.

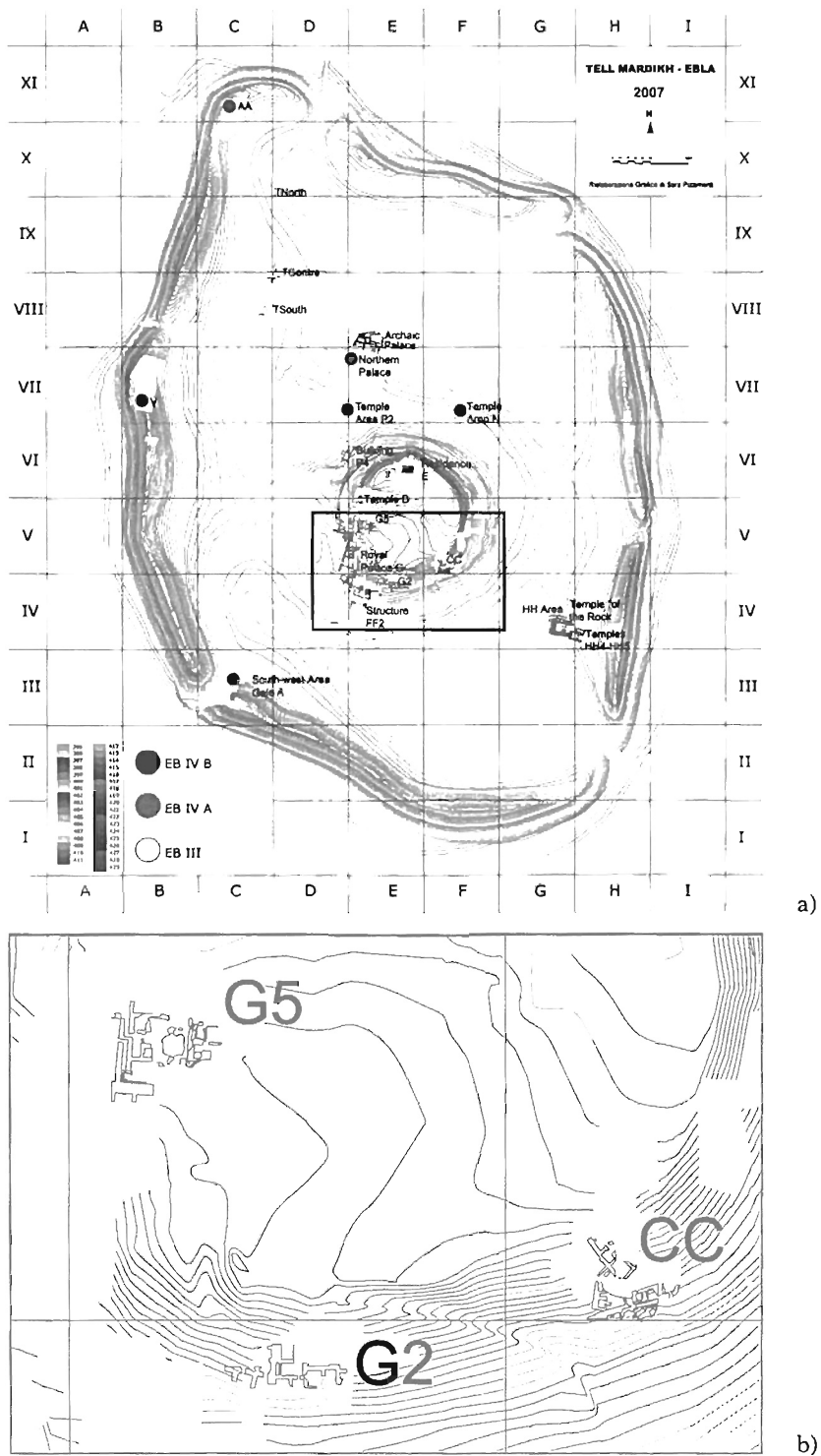


Fig. 3 – Tell Mardikh-Ebla: a) the EB Settlement; b) Focusing on the EBIII Settlement.

(Fig. 4b), situated on the southeastern slope of the Acropolis (Fig. 3b) and believed to be the earliest architectonic structure yet discovered at Ebla. Its lengthy life span throughout the period in question⁹ is shown by various phases of use (at least 6), the layout of a number of rooms mirroring that found in G2. Matthiae considers these remains to have been a “peripheral” sector (given the evidence, one used for storing cereals) of a large building enclosed by a wall (M.7257) that runs along the edge of the Acropolis, preserved to a length of approximately 20 metres¹⁰. The pottery indicates a marked continuity regarding shapes, and shows some local painted patterns with rare examples comparable to samples known to us from ‘Amuq, again from phase H¹¹.

Taking up Matthiae’s hypothesis, based on certain significant pieces of evidence, that buildings G2 and CC are the remains of a single architectonic complex on the Acropolis¹², I here would like to emphasise certain points; the location of the structure G2/CC along the southern and south-eastern slope of the Acropolis (Fig. 5), the presumed area of roughly 330 square meters for the remains attested to date and the certainty that part of the complex (CC) was used for storing primary resources. These latter factors suggest that the building served a public purpose as seat of the economic and “political” management of the community. At the start of the Archaic Early Syrian Period¹³, therefore, we may presume that a large building already stood on the Acropolis at Ebla, already divided into different units, which we can identify as the “seat of power” prior to the construction of the Royal Palace G during the Classic Early Syrian Period.

It is to be noted that this complex built on the south/southeastern slope of the Acropolis is located in the southern sector of the site, the sector explored during the latest excavations of the southeastern Lower Town that brought to light a pre-eminently important cultic area (Fig. 2). This cultic area continued to be in uninterrupted use for an extremely long time, from the “Temple of the Rock” of the Classic Early Syrian Period to the time of the Old Syrian sanctuaries¹⁴. The relatively recent interpretation regarding the sacredness of the place itself¹⁵, and the

⁹ Matthiae: 2000a: 572 on.

¹⁰ Matthiae 2000a: 572-573.

¹¹ given the local, monochrome painted pottery of Ebla, consisting mainly of open bowls with geometric decoration Matthiae proposes comparisons, though rare, with the pottery from ‘Amuq H phase, bearing the same cross-hatched motif : Matthiae 2000a: 573, 575, notes 15, 16; pottery types (sporadically) present at Ebla can be compared with the “Multiple-Brush painted Ware” production, once again dated to phase H.

¹² such as the topographical position of both structures, their relative distance from one another (recently calculated as approximately 56 m) and the supposed alignment of the elevations of the various flooring: Matthiae 2000a: 575, note 17. The elevations of the ground in the rooms of building G2 lie, in fact, between 18.70 and 19.25 m., whilst the original level of those in building CC lie at a depth of approximately 18.85 m., indicating a marked degree of uniformity between the two structures, if we bear in mind the shape of the southern slope of the Acropolis.

¹³ Matthiae assigns the building CC to EBIIIA: Matthiae 2000a:572.

¹⁴ Matthiae 2006b: 458 on.

¹⁵ possibly relating to a spring that originally flowed there: Matthiae 2006b: 470, note 31; or to the geological nature of the location, with numerous subterranean cavities and emerging rocks that could have given rise to a mythical landscape *ab origine* in the collective imagination.

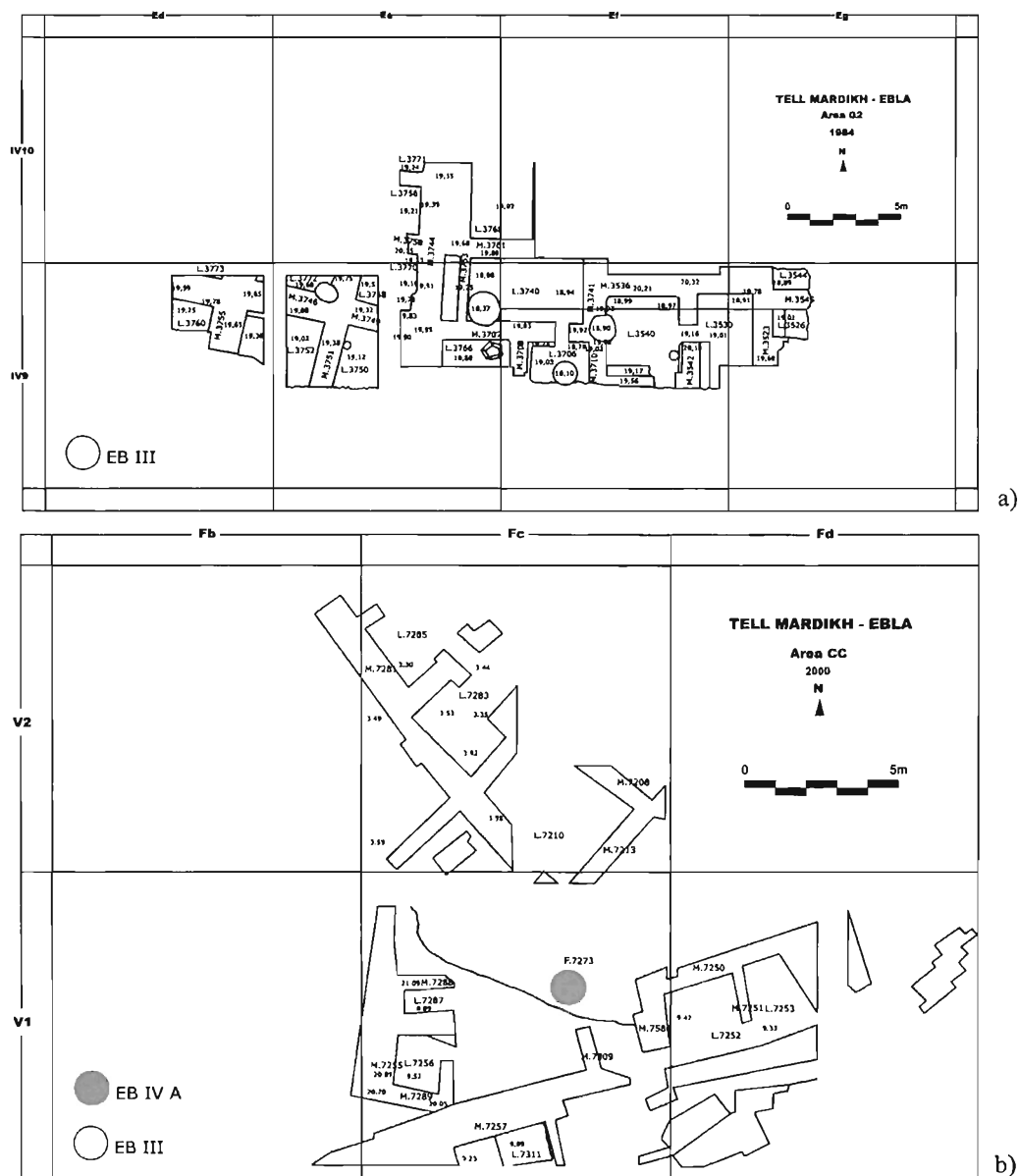


Fig. 4 – Tell Mardikh-Ebla: a) G2 Building; b) CC Building.

certainty that the flooring of the cella in the earliest temple, (the so-called “Temple of the Rock”)¹⁶ partly consisted of bare rock, lead me to believe that the “object of worship” was already that white rock itself, from which the city would take its name¹⁷, before the construction of imposing cultic buildings. Thus it is possible

¹⁶ the earliest of the long series of shrines to be erected at this place: cf. Matthiae 2006b: 467, 470.

¹⁷ Fronzaroli 1977: 153-161 where the reading of the name of the city was proposed on the basis of a presumed phonetic development in the Eblaite language (later disproved), similar to that witnessed in Akkadian. According to P. Fronzaroli, to whom go my warmest thanks, the name of Ebla could

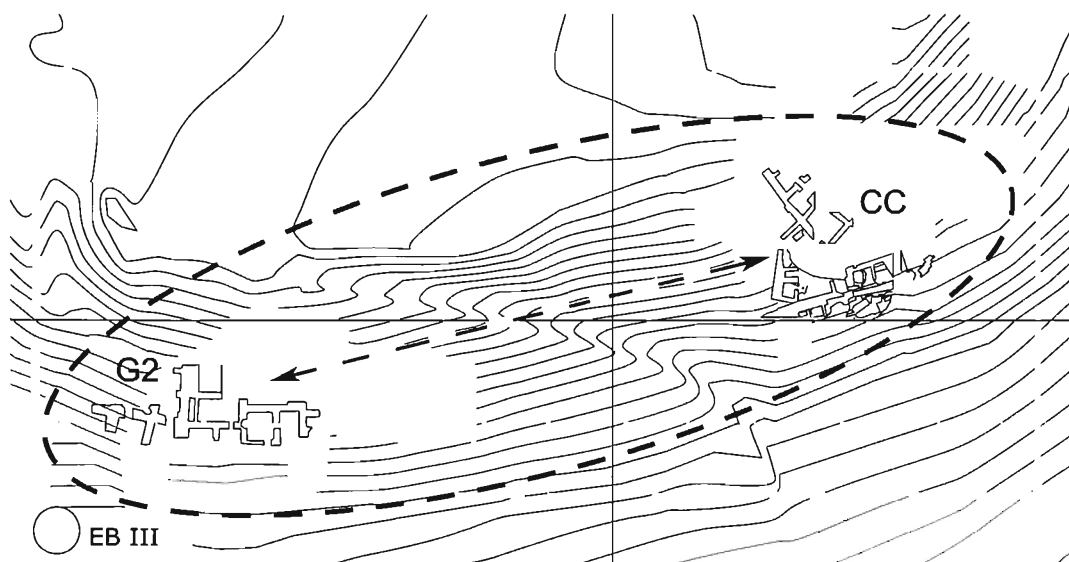


Fig. 5 – Tell Mardikh-Ebla: G2-CC Buildings on the Southeastern slope of the Acropolis.

that the southeastern region of Tell Mardikh-Ebla represents the very origin of this successful urban settlement.

Moreover, the hypothesis that I propose here, that the earliest settlement at Tell Mardikh was located precisely in this sector of the site, supports the ratio of the topographical position of the G2/CC complex. This, in fact, is located on the Acropolis and upon the southern slope, ideally looking down upon the corresponding sector of the Lower Town, towards the “place of the Rock” (Fig. 6). Could these be the faint traces of a landscape of the pre- or proto-urban settlement, still showing tangible signs of both a pre-existing power structure and of the “mythical” origins of the site?

The archaeology of Ebla’s origins presents us with particularly relevant evidence relating to the fact that there are no signs of violent destruction in Building CC. This area, already in disuse for some time, was levelled when the fortification walls of the citadel were raised at the start of the Middle Bronze Age¹⁸. During the last phase of its use, Building G2 reveals the abandonment of the western sector and, as already noted, the destruction by fire of only the easternmost part¹⁹. It therefore appears plausible that the EBIII settlement²⁰ that rose on the southern

derive from a term meaning “white rock”, a suggestion still quite plausible today, notwithstanding the difficulty of identifying the form to be reconstructed. Quite similar considerations in Matthiae 2007: 490, note 13, published when the present paper was at press.

¹⁸ Matthiae 2000a: 575.

¹⁹ Matthiae 1987: 138.

²⁰ The structure G2 has been attributed to an early phase of EBIII, corresponding to EBIIIA: Matthiae 1987: 136; Matthiae 1993: 624, note 22; S. Mazzoni, instead, proposes a wider chronological span with in EBIII on the basis of the pottery assemblage: Mazzoni 1991: 173-174, 179-180; Mazzoni 2002: 74-75.

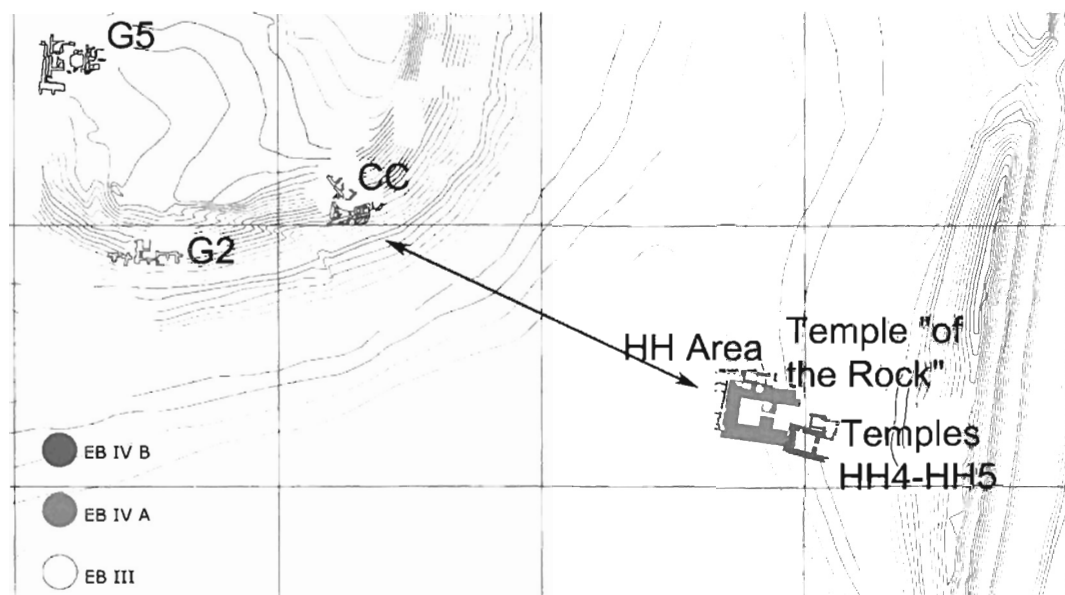


Fig. 6 – Tell Mardikh-Ebla: the Southeastern Area of the City during the EB Period.

slope of the Acropolis was partially abandoned for some unknown reason, to then move towards the northwestern slope during the advanced EBIII Period²¹. This leads to a notable change in the alignment of the architectonic structures and, more generally, in the rotation of the topographical seat of power, from south/southeast to north/northwest²² (Fig. 7).

It is, in fact, in the northern sector of the Acropolis – on the top of the western slope, in the so-called West Unit – that a phase of occupation has been uncovered²³ that precedes the earliest of the three floorings of Classic Early Syrian Palace

²¹ For the division of EBIII into two phases, according to the development of the material culture as evidenced by the pottery, see notes 20 and 23.

²² On this south-east slope, the change must have led to a reduction not only in the size of the settlement which, however, persisted throughout the entire EBIVA Period, that relating to Royal Palace G, but also in terms of its use. It is, in fact, in this area that we find the storerooms-warehouses of the Classic Early Syrian palatine complex, located above the earlier building G2. Cf. Matthiae 1987: 138, 144-145; Mazzoni 1991: 172-173.

On the other hand, the architectonic remains of building CC do not demonstrate any continuity with the later Early Syrian palatine complex at Ebla (cf. note 18). The only evidence relating to the time of Royal Palace G consists of some sherds which were found in a pit (F.7273) that cut through the structures of the rooms of the building used for storing foodstuffs: Matthiae 2000a: 573, note 14. We can, therefore, plausibly suggest that CC represented the fulcrum of the earliest "public" building of a established and centralized power which controlled primary resources.

²³ Mazzoni 1991: 172-175 where we find preliminary analyses and interpretations of the archaeological data, as well as the various pottery types from the earliest levels of the West Unit sector, subsequently renamed G5/G East; Matthiae 1993: 618 on., 622 on; Matthiae 2000a: 576 on.

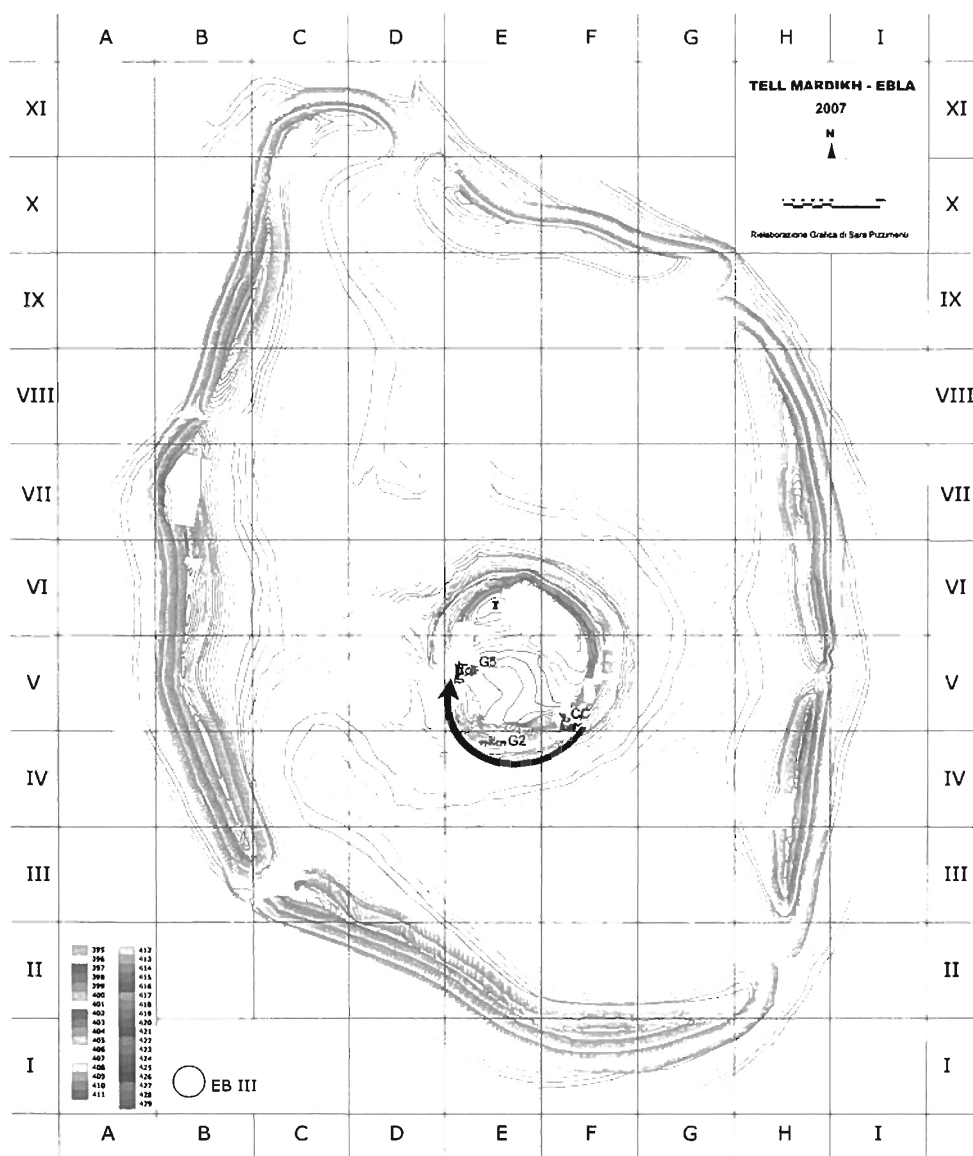


Fig. 7 – Tell Mardikh-Ebla: the Settlement Shifting during the EBIII Period.

G (EBIVA)²⁴ (Fig. 8). This phase shows some partial remains²⁵ of a main structure (known as G5)²⁶ that may well still lie below the Royal Palace complex of Ebla

²⁴ The third and latest flooring exposed by the cut through the large Iron Age pit (F.4461) shows traces of the destruction which erased Palace G: Mazzoni 1991: 168-169.

²⁵ These are basically a room, L.5130, a bin used for storing primary goods identified in the pit F.4661 and the remains of walls such as M.4472.

²⁶ The building in question, not yet called G5 in Matthiae 1993 (see note 23), is given this name, instead, in Matthiae 2000a: 571, 576-578, fig. 8. The remains of this further structure, which predates Royal Palace G, extend below the rooms of the Palace that were built in the eastern sector of the royal complex during EBIVA and are located on the north-western summit of the Acropolis.

Again, the archaeological evidence such as the uninterrupted sequence of numerous levels of flooring and rebuilding, going from the Archaic to the Classic Early Syrian Period²⁹, testify to the fact that the occupation of this northwestern area of the Acropolis of Ebla continued from late EBIII to the end of EBIVA Period without being interrupted by any kind of destruction up to the conquest and devastation of the city, dated to around 2300 BC³⁰.

The topography of the palatine complex, therefore, remained unchanged in the location for roughly 300 years and documents, during the reign's period of highest expansion, with the great courtyard with porticoes (L.2752) of Royal Palace G, that this topography had precise expansionist tendencies towards the West.

It seems quite likely, therefore, that the remains in question on the Acropolis of Ebla (northwestern side) and lying under some sectors of the Royal Quarters of the Palace G, are evidence of a seat of power that was recognised and active before the time of the Archives³¹.

II.

The presence of a phase that pre-dates that of the Palace Archives, and held to be contemporary with that of the western slope of the Acropolis³² which we have just mentioned, can now clearly be seen also in the North Wing of the Royal Palace G. (Fig. 9a), since the ongoing survey, which began again in 2002³³. In fact, from the filling below the burnt floor of the general destruction suffered in the Classic Early Syrian Period in the smaller (L.8606) and the easternmost of the two palace rooms (L.8605, L.8606) (Fig. 9b), brought to light in 2003, come the remains of a sculpted limestone plaque of a type and subject that were widespread in Early Dynastic Mesopotamia (E.D.II-III) (Fig. 10a,c) This work is, so far, a unique example of such

²⁹ Matthiae 1993: 619; Matthiae 2000a: 576-578.

³⁰ The dating of the destruction of Ebla to EBIVA has been reaffirmed by Matthiae 2004: 308-310, note 20; as has the attribution of the victory to Sargon of Akkad. A different and possible scenario for the destruction of this Early Syrian reign was proposed some years ago by the author and recently supported by epigraphic data and by the historical reconstruction of political events provided by Archi, Biga 2003 and Charpin 2005; cf. Dolce 2001; Dolce 2007: 172-173, note 3.

³¹ It is not my intention here to go into details regarding the kind or relevance of the "political" system that governed Ebla at the time, except to point out a number of reliable data from varying types of documentation that refer unequivocally to phases in the life of Ebla prior to the Archives. In the first place, we have the list of kings who, deified or not, preceded the three kings known to us from the Archives themselves: cf. Archi 1986; Archi 1991: 199 on.; Archi 1996; Archi 2001: 4. This is an aspect of Ebla royalty that remains, to a certain extent, obscure yet and central to our interpretation of the religious and political structure of the reign, from its very beginning until the first destruction of the city: see Dolce 2008 c. For an archaeological evaluation of Ebla prior to the cultural and political expansion witnessed in the Classic Early Syrian Period, see Dolce 2008a. Secondly, there is the inappropriate re-use of the remains of a monument celebrating Ebla's victory over an undoubtedly worthy enemy, the so-called Ebla Standard. I have already suggested that this be attributed to a cultural phase of the Archaic Early Syrian Period, close to the Mesopotamian Early Dynastic IIIa, and ascribed, in the history of the site, to the king Kun-Damu, who may have distinguished himself with a victory over Mari: Dolce 2005: 154-155; Dolce 2008a: 68. For a detailed reconstruction of the sequence of Ebla's rulers, both prior to and contemporary with the period of Royal Palace G, see Archi, Biga 2003: 6-7.

³² Matthiae 2004: 307-308.

³³ Matthiae 2004: 305-309; Matthiae 2006b: 451, note 5; Dolce 2008a: 69-70; Dolce 2008 c.

documentation for the Syria of that time³⁴. It was associated, in the filling, with a complete goblet that can, again, be ascribed to the end of EBIII Period³⁵ (Fig. 10b), and with an archaic inscribed administrative tablet that can be dated to no later – and probably earlier – than the reign of Igrish-Khalab, the first king known to us from the Archives³⁶. Stratigraphic evidence and data relating to the context of these pieces are also worth noting. They were found immediately below the flooring involved in the only destruction that we know of so far in either proto-urban or urban Ebla until the end of EBIVA Period. This differs from the situation we find in the western sector of the Acropolis, in the West Unit described above. There, in fact, numerous floorings and rebuilding works are documented from the earliest time of the Royal Palace G right down to the destruction attested on the most recent flooring, and all of these lie above a phase of use and occupation dating to the Archaic Early Syrian Period in this same sector of the Acropolis (G5-G East). Of particular importance amongst the findings in the West Unit is the so-called Ebla Standard, the wooden support of which, however, was only reused for the equipment of the latest floor of this sector of the Palace G (marked by signs of destruction by fire)³⁷; it undoubtedly belongs to an earlier and glorious period of the city and its reign³⁸.

In my opinion, these last pieces of evidence suggest that, to date, the North Wing of Royal Palace G preserves, apart from the remains of material culture mentioned previously (regarding pottery assemblage), one of the few certain testimonies to the phase of the city's rise; that is to say, just preceding the rise which the reign would see during the Classic Early Syrian Period and the enlargement of the palatial complex G from the "Court of Audiences" to the Quarter of the State Archives³⁹.

³⁴ TM.03.G.1150. The fragment measures approx. 21.3 cm in height, 10.5 cm in width and is little over 2 cm thick. For a preliminary evaluation of this work, see Matthiae 2004: 307-308; Dolce 2008a: 70 *on.*, fig. 5.

³⁵ TM.03.G.1206/13: cf. Dolce 2008a: 70, note 35; the goblet is evidence of that phase in the material culture of the site, preceding the floruit of Early Syrian Ebla, long known as EBIVA1: cf. notes 20, 28.

³⁶ This is an almost complete tablet, TM.03.G.1000. I tend to agree more with the second hypothesis; that is to say, that the document was drawn up before the reign of Igrish-Khalab and, in any case, in a phase of settlement at Ebla that predates the building of the Archives into the main Courtyard L.2752. This would have been at a time when the documents of the emerging kingdom were possibly conserved in a place on the Acropolis connected with the first seat of power, when Ebla had a "...limited political horizon and was subjected to Mari.." (Biga 2003: 360) and paid heavy tributes to Mari, as shown by the enormous quantities of goods mentioned also in this text. Such tributes were also paid by Ebla during the reign of Igrish-Khalab, but were probably paid even earlier: cf. Archi, Biga 2003: 1-5; Dolce 2008a: 69; see Matthiae 2004: 308, fig. 6.

³⁷ Matthiae 1989; Matthiae 1990: 390-405; Dolce 2005; Dolce 2006.

³⁸ Matthiae 1989: 43, note 41 estimates that the work may have been created as much as one century earlier. More recently, a synchrony has been proposed between this celebratory work and the remains of a sculpted plaque from the northern sector of the palatine area: Matthiae 2004: 307-308; cf. Dolce 2005 for a proposal attributing the "Standard" to within the period of the Eblaite dynasty prior to the time of the Archives.

³⁹ More generally, the north-western sector of Royal Palace G during the period of the Archives cannot in any way have been in a peripheral position with respect to the main Units of the Palace itself – lying between the Acropolis and the western slopes – as shown by the most recent and significant finds from the 2006 and 2007 excavations. These precious documents were found on the floor of room L.9583, three-quarters of which uncovered during the 2006 campaign, concluding the work in 2007.

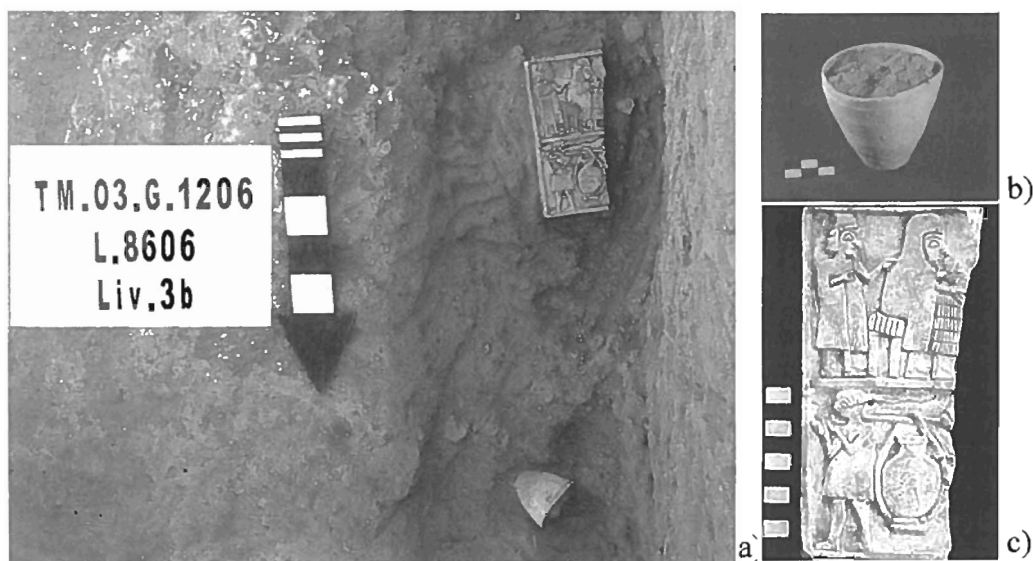


Fig. 10 – Tell Mardikh-Ebla: a) the North-Northwestern Wing. Unearthing the works b), c); b) the Goblet (TM.03.G.1206/13); c) the Fragmentary Plaque (TM.03.G.1150).

The scenario we can glimpse from this handful of data, therefore, is of a reign that is growing in the first half of the III millennium BC, already literate, and provided with instruments of visual communication in line with those of the end of phase II and phase III in Early Dynastic Mesopotamia, marking the threshold of subsequent achievement of the Ebla of the Archives.

It is clear that we are in an advanced and communicative stage of the site's history, and in continuity with the earliest attestations of seat of power on the Acropolis mentioned above (G5/G East).

III.

The period of Classic Early Syrian Ebla's maximum political, economic and territorial expansion lasted for little more than fifty years⁴⁰, the city in this period being the capital of a strong, leading reign in Syria. In work on the site during these first years of the new millennium, from the imposing ruins of Royal Palace G and its various Quarters, decisive architectonic, artistic and textual documentation continues to emerge. This ranges from the now completely discovered layout in the Administrative Unit (Fig. 11) of a second official core where the function of royalty was exercised and "special" documents were drawn up⁴¹, to the discovery of a room

⁴⁰ According to philologists' most recent estimates: Eidem et alii 2001: 99 and *passim*; Archi 2003: 17, where the author estimates that the documents from the Central Archive relating to the last two sovereigns of Ebla cover a period of approximately 40 years; Archi, Biga 2003: 6 on.

⁴¹ These are the internal throne room (L.2866) and the rooms to the south of this (Loci 2984, 2982), interpreted as a kind of treasury given the nature and value of the finds and their spatial relationship with the throne room itself. Of particular significance is the location within this official inner seat of royalty of a section of the archives containing documents relating to precious metals; Matthiae 2004: 310-317; Archi 2005: 96; Dolce 2008b: 527 on.

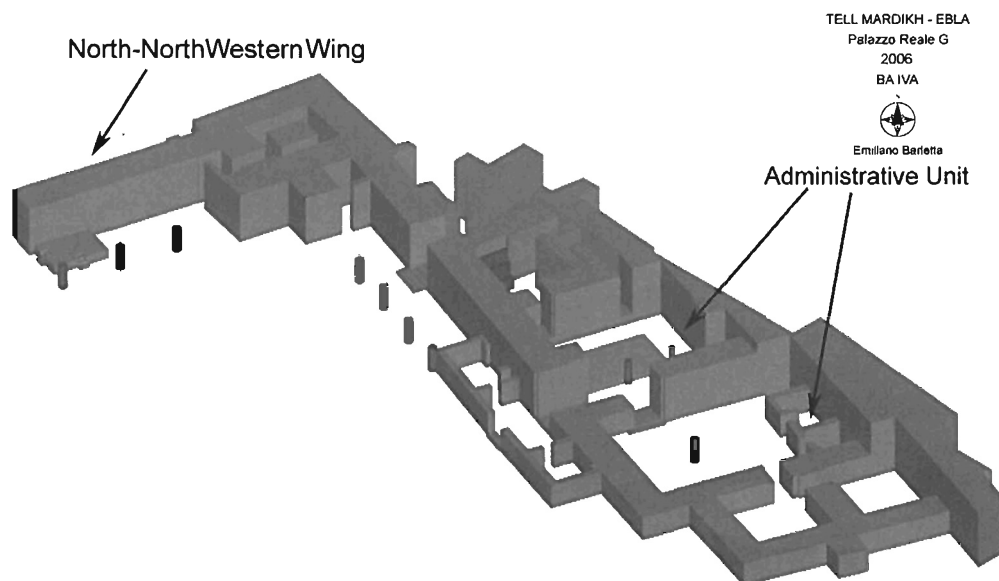


Fig. 11 – Tell Mardikh-Ebla: Axonometric View of the Royal Palace G.

of a building (FF2) in the southern most area where remains of one of the first polychrome Early Bronze paintings of Inner Syria have been preserved⁴². Then we have the discovery of a palatial quarter to the North of the “Court of Audiences”, whence come examples of the well-known production of the royal workshops of Ebla⁴³, and artistic works of unique value and state of conservation, like the golden chair and the bronze handmade discovered in 2006, joint to the miniature statuettes found in the same room (L.9583) in 2007, together with written documents that may represent the last act of a victorious Ebla before catastrophe struck⁴⁴.

Lastly, the systematic exploration of an area in the southern part of the Lower Town has produced evidence that would have been entirely unexpected only a few years ago. This is the bringing to light of the “Temple of the Rock”⁴⁵ from the time

⁴² Matthiae 2004: 317-326; Di Ludovico, Ramazzotti *at press*.

⁴³ The first data on this palatine sector relating to the floruit of the Eblaite kingdom are provided by Matthiae 2004: 306-307; Matthiae 2006b: 451, note 5; Dolce 2008 c: note 17. The documentation found since the 2003 campaign on the floors of the palace room (L.8605) in the north wing of Royal Palace G, includes works of notable craftsmanship and homogenous examples of Ebla's production of pieces in gold. These pertain to the remains of kaunakès (miniature sculpted skirts), bull statuettes, many fragments of gold foil and a mother-of-pearl inlay rosette (TM.03.G.1090-1093).

⁴⁴ Information on the relevant discoveries is provided by Matthiae in some short notes in *Archaeology* 61(2008) and “il Giornale” of the National Museum of Oriental Art “Giuseppe Tucci”, February 2008. See also Matthiae 2008: 53-56. On the wars of this final phase of Ebla, the kingdom's relations with the major powers of contemporary Syria and reconstruction of the synchronism between the rulers of Ebla and Mari, together with the possibility that this latter was responsible for Ebla's final defeat, see Archi, Biga 2003 and Charpin 2005.

⁴⁵ Matthiae 2006b: 458-479; Matthiae 2007: 488-493.

of the Archives that I have already mentioned, and which I would like to return to here in order to present some of the data obtained by the excavation. These relate, first of all, to the fact that the "Temple of the Rock", for which it has been suggested that the titular deity was Kura⁴⁶, doesn't show inside clear traces of fire and could have been «spared» by the conquerors. The heart of the temple, the cella, had been sealed with bricks shortly after the end of the Classic Early Syrian city, already at the start of EBIVB Period, as shown by pottery found therein⁴⁷. The fact that the site continued to serve a sacred purpose is also guaranteed by the remains at least of two temple structures dating to EBIVB⁴⁸.

We therefore need to reconsider the extent of the destruction of Classic Early Syrian Ebla and whether this involved the entire city. This not so much because of the fact that evidence is so far lacking of this event in the area of the "Temple of the Rock" – which, as Matthiae recently proposed, could be for a number of reasons⁴⁹ – but in the light of the fact that this area was to some extent frequented uninterruptedly from the Classic to the Late Early Syrian Period. We must also bear in mind the presence, in the same place, of two other sanctuaries just mentioned, constructed during the time of the "Second Ebla" and some associated structures which enclosed them⁵⁰.

IV.

The urban settlement known as Late Early Syrian Ebla (EBIVB Period) (Fig. 12a) is somewhat limited compared to the city of the Archives (EBIVA Period) in terms of area and of the preserved structures so far brought to light through excavations. It is, however, more widely attested in most of the site and our image of this town has now been significantly enriched by the discovery of a temple and a shrine dated later than the "Temple of the Rock", in the last quarter of the III millennium BC.

For some time I have proposed a partial reconstruction of the urban landscape of this "second Ebla" and its topographical layout on the basis of the evidence and

⁴⁶ Two well-founded hypotheses have already been put forward regarding the identity of the titular god of the "Temple of the Rock", relating to Hadad and Kura: Matthiae 2006b: 489-493. The attribution of the "Temple of the Rock" to the deity Kura could find support in the detailed description given in the ritual for the royal wedding concerning the lengthy route, involving a number of "stopping places", that the future queen must follow before being admitted to the heart of the SA.ZA_x^{ki}. Here we find a description of the future queen-bride waiting outside the urban enclosure until the sun lights up the Temple of Kura: see Fronzaroli 1993: text n.1 (5),(6); text n.2 (7),(8),(9); see comments: 23-24, 73-74. However, such an attribution works only if the relationship between the deity Kura and the sun is of particular relevance in the ceremony itself and, possibly, in ritual practices at Ebla in general: see also p. 273, notes 76-78.

⁴⁷ The hypothesis of the destruction of the temple HH1, or "of the Rock" is defined by Matthiae 2007: 488, 493. For EBIVB see Matthiae 2006b: 471, fig. 22: nos 4-11: this is the painted caliciform ware from the phase immediately following Palace G, corresponding to the beginning of EBIVB.

⁴⁸ These sanctuaries, denominated HH4, HH5, were discovered during the 2006 campaign and appear to be "langraum" type cellas, precursors of the temple architecture of Middle Bronze Syria. See Matthiae 2007: 494 and Sala *in press*: note 51 for Late Early Syrian Period temple architecture in this area of Ebla.

⁴⁹ Matthiae 2006b: 470-471, note 32.

⁵⁰ Matthiae 2006b: 470-474, shows the continuity between EBIVA and B in his reconstruction of the chronological sequence and events relating to the cultic area during the third millennium BC. He, therefore, proposes that the destruction of Classic Early Syrian Ebla involved "... most of the city". See also Matthiae 2007: 488.

data, of varying value, that has emerged over the course of forty years of excavations⁵¹. In fact, the location and distribution of more or less consistent traces of this fairly lengthy phase in Ebla's culture⁵² reveal a marked contraction of the settlement on the Acropolis, but not its complete abandonment. This is demonstrated by evidence from the levels of EBIVB Period below the central courtyard of residence E⁵³, the presence of a cella below that of the great Old Syrian Temple dedicated to the goddess Ishtar and, probably, by the monumental staircase on the north-eastern side of the Acropolis. This was constructed before the Old Syrian Temple and led towards this sacred place⁵⁴.

Substantial signs confirm that the settlement of EBIVB extended along the north and northwestern slopes of the Lower Town, often covering the same areas designated as seats of power and cultic places dedicated to the gods in the future Amorite city of Ebla: the first phase of the Archaic Palace⁵⁵, the floorings in the westernmost area of the Northern Palace, to the evidence of a shrine found in between the foundations walls of Temple P2, and the foundations of a sanctuary below Temple N to the extreme north-east of this region⁵⁶. Traces of a "Second Ebla" can also be found in the enclosure of city walls on the western and northern sides of the ramparts⁵⁷ as well as in the modest domestic structures in the northwestern region of the Lower Town (T area) and near the southwest gate, the "Damascus Gate"⁵⁸.

Such data lead to three main considerations (Fig. 12b) : the first is that the change in the topographical layout begun in EBIII Period and continued more markedly in the Period of the Archives, with the axis being rotated from south to north, is further developed in this "Second Ebla" of the Late Early Syrian Period. The second is that the development of the subsequent Amorite city of Ebla, in certain urban characteristics, appears to be based on that of the Late Early Syrian Ebla⁵⁹. The third consideration is that a notable change *also* distinguishes this final phase of the III millennium BC city from its past, that is to say, the radical and innovative shift of the official centre of power from the Acropolis to the Lower Town, a position that would be maintained until the end of the reign in MBII Period⁶⁰.

⁵¹ Dolce 1995; Dolce 1999; Dolce 2001; Dolce 2002: 220 on.

⁵² See note 51; Matthiae 2006b: 470-476; Dolce 2007.

⁵³ Matthiae 1976: 201; Matthiae 1977: 109-110; Matthiae 1995a: 128-129.

⁵⁴ Matthiae 1976: 201; considerations concerning the layout of this area of the Acropolis and still unanswered questions are provided by Matthiae 2006b: note 39. The reconstruction of "Second Ebla's" urban landscape proposed by the current author, on which see note 51, as well as certain comparable features of Early Dynastic architecture at Kish and Ebla, have recently been taken up again by Pinnock 2007: 113-115.

⁵⁵ Matthiae 1993: 639-640; Matthiae 1995b: 654-655, 659 on.; Dolce 2001: 17-18; Matthiae has recently analysed this building, and in particular its earliest phase: Matthiae 2006d: 87-94.

⁵⁶ Dolce 2001: 17 and references.

⁵⁷ Dolce 2001: 19-20 and references.

⁵⁸ Matthiae 1993: 615, 619-621, 634-637 (T area); Matthiae 1976: 190-192, regarding a sounding carried out in 1969 in area A; Dolce 2001: 13, 17.

⁵⁹ As I already suggested ten years ago: cf. Dolce 1999: 293, 296 especially.

⁶⁰ The reasons behind the choice of this location for the official seat of power already in the EBIVB Period could *also* relate to subsidence following the destruction of Palace G, positioned on the terracing that stretched to the foot of the Acropolis along the western slope.

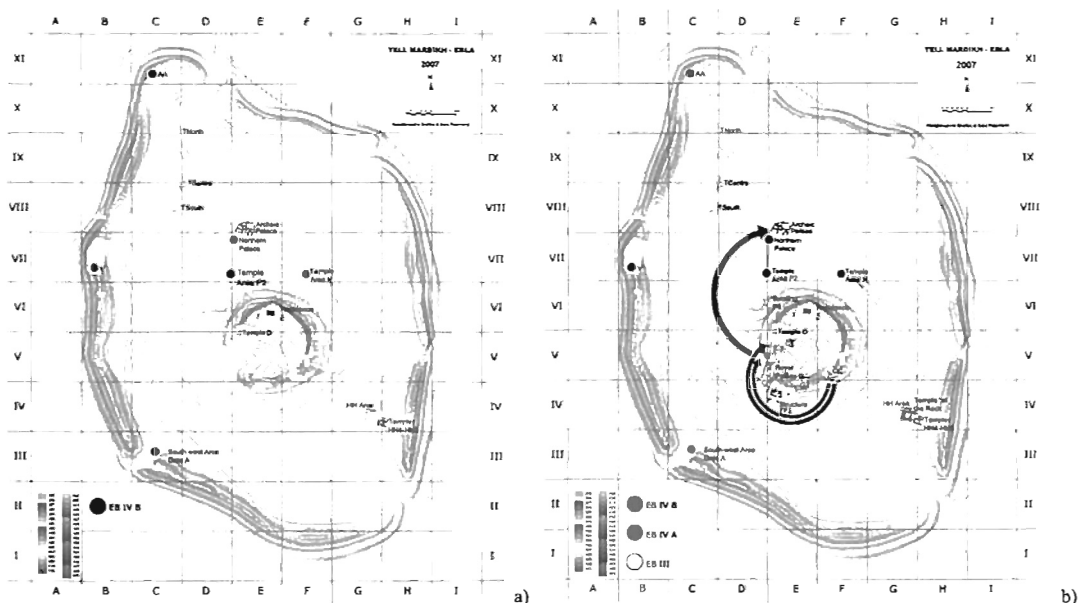


Fig. 12 – Tell Mardikh-Ebla: a) the EBIVB Settlement; b) the Settlement Shifting during the EB Period.

This change, however, although extremely significant, remains for now the only sign of effective discontinuity from the Ebla of the Archives, as the most recent discoveries in the southeastern region of the Lower Town show⁶¹.

This conscious and possibly indissoluble continuity with the recent past on the part of the inhabitants of “Second Ebla” is, in fact, clearly demonstrated in the attention paid to the “place of the Rock” shortly after the destruction of the Classic Early Syrian reign. It is even more evident in the regeneration of the value of the place itself by the building of two shrines. This is a particularly significant act in terms of the revival and long-lasting nature of the site, which always returns to its origins notwithstanding changes in the urban layout.

The “place of the Rock” represents the historical memory of such continuity, between one time of the city’s destruction and another...

As far as the extent of the destruction of this Late Early Syrian “Second Ebla” is concerned, whilst this was undoubtedly caused by fire it is too soon to advance any hypothesis. This is due to the paucity of direct evidence, to date found in an external western sector of the “Temple of the Rock” area⁶² and, some years ago, in the area of residence E on the Acropolis⁶³. Evidence is lacking of violent destruction in the phases of life of the Late Early Syrian Archaic Palace, as is also the case for the subsequent Old Syrian phases of the same imposing building until its definitive

⁶¹ Matthiae 2006b: 474 especially.

⁶² Matthiae 2006b : 471, 474 on also note 48.

⁶³ Matthiae 1995a: 132; Dolce 2001: 20, note 34.

ruin around 1600 BC⁶⁴. Therefore, in the seat of power of the Northern Lower Town, we find a substantial degree of continuity from EBIVB to MBI-II Periods (Fig.13), notwithstanding the tangible presence elsewhere of the conflagration which occurred in the last quarter of the III millennium BC.

V.

Lastly, in this journey around Ebla of roughly a thousand years it just needs to be stressed that signs of continuity between the Late Early Syrian city and the imposing metropolis of the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age are quite clear: generally speaking, these can be identified in some traits of the urban development⁶⁵ and certain elements of the artistic culture in the field of visual communication that we have considered elsewhere⁶⁶.

The northern and western sides of the Acropolis and of the Lower Town appear to be the strong points in this Middle Bronze Age development, but it is equally clear that, at the time of the powerful reign of Ebla, the urban project also included the southwestern area of the Lower Town (B area and Southern Palace/FF), with a layout that exploited access from the south-west, or “Damascus Gate”⁶⁷ (Fig. 14a). At the opposite extreme of the Lower Town, to the north-east, this urban plan maintained the location of the Temple N, possibly dedicated to the sun deity UTU-Samash⁶⁸, that was also present in the layout of “Second Ebla”⁶⁹. It is also particularly significant that this urban plan confirms the strong tradition of the cult at the “place of the Rock” with the erection of at least two temples during MBI and MBII Periods, without any interruption in the use of the area⁷⁰ (Fig. 14b).

Two elements that again come from the sacred area in the southeastern region of the Lower Town complete the picture: the recently confirmed certainty that the typology of the temple “in antis” dates back to the Ebla of the Archives Period⁷¹ and originated in Syria⁷². The numerous Old Syrian temples of Ebla (Fig. 15), therefore, all derive from a local and first-rate “pattern” in the city’s architecture, but develop the cella in a different manner, the “langraum” type, even in those cases

⁶⁴ Cf. note 55; Matthiae 1994: 37-38; Matthiae 1995b: 672-681; Dolce 1995.

⁶⁵ I refer here to the position and role of the principal buildings, from the Archaic Palace to the temples of the gods, such as N, P2 and D as well as the latest discovered HH2 and HH3. At these focal points, the urban landscape of the Acropolis and of the Lower Town of Amorite Ebla maintains the layout of the earlier city, at least from the Late Early Syrian city onwards.

⁶⁶ Dolce 2002; Dolce 2007; on the most recent discoveries of Old Syrian sculptures at Ebla, see Matthiae 2002: 565 on.; Matthiae 2006c.

⁶⁷ Results of excavations carried out in this sector of the Lower Town are presented in Matthiae 2004: 305, 326-346 and Matthiae 2006b: 447-448, fig. 2.

⁶⁸ Matthiae 1979: 566; Matthiae 1986: 346-351; Dolce 1988: 109-111, 113.

⁶⁹ see p. 267 of this paper.

⁷⁰ We refer here to sanctuaries HH2 and HH3, currently dated to the Classic and Late Old Syrian periods: Matthiae 2006b: 479 on.; Matthiae 2007: 512-521.

⁷¹ Here I would like to recall the “distinction” stressed by Matthiae 2006b: 475-479; for a recent study of the architecture and development of the “in antis” temples in Syria and the Levant during the III millennium BC, see Sala *at press*.

⁷² According to the EBIV evidence from other Syrian sites, such as Tell Halawa; cf. note 71; Dolce 2008c: notes 84-85; Matthiae 2006b: 479-481.

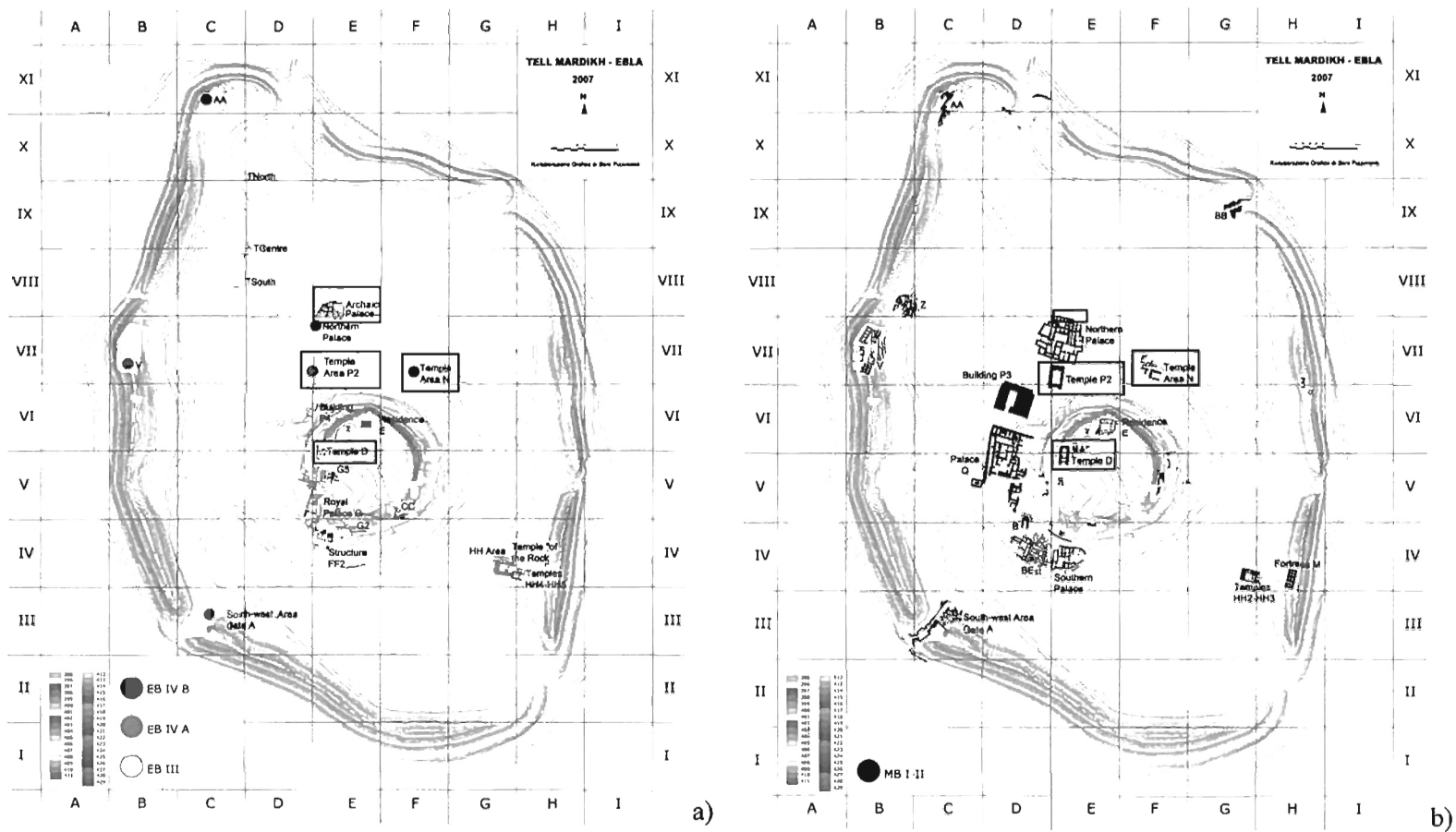


Fig. 13 – Tell Mardikh-Ebla: the Enduring Location of Temples and Palaces: a) the EB Settlement; b) the MB Settlement.

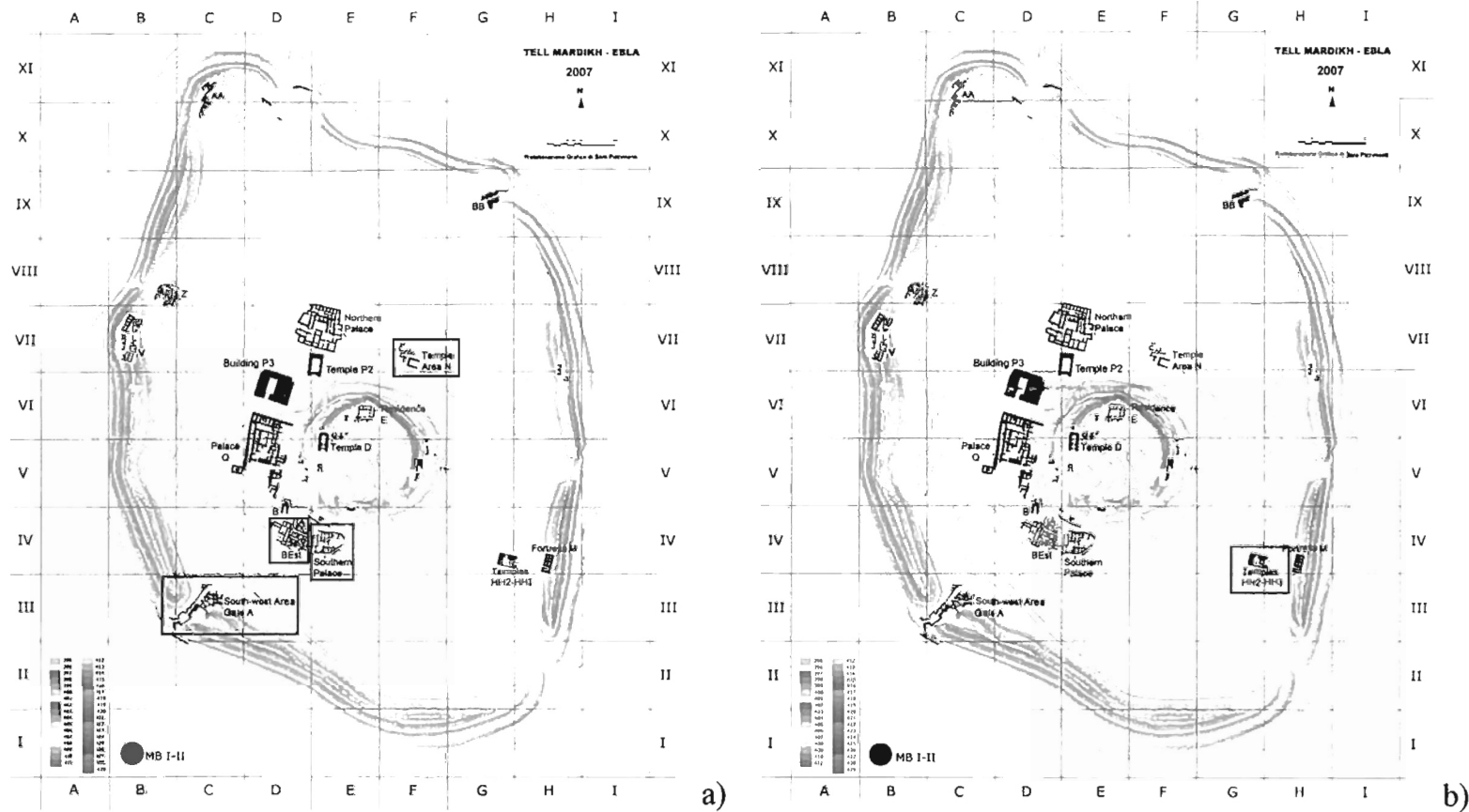


Fig. 14 – Tell Mardikh-Ebla: the MB Settlement: a) Focusing on SW and NE Areas; b) Focusing on SE Area.

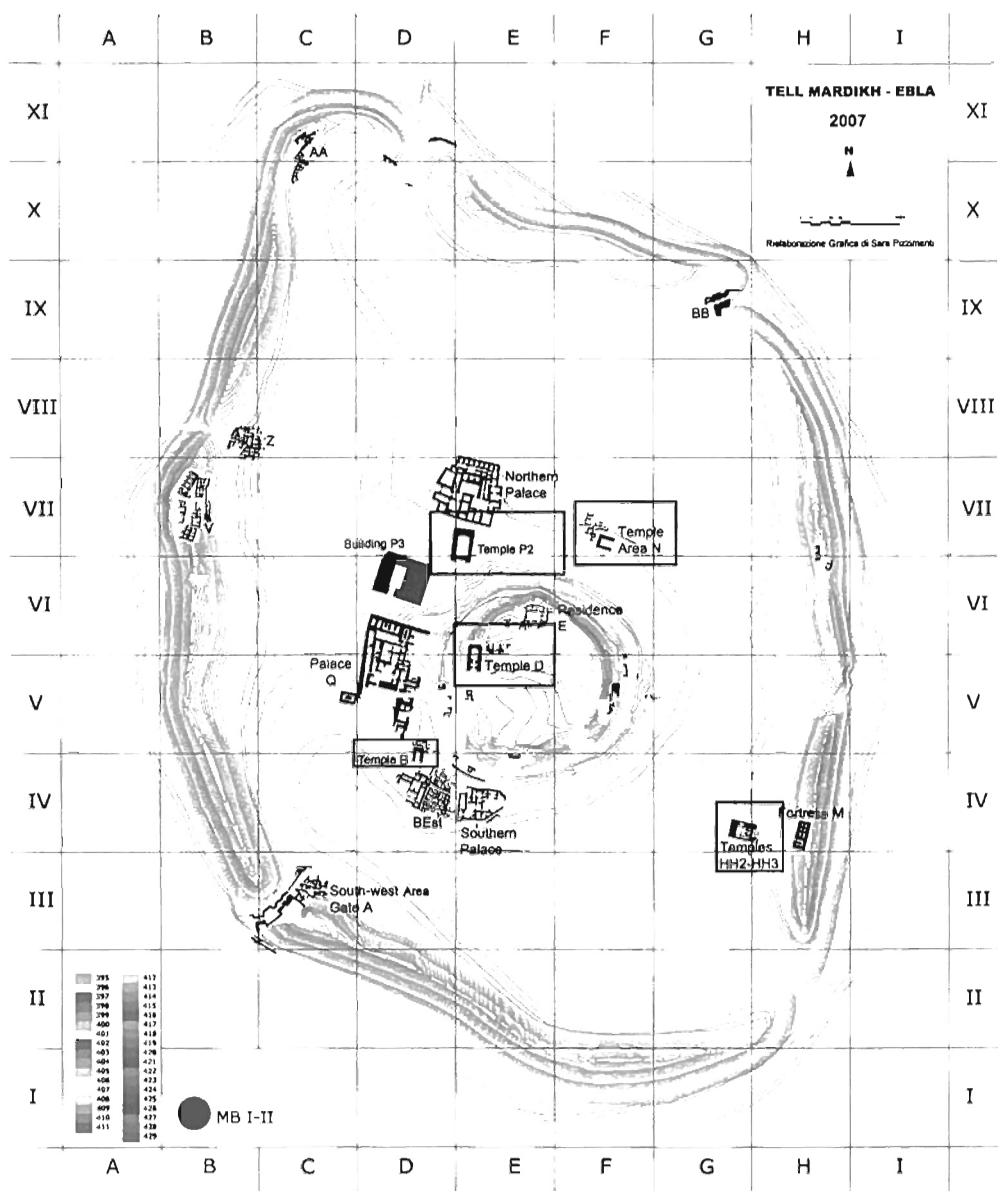


Fig. 15 – Tell Mardikh-Ebla: the Temple Areas during the MBI-II Periods.

where the sanctuary shows a tripartite plan, such as the great Temple D on the Acropolis and the two sanctuaries mentioned above⁷³. This last variant raises one of many unanswered questions: is this a characteristic linked to one and the same

⁷³ Cf. Matthiae 1995a: 155-160, fig.35; cf. note 70. We must remember that this change in the development of the typology of the cella had already begun at Ebla in the Late Early Syrian sanctuaries erected at the “place of the Rock”. We must also bear in mind that this change is independent of the different ratio of the proportions between the cella and the antecella (noted by Matthiae 2006b: 479-480) used in the tripartite temples at Ebla during the Old Syrian Period.

titular divinity of these Old Syrian temples?⁷⁴. Or, instead, is this layout employed for certain sacred areas dictated by the needs of the cult itself?⁷⁵.

The topography of the cult at Ebla between the Early Syrian and Old Syrian Periods raises a further query. The temples constructed from EBIV on in the Lower Town, at the opposing northeast (Temple N) and southeast extremes (the Temple of the Rock and subsequent shrines) are, to date, the only ones with a different orientation and with the entrance facing East, towards the rising sun (Fig. 16). The suggestive interpretation recently given for the narrow entrance to the great "Temple of the Rock" of the time of the Archives⁷⁶ stresses the particular role played by the first rays of the rising sun at dawn, reaching right to the back of the cella.

One could wonder whether this ever-repeated scene of the sunlight penetrating into the shrine, displayed in the place which may lie at the origins of Ebla's foundations, is not strictly linked to the ritual of the royal marriage, part of which took place in this Temple according to the current hypotheses⁷⁷. We may also ask whether the persistence in this sacred area of the east-facing entrance in all of the later Early and Old Syrian temples, as well as in Temple N (possibly seat of the deity Shamash and located at the opposite end of the northeastern Lower Town), does not indicate a more complex, exoteric path: the rays of the sun, rising in the east, pass first through the southern area of the city, from north to south, tracing an ideal link between the two sacred areas⁷⁸ (Fig. 17).

Currently, from the earliest proto-urban traces to the grandiose layout of the Old Syrian city, Ebla reveals, in the first place, a marked stability of the settlement and a dynamic and uninterrupted development of the topographical plan from EBIII to EBIVA Periods. Secondly, we can observe a clear and long-lasting reprisal following the two single events of destruction - undoubtedly experienced over the last centuries of the Third Millennium BC - before the destruction at the end of the

⁷⁴ Temple D on the Acropolis was attributed some time ago to the goddess Ishtar on the basis of various, cogent pieces of evidence, as recalled again by Matthiae 2003. Instead, Matthiae (Matthiae 2006b: 481-488) recently proposed attributing the larger (HH2) of the two Old Syrian sanctuaries brought to light in the southern Lower Town to Hadad.

⁷⁵ Given the evidence which has recently emerged precisely from the "place of the Rock", the palatine nature of Temple D on the Acropolis can no longer be linked to the tripartite internal layout of the sacred area. For Temple D, see notes 73, 74, and Matthiae 2000b: 182; Matthiae 2003: 386-387.

⁷⁶ Matthiae 2006b: 467, note 26.

⁷⁷ The suggestion that the "Temple of the Rock" was one of the sacred places in which a phase of the royal marriage rites, attested by the texts in the Archives, was conducted, was put forward by Matthiae 2006b: 490-492, and recently taken up again by Pinnock 2007: 117-118. The importance of the sun deity's role in the marriage rites is shown by some passages in the texts: Pomponio, Xella 1997:336-337, 17)-(19),22).

⁷⁸ In sun's passage from east to west, the fact that the first rays of dawn touch the southern part of Ebla where the temples in question were located, may indicate a deep symbolic link with the place of the city's "birth", as well as the "birth" of "the new king and the new queen", to quote the expression that occurs in the ritual of the sacred marriage in the Classic Early Syrian Period (see Fronzaroli 1993: text n. 1 (65), text n. 2 (68)). However, the position and orientation of all the temples in the southern region of the Lower Town, with their east-facing entrances, could also suggest a specific link to the sun deity, UTU (see Matthiae 1986:346) and, possibly, have the aim of daily determining the royal destiny in such temples, an aspect hinted at in Polonsky's interpretation of Sumerian literary sources: Polonsky 2000.

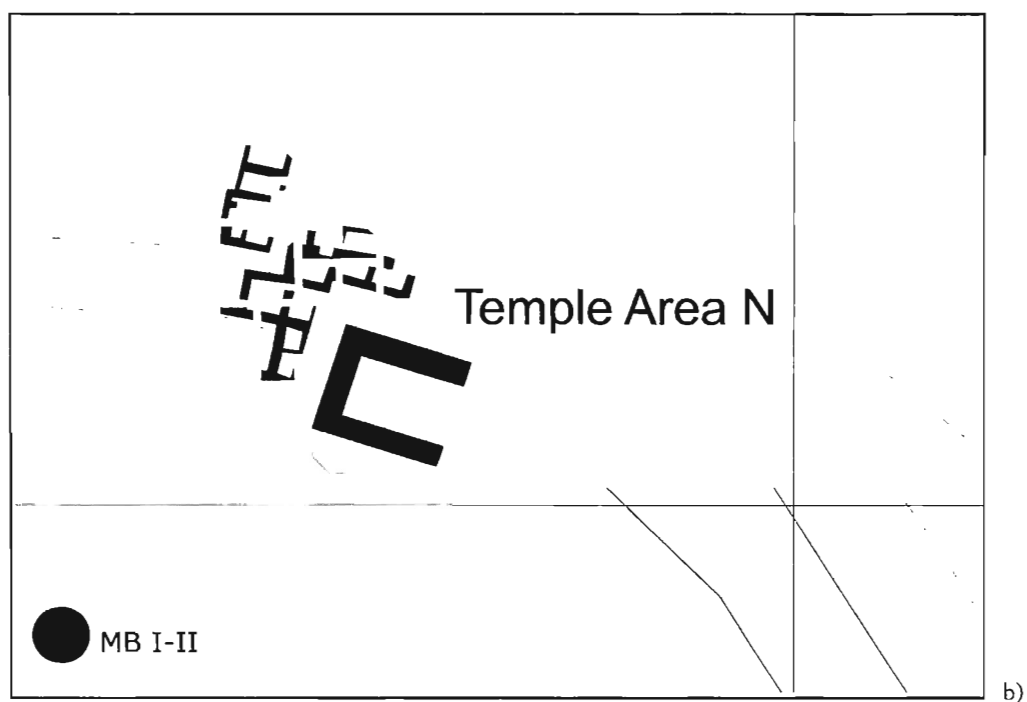
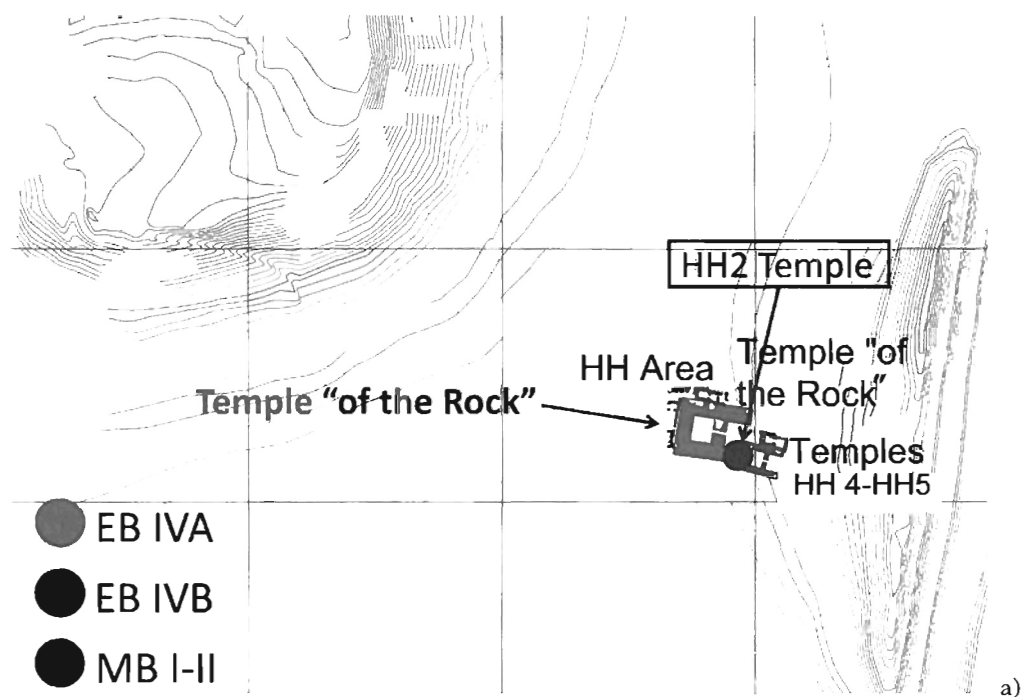


Fig. 16 – Tell Mardikh-Ebla: a) the HH Area from EBIV to MB Periods; b) the Temple Area N.

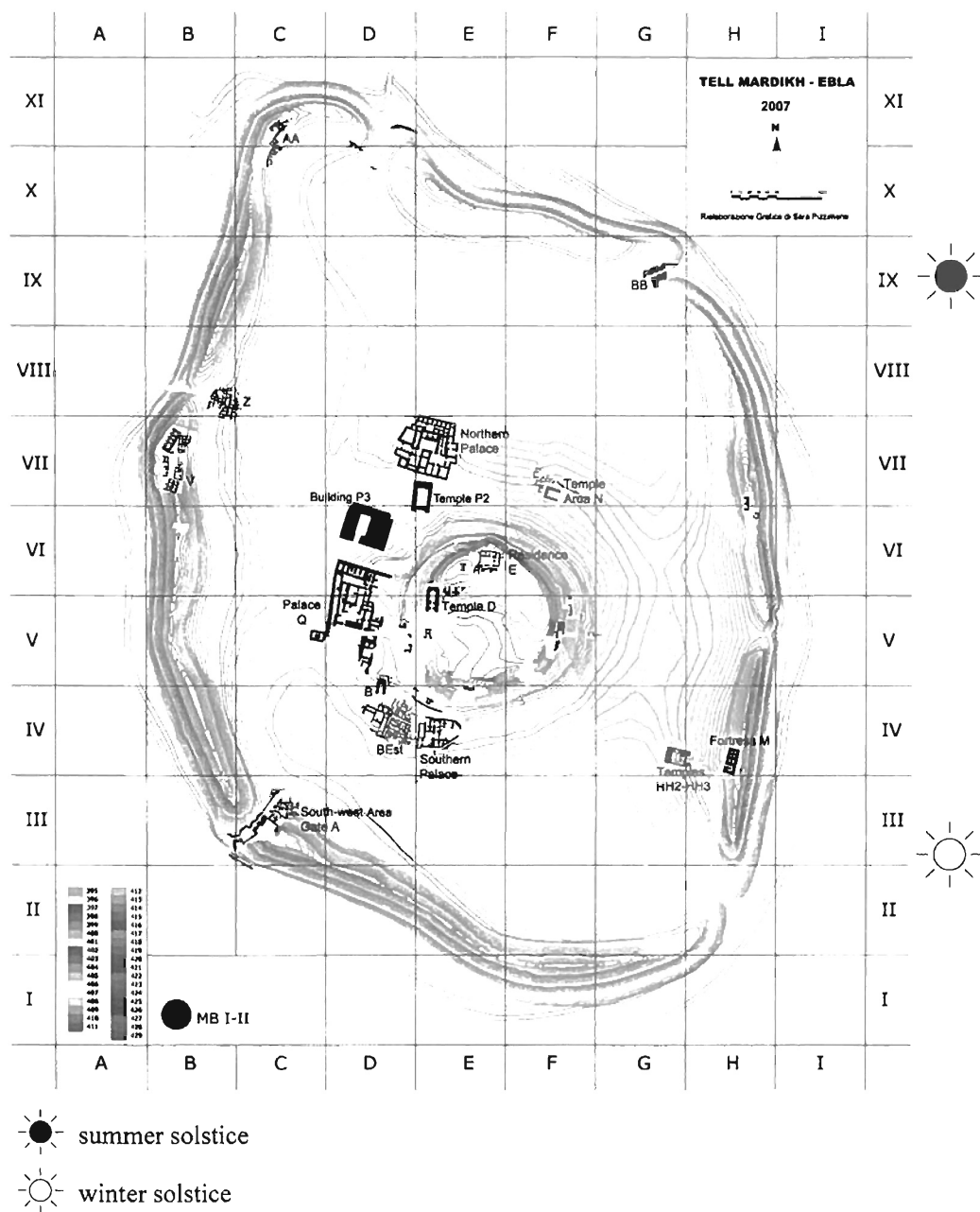


Fig. 17 – Tell Mardikh-Ebla: the MB Settlement. The Course of the Sun on the Eastern Sector of the City.

MB Period- that is to say towards the end of EBIVA and of EBIVB. Thirdly, from the "Ebla of the Archives" to the "Second Ebla" and the Amorite city, life persists in the key points of the city, both secular and religious, alongside peculiar developments in the urban sectors, as in the case of the Old Syrian Period. And the primordial place from which the city had its origin, "The Rock", emerging on the southern plain, would appear to be the fixed point around which the history of the site revolves.

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