

Ebla: Crafts and Power in an Emergent State of Third Millennium BC Syria

Stefania Mazzoni

Dipartimento di Scienze storiche del mondo antico, University of Pisa, Via Galvani, Pisa, Italy.
E-mail: smazzoni@uni.net

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Abstract

This paper draws on data from the excavation of late fourth and third millennia settlements in the north-eastern Levant to explore the dynamic relationship between craft production and urbanization. An examination of the contexts of production and patterns of artefact distribution, both within and between settlements, suggests that the impact on craft production of elite-dominated managerial institutions can be detected at both central and peripheral sites, and involved both valuable and more mundane classes of artefact.

Introduction: Craft Production and Urbanism

In his seminal analysis of the urban revolution, Childe (1950) cited craft specialization as a key factor in the process. Sometimes termed the 'Craft-Specialization-and-Irrigation Hypothesis' (Redman 1978: 223-24), Childe's analysis emphasized the role of technological developments in the rise of urban societies; irrigation, combined with land and water transport, facilitated the production and accumulation of agricultural surpluses, which in turn permitted the maintenance of full-time craft-specialists. The skilled production of craft goods appears to have been concentrated in urban centres, where it formed an important aspect of the economy, and was frequently linked to the acquisition and accumulation of valuable raw materials that became transformed into prestige items. The development of skills in producing monumental art

and architecture, generally employed in the promotion of local elites, can be viewed as simply one particular aspect of this process.

It is now widely accepted that urbanization in Mesopotamia and other parts of the Near East was a long-term process, which can be divided into distinct phases and which resulted from a combination of a range of forces and circumstances (Nissen 2001). This process culminated in the later fourth millennium BC in the extraordinary growth of the settlement of Uruk in the southern part of the Mesopotamian alluvium. Uruk appears to have increased in size from 100 to 230 ha between the Early and Late Uruk periods (Finkbeiner 1991; Pollock 2001: 187-94). The settlement developed as an urban centre grouped around monumental buildings of public or cultic function. These buildings have produced extensive evidence (e.g. clay accounting tablets, broken clay sealings) for the operation of a complex centralized

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administration. In a process usually termed the 'Uruk expansion' (Algaze 1989; 1993), the later fourth millennium BC also saw the appearance in parts of Iran, Syria and Anatolia of a range of artefactual evidence—ceramic forms and administrative items such as seals and tokens—with good parallels in the urban centres of Mesopotamia.

Many aspects of this process remain matters of debate. Examples include the nature of cross-cultural interaction between communities at different levels of economic and political development (Algarze 2001), and the extent of variation in the complexity and organizational structure of indigenous communities at the point of, and even prior to, the Uruk expansion (Frangipane 2001; Stein 2001; Rothman 2001; Schwartz 2001). In recent years, it has become clear that craft specialization, urbanism and administrative activity did not appear simultaneously. Evidence from Neolithic and later prehistoric settlements points to the emergence of administrative activities related to the possession, control and storage of goods, and presumably therefore to the acquisition of wealth, well before the Uruk expansion (Akkermans 1989; Rothman and Blackmann 1990; Duistermaat 1996). In addition, there is now growing evidence to suggest that in Mesopotamia during the Uruk period there existed a significant quantity of household-level craft production within villages, and that this was articulated with mass-produced production under the control of administrative bodies in the main population centres to generate 'a complex, interdigitated economy' (Pollock 2001: 219).

The production and consumption of goods and artefacts, their role in the spheres of ritual and ideology, and their impact on social differentiation have been extensively studied. Because criticism usually has been directed towards problems with the limitations of the evidence (Roaf 1989: 137-39; Lamberg-

Karlovsky 1996: 52-54, 259-60) rather than with the general approach, it seems reasonable to employ a combination of artefactual and documentary evidence as a means to investigate the social and organizational dimensions of ancient craft production.

The organizational dynamics of the basic economic activities—subsistence strategies, craft production, trade—that supported the process have been widely explored by archaeological means (Stein and Blackman 1993; Stein and Rothman 1994; Warrenmaker 1998). Scholars have also been able to use documentary evidence to investigate the role of craftspeople in ancient Near Eastern economies from both regional and diachronic perspectives (Renger 1996). The relationship between the production and consumption of goods has formed an important element in recent considerations of ancient urbanism (Van de Mieroop 1997: 252–57), although it remains difficult to assess the extent to which centres near eastern cities may have been centres of production (as were medieval cities) as well as important loci of consumption.

The limitations of the data ensure that only a few of the many questions we would like to ask regarding the relationship between crafts and urbanism can be given satisfactory answers. Archaeological evidence is often inadequate and is usually distributed unevenly between different areas and periods, which makes comparative analysis difficult. This scholars risk significant over- or underestimations of the scale of activity in individual cases, or are forced to resort to sweeping generalizations. While written sources offer some help in the study of the northern Levant, they are fewer than is the case in Mesopotamia. Craft production is a case in point. The textual evidence from Tell Mardikh (ancient Ebla; see Figure 1 for map), which dates to the Early Bronze Age IV (EB IV) and spans the second half of the third millennium BC, supplies a wealth of information on the raw materials

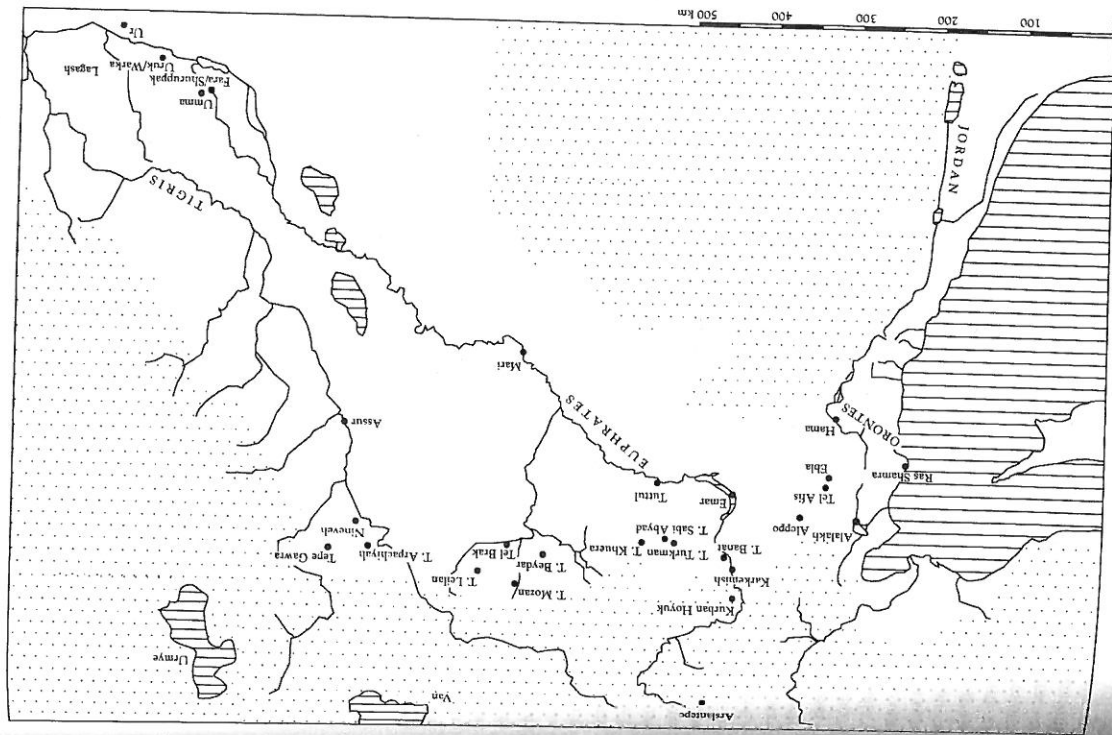


Figure 1. Map of the Near East in the third millennium BC.

and manufactured products. In contrast to textual evidence from Mesopotamia, however, it provides little information on the organization of manufacture. For this we must turn to the archaeological evidence, and in particular to those non-perishable materials that could not readily be recycled. This restricts our investigation to a small range of materials, in particular the ubiquitous pottery and stone artefacts, and thus severely limits our ability to investigate key areas such as metals and textiles. There are also notable variations pertaining to the different bodies of material and in the quality of documentation through time. A case in point is the production of textiles, best known through written sources that increase in number around the middle of third millennium BC. The study of pottery, stone ornaments and seals, however—artefacts that are more evenly distributed across the various periods of interest—can provide a better long-term perspective. Equally problematic is the evidence for production and consumption. Evidence for production includes the remains of workshops and manufacturing centres, which for most materials are meagre. Even in the case of pottery workshops, kilns themselves are poorly documented. Consumption, however, can be better defined through the character, quantity and distribution of various materials in different archaeological contexts.

Crafts in the Context of Primary and Secondary Urbanization

A variety of craft-goods was produced in pre-urban communities in response to requirements such as social differentiation (precious stones, jewellery and ornaments), the storage of commodities (pottery and various perishable containers) and administrative activities (seals). The production, accumulation and distribution of manufactured goods, such as pottery, seals and other record-keeping artefacts, by the apparently unstratified Halaf and Ubaid

communities of Mesopotamia during the sixth and fifth millennia BC, are viewed as an important stimulus to inter-regional interaction. In the case of Halaf pottery, analysis has enabled the identification of centres of manufacture such as Tell Arpachiyah and of importation and/or consumption such as at Tepe Gawra (Davidson and McKerrill 1980). Equally there is evidence from early fourth-millennium BC Hacınebi for the existence of two distinct classes of seal, differentiated by raw material, complexity of design and manufacturing techniques; these appear to have been employed in different types of context, thus suggesting a distinction between household and elite-level sealing practices (Stein 2001: 274–76). Specialized craft production is therefore well-documented before the appearance of urban centres in southern Mesopotamia. On current evidence, however, it is difficult to establish whether specialist production played a critical role in facilitating the growth of social complexity and the emergence of elites documented in late Chalcolithic villages. Certainly the fact that the procurement of some raw materials was restricted to certain periods or climatic conditions suggests that crafts such as weaving and pottery production may have been undertaken on a seasonal basis and at household level.

The same problem can also be raised in the case of urban societies. The extent of evidence for self-sustaining, specialized craft manufacture in the villages or towns existing outside the control of institutions, temples and palaces remains unclear (but see Pollock 1999: 93–116). Growing administrative centralization and the development of the state were linked to the intensified production, consumption and distribution of craft goods, with major institutions at key locations for the accumulation, exchange and consumption of precious goods, frequently procured from distant sources. Consumption grew in step with the increasing organizational control

plexity of the institution, with goods being consumed in the context of prestige activities and through their redistribution among the many channels of the administration, such as intra-institutional gifts and exchanges. Through the deployment of craft products in this way, these gifts became a major source of wealth and their control a source of power.

Primary urbanization in the Levant appears to have been a multi-faceted, long-term process involving both indigenous growth, culminating in the localized emergence of elites and the associated administrative control, and exogenous stimuli, in particular a gradual penetration into north and west Syria during the mid-late fourth millennium BC of south Mesopotamian settlers who occupied their own sites or distinct quarters within existing settlements (Stein 2001). The archaeological data suggest that the endogenous (Syro-Anatolian) and exogenous (intrusive south Mesopotamian) versions of complexity had much in common, notably urbanization and the growth of centralized institutions that accumulated and redistributed key resources. The differences lay in matters of scale and in the particular cultural expressions employed in each case, for example *coba* bowls (plain rimmed hemispherical bowls) and stamp seals in the north versus bevelled-rim bowls and cylinder seals in those areas more heavily influenced by Mesopotamian practices.

Pottery and sealing practices, however, provide indicators of common trends operating over a very large area. Ceramic mass-production and standardization appears to have begun by the beginning of the fourth millennium in the Chaff Faced horizon area, which encompassed sites located in an area stretching from Tell Brak in north-eastern Syria, Arslantepe in south-eastern Anatolia, Ras Shamra on the Mediterranean coast, and Tell Afs and Hama in the Syrian Orontes Valley (Rova 1999–2000; Trufelli 1997). This process began prior to the Uruk expansion, in

the so-called 'pre-contact' phase (Lupton 1996), and continued well into the succeeding 'contact phase', during which the impact of the Uruk expansion was most apparent in the north and west, and therefore spanned much of the fourth millennium BC. The evidence of seals and sealings, however, points to the existence in this area of an earlier administrative system of local, not Mesopotamian origin. Evidence from Tell Sabi Abyad, for example, indicates an unequal distribution of, and differential access to, commodities by the end of sixth millennium BC, but in a context lacking any obvious evidence for a centralized power (Duistermaat 1996: 374–75).

The growth of elite-controlled administration is well-documented by the later fourth millennium BC at Arslantepe VIA. Here, evidence has been recovered, mostly from within the ceremonial area, for the circulation, use, accumulation and discard of seals, sealings and tokens, all pointing to the presence of a local bureaucratic institution (Frangipane 1994; 1997; 2001). There is no significant evidence, however, for any change in the nature of the commodities produced and consumed contemporary with this case of local proto-urbanization. Centralization and a growth in consumption nonetheless may have affected the scale of production, stimulating an increase in manufacturing activity.

Secondary urbanization in the northern Levant, which is the form relevant to Ebla, followed the initial period of increasing complexity outlined above. The process appears to have taken place without major local disruptions, perhaps because of the demise of the Uruk communities in Syria at the end of the fourth millennium BC; it witnessed the emergence of new clusters of settlements in previously marginal zones (Mazzoni 1998). The process culminated, around the middle of the third millennium BC, in the formation of city-states and kingdoms controlled by central

region. No other site can offer a similar duration of uninterrupted occupation through both EB IVA and EB IVB. Phases J8-1 at Hama appear to represent an area of domestic occupation that underwent a process of gradual change in architecture and material culture, without major breaks and with no evidence of shorter discontinuities. Fugmann (1958: 82) interpreted the destruction separating phases J5 and J4 as marking a division between more and less prosperous phases. This conclusion, however, is not supported by the published evidence for changes in the range and relative proportions of different styles of pottery or other finds. The material from the different phases appears to constitute a sequence of homogeneous assemblages connected to domestic activities. Tableware alone documents the increasing standardization of fabrics and growing emphasis upon mass-production over time. At Tell Afis, where only the second part of this period, (i.e. EB IVB) is documented, and where the exposure is still limited (Mazzone 1998), there is evidence of a general continuity in material culture with only subtle changes in the ceramic assemblage indicating a similar evolutionary trend.

Ebla

The case of Ebla with its monumental Palace G and associated documentary archives is certainly unique (Figure 2). The palace and its assemblage are dated to EB IVA, contemporary with Hama J6-5, while the texts are generally considered 'pre-Sargonic' in style, pointing to a date towards the end of the Early Dynastic III period, or perhaps the first years of the reign of Sargon of Agade in terms of the historical chronology of Mesopotamia. Recent investigations in the lower town indicate that while the destruction of Palace G was a major event, it was not followed by a site-wide interruption in occupation. Excavations in the northern area of the lower town in the Archaic

Hama and Tell Afis

Phase J at Hama (Fugmann 1958) provides a basic material-culture sequence for the

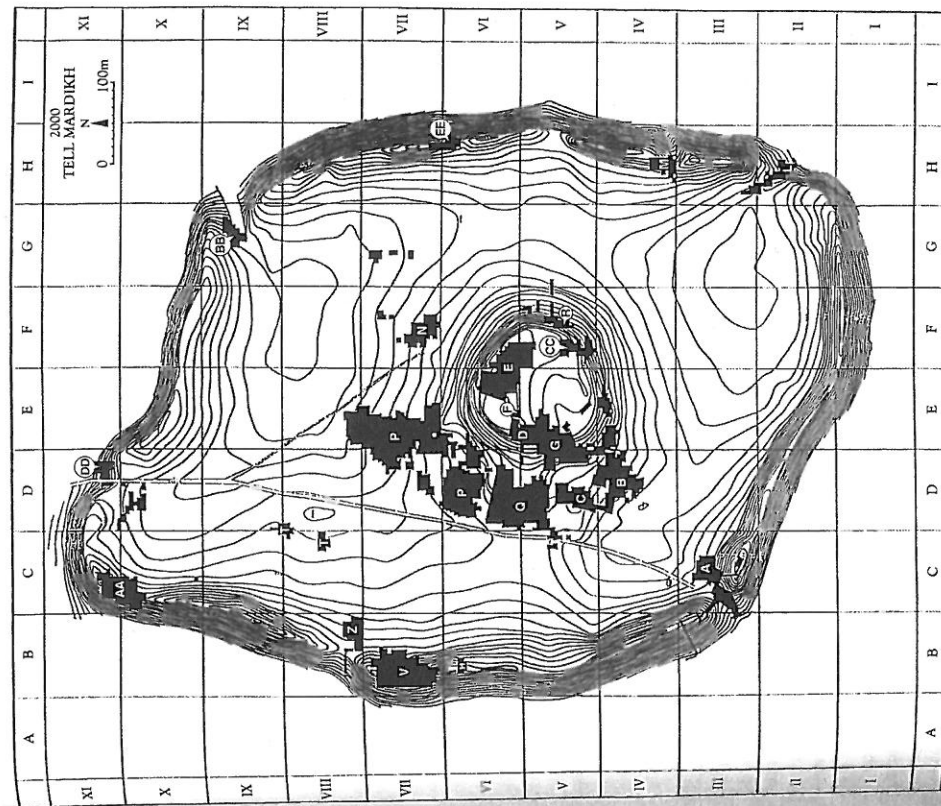


Figure 2. Ebla: plan of the site, showing excavation areas.

Palace P, the earliest of a sequence of palaces there, and soundings in an area of domestic occupation in Area T, both give evidence of continued occupation in EB IVB, with contrasting patterns of change in monumental architecture and material culture (Matthiae 1995: 91; 1998: 564-66).

The evidence for the earlier periods (pre-Palace G) is still uneven and precludes an interpretation of longer-term transformations. However, the EB III deposits (G2) excavated in Area G South in 1983-85 and those from Area CC on the southeastern slope of the acropolis investigated in 1998-99, documented storage activities. A preliminary assessment of the evidence suggests that a substantial change in material culture and architecture occurred between this phase, possibly to be dated to an earlier stage of EB III, and that documented by Palace G. More recent excavations in the Central Unit northeast of Palace G may fill the void between the earlier EB III occupation and that of EB IVA, as these revealed traces of an earlier building directly preceding Palace G and to be dated between the end of EB III and the beginning of EB IV. Here, a mass of chipped stone flakes and cores was retrieved on the older floor of the building, thus documenting the local storage and working of flint and perhaps indicating a degree of control over the accumulation of raw material stocks and of manufacture prior to the construction of Palace G itself. In addition, the existence of decorative inlays with scenes of war and groups of mythological figures—reused in Palace G but most likely produced earlier—points to the existence of specialized crafts and ideologically significant prestige objects before the final flourish of Palace G (Matthiae 1989: 32-43).

If we compare the data from Ebla with that from Hama, there emerges a picture of strong continuity and gradual change in material culture. At Ebla, there is evidence for a

significant increase in complexity, both in architecture and material culture during the life of Palace B, i.e. EB IVA. This was presumably connected to the activities of the last kings of the Ebla dynasty. It is important to be aware, however, that future research in the levels pre-dating Palace G may require modification of this view.

Ebla: Institutional Production and Consumption

Minor and Major Arts: Connecting Ideology and Economy

A major difference between Hama and Ebla (which, however, might reflect the nature of the structures excavated) is the presence in Palace G of minor art objects made in stone, and in precious materials such as shell or lapis lazuli, indicative of long-distance trade. Both large and small sculptures, and inlays of lapis lazuli, steatite, limestone and carved shell were recovered from the ceremonial wings of Palace G. These were absent, however, in the residential quarters of Hama. The evidence from Ebla relates to both consumption and production as quantities of stored raw materials like lapis lazuli were present in Palace G (Pinnock 1996; Dolce 1995). In addition, a workshop unit (L.5005) was located in Building P4, which lies just beyond the northwest-ern edge of the acropolis in what was possibly an external wing of the palace (Marchetti and Nigro 1995-96). The accumulation and storage of raw materials and the manufacture and display of prestige objects for the visual communication of power, were all centred upon, and controlled by, the palace as an institution. Further details are furnished by the cuneiform texts from the site (Archi 1990), which provide evidence for the manufacture of sculptured heads of the god Kura, and of the divine couple Shugu and Shugadu covered by, or cast in, bronze, gold and silver, as well as for the presentation by the king of

lapis lazuli and gold to make a head of the god Adda. Bronze was also used for the head of an unknown personage Ilba-Ishar, while gold and silver were used for decorating the hands, feet and parts of the bodies of the gods' statues. Metal statues of composite creatures are also documented, with examples including the bull of the god Idabal of Arugadu; the human-headed bull for the temple of Kamishi; and a bird and a human-headed bull which were set over the gates. These texts also provide evidence for the movement of both statues and skilled personnel, and refer to nine sculptors and two statues travelling to Ebla from the city of Mari in the Euphrates Valley. Documentary evidence also indicates that the palace acquired and supplied the valuable materials, which were carefully listed. Less precious materials, although better documented archaeologically, are never discussed in the texts. The palace also sustained the specialist workers. Documents concerning the monthly delivery of clothing and wool to the palace personnel give a total of 500 smiths and 140-160 carpenters, alongside 30-40 physicians, 14 bar-

bers, 10-20 cooks, and 26-30 musicians (Archi 1988: 135-36; 1993: 616). Military equipment such as axes, daggers, spearheads, cuirasses, razors and hammers are mentioned frequently, while parts of wagons and ornaments also occur. It is clear that decorative and precious objects were both produced and consumed (i.e. displayed) within the circuit of the palace, or exchanged with elites from other localities in the form of gifts or tribute. The whole operation was a self-sustaining process, arguably of a parasitical nature (Van de Mieroop 1997: 255). At Ebla, it seems clear that the production of prestige goods was dependent on institutional involvement, that is, the state physically centred on the palace, comprising the king and his family, plus an extended court composed of various officials and their dependents. It was this body that accumulated the precious materials, frequently imported them, and through its demand for goods for consumption, sustained the craftsmen.

Other craft products, however, were manufactured in the villages or in urban locations not under the direct control of the palace,



Figure 3. Ebla, Palace G: jar TM.89.G.383/1, with impression A 41, as found in L. 2890.

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as well as a common administrative pattern (Matthews 1997b). Therefore, there appears to have been no great difference between the consumption and circulation of such commodities in the palace environment at Ebla and in domestic contexts at Hama.

Goods, Pots and the Central Institution

A similar conclusion can be drawn from the analysis of pottery production and consumption. Consumption can be evaluated by monitoring the circulation and presence of pottery within different social contexts. The archaeological evidence for pottery production is meagre, with little known about kilns and workshops. Examples of third millennium date include a potters' quarter in Tell Banat in an elevated position covering almost 2 ha in area inside the city (McClellan 1999: 417). Another production complex is located in the outer town at Tell Leilan, which specialized in the production of a class of bowls with standardized size and shape (Senior and Weiss 1992: 16-23; Weiss 1993: 46). At Lidar Höyük an extramural production area has revealed numerous horseshoe-shaped kilns, where a variety of mid-late EBA wares and forms were being produced (Hauptmann 1993). At Tell Afis, a Middle Bronze Age kiln located on the western edge of the central mound provided evidence for on-site production (Felli and Merluzzi 2002). At Ebla, the absence of evidence for kiln-wasters suggests that the pottery workshops were situated outside the city walls. In many cases, the polluting nature of the firing process and the availability of clay sources would have encouraged people to locate kilns and workshops away from settlements (Moorey 1994: 141). While on occasion the archaeological evidence suggests some control of pottery production by local administrations, because of the location of the industrial unit (Tell Banat), or the standardization of the containers relating to redistributive activities (Tell Leilan), more often production

perhaps on a household basis. This is not only the case for pottery but also for a number of commodities, and even for some administrative devices such as seals. Seal engraving, documented in a variety of archaeological contexts and sites from the late sixth millennium onwards, could be a non-professional, even a part-time activity. Seals could have been produced in perishable and readily available materials, such as wood, bone and clay. The practice of creating seal impressions on jars before firing is well-documented at Ebla. Seal impressions of this type reveal a rather old-fashioned repertoire of geometric patterns and herding scenes. The practice belongs to the non-institutional sphere and appears to be based on an indigenous Late Chalcolithic tradition, which had been modified to some extent by Late Uruk stylistic traits (Mazzoni 1992; Matthews 1997a: 90-94). In contrast, seals associated with institutional practices, and which were used to seal doors or containers, differed in both style and iconography, and featured contest and banquet scenes that appear to have been inspired by southern Mesopotamian traditions.

The evidence from Ebla and Hama provides a clear picture of the circulation of seal-impressed jars. Examples accumulated at Ebla originated from a variety of sources, and instances of a range of different seals and pot-forms were recovered from the Palace G. The fact that many of these jars were found in the kitchen unit of the ceremonial wing, often close to hearths (Figure 3), points to the consumption and transformation of their contents at Ebla, rather than to local manufacture. The contemporary residential area at Hama has produced broadly similar jars, bearing impressions from seals of the same classes. In fact, identical jars from Hama and Ebla bear impressions of the same seal (Figures 4.2, 5), indicating not only their common provenance and circulation, but also a similar process of consumption, probably of the same products,

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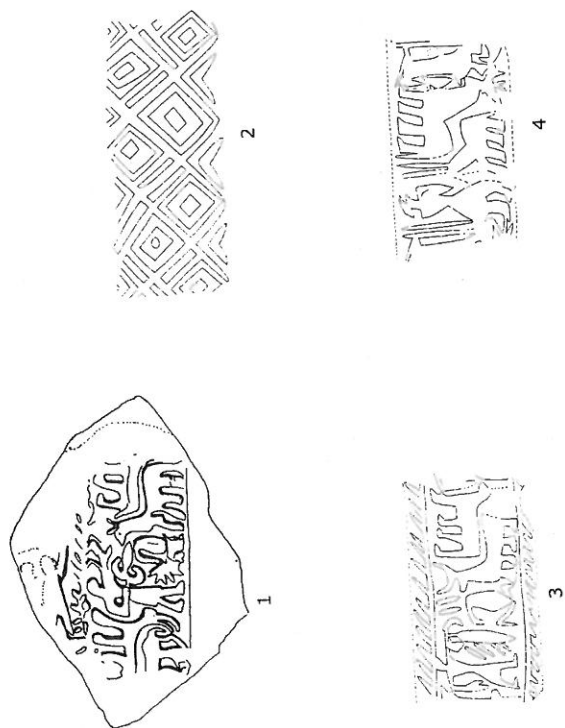


Figure 4. Seal impressions on jars: (1) Ebla, no. A3, TM.63.D.30; (2-4) Hama, nos. 3F 183, 3H 360, and 3H 370 (after Matthews 1997b: nos. 26, 5-6).



Figure 5. Ebla, impression A6 (TM.69 G.28)

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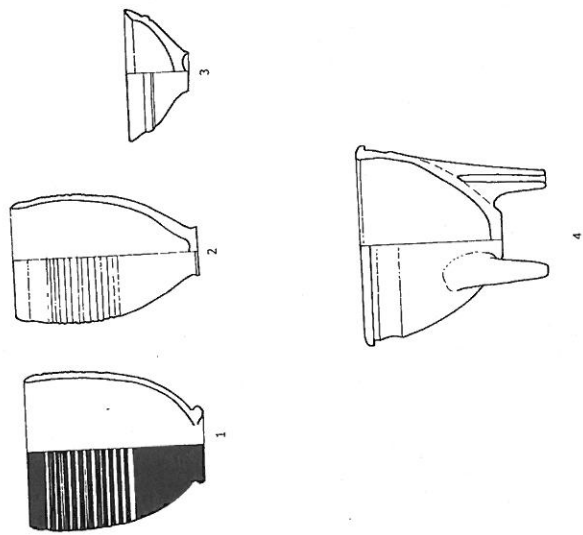


Figure 6. Tableware from Ebla, Palace G: (1) black-painted goblet, TM.75.G.510/26, L.2812; (2) corrugated goblet, TM.75.G.216/23, L.2718; (3) everted-rim bowl, TM.83.G.106/13, L.3512; (4) tripod bowl, TM.82.G.511/1, L.3463.

was organized at the level of specialized independent workshops, or even that of individual households. Despite their relatively limited involvement in pottery production, however, elites and administrators were major consumers of ceramic products, a demand that had significant ramifications for the wider economy.

Documentary sources from Mesopotamia provide reliable evidence regarding the organization of ceramic production. Pre-Sargonic and Sargonic texts (Steinkeller 1996: 235) mention very large quantities of vessels delivered by potters to institutions such as temples and palaces. At Lagash, for example, several dozen examples of three different pot-types were deposited in a storehouse and subse-

quently used in a religious festival. At Umma, 7,000–8,000 examples of six different vessel types were noted and at Lagash 3,000 vessels were listed. Potters could belong to the houses or palaces of the Ensi of Lagash and his family (Sallabarger 1996: 23–27). In the Ur III period, we know that at least some ceramic production was organized by the state (Ward 1970–71), with potters under the control of the local governor or some other part of the royal organization (Steinkeller 1996). There also existed a category termed 'potters of the countryside', probably working for and in the villages. Moreover the Ur III texts also provide evidence of potters working in their own houses and workshops, which supports the hypothesis that elements of ceramic pro-

duction were carried out in dispersed locations, although in this case presumably to supply institutional demands (Steinkeller 1996: 252–53). Of course, the fact that economic texts generally reflect the concerns of institutions restricts our understanding of the nature of ceramic production outside this sphere (Sallabarger 1996: 22–23).

Looking at the archaeological evidence, it is again useful to compare Ebla and Hama. There are observable differences in the quantities of vessels documented, but with the key exception of storage jars, the vessel-types are the same. Fine, wheel-made table wares of the same standardized, mass-produced fabric are documented in both the palace of Ebla and in domestic contexts at Hama (Figure 6). The similarity in patterns of consumption may reflect a wide distribution of certain commodities for individual use. In particular, the ubiquity of mass-produced goblets points to a demand for such vessels at both elite and household levels. Given their association with drinking practices, this suggests that certain aspects of elite behaviour were influential in

social practices at less elevated levels of society (Mazzoni 1994: 253; 1999: 143–44). As observed at Kurban Höyük IV–III (Warrenmaker 1994: 199–203), non-elite households appear to have maintained their demand for specialist goods (i.e. wheel-made standardized ware) during periods of increasing centralization, but also at times when central authority seems to have collapsed. This presumably reflects a combination of the ready availability of mass-produced pottery and a degree of 'culturally constructed desire', based upon the emulation of elite behaviour. A similar process might be indicated by the increasing use of specialized vessels, such as Euphrates Banded Ware, in EB III–IV funerary contexts at Tell Banat where they may have had a particular symbolic significance, perhaps as markers of status (Porter 1999: 316).

In contrast, storage vessels display more local characteristics. Fabrics were less standardized and showed a larger variety of regional and even local traits; there was also some variation according to the contents that vessels were designed to hold. At Ebla, Palace

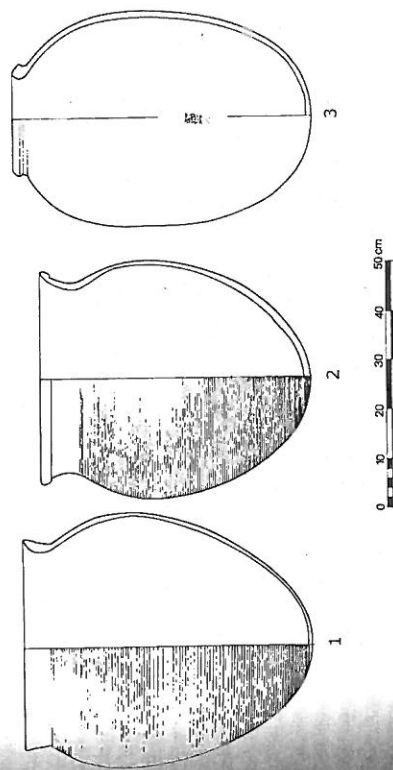


Figure 7. Ovoid and corrugated jars from Ebla, Palace G: (1) TM.89.383/1, L.2890; (2) TM.89.G.394/6, L.2890; (3) TM.75.G.230/22, with impression A16, L.2617.

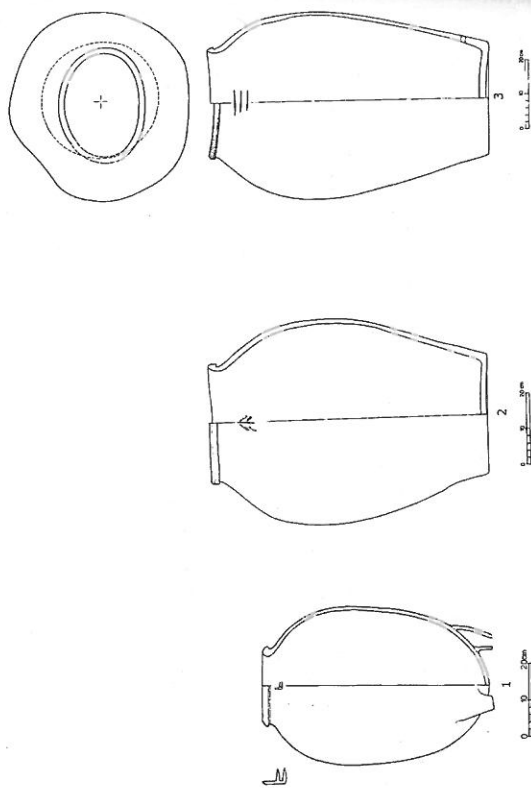


Figure 8. Ovoid and grooved-rim jars from Ebla, Palace G: (1) TM.75.G.265/2; (2) TM.83.40/1; (3) TM.83.G.28/1.

G produced a wide range of storage vessel types, the various forms of which showed different spatial distributions. Ovoid tripod vessels were concentrated in the Euphrates Valley and at Ebla; globular corrugated forms occurred at Hama and Ebla; red-burnished jars with an everted grooved rim appeared in the 'Amuq; and vessels with a vertical grooved rim were uncovered at Ebla (Figure 7). The variety of vessels present in the palace may be attributed to the accumulation there of products destined for consumption by the administration.

The vertical grooved-rim jars are documented only in the region of Ebla, and their distribution extends northwards to Tell Afis, the lower part of the Nahr el-Quweig, and the adjacent western hills. Their local origin is also supported by the chemical and petrological analyses of a small number of sherds from Afis and Ebla, which indicates that they

derive from the same clay source. These vessels show little evidence of standardization, being coil-built and fired under a range of conditions. As a consequence they occur in a large range of forms. At Ebla, examples of such jars (Figure 8) were encountered stacked in large numbers, indicating a major level of consumption, a point consistent with the scale of production. While fine wares were mass-produced, standardized and possibly factory-made, the only indicator of standardization in storage jars is their size, and even this shows some variation. Only the very limited spatial distribution of certain vessel types might indicate some degree of control over their manufacture by the Ebla palace; more likely this distribution indicates the effect of palace demand in stimulating increased regional specialization in the manufacture of storage vessels.

In proposing a trial model for the evolution

of ceramic production in Syria and its regional patterning, I emphasized the relationship between ceramic zones, and the organization and formalization of spaces under economic and administrative control (Mazoni 1999: 143). The scale of pottery production and the technological development of its manufacture were, in fact, shaped by the intensity and variety of social aggregation, while the regional distribution of fabrics and vessel classes was mainly related to the economic configuration of the consumers. Specialisation in EBA III-IV pottery production was seen as consistent with the demand of political elites for consumption of food, both on a day-to-day level and in connection with conspicuous consumption and display and other aspects of their behaviour designed to encourage cohesion among the members. One consequence of this appears to have been to stimulate the emulation by non-elites of particular behaviours, creating an increased demand for certain classes of artefact, and thus a concomitant intensification of those aspects of elite behaviour that retained a greater level of exclusivity.

Political elites thus played an important role in the expansion and transformation of specialized craft production. The state had access to precious and valuable materials through trade and exchange, and these were turned into manufactured prestige goods by specialist craftworkers operating under elite control. For crafts such as pottery, which were less directly linked to institutional power, the growing demands of the elite may have impacted significantly upon production, stimulating the intensification of manufacture and the adoption of faster processes, which would have increased productivity through greater standardization. The growing efficiency of the production process may in turn have resulted in a decrease in production costs, and thus facilitated the relatively rapid dissemination and utilization of such items by non-elites.

Crafts, Culture and Society: Syria

The growing intensity of production, specialization of manufacture and standardization of processes indicates the increasing role of crafts in the economy of the Levant during EBA III and EBA IV periods. The organization and efficiency of production clearly responded to the level of consumption, which not only increased considerably during these periods but was also shaped by the specific social and economic configuration of the consumers, that is, by their ideological orientation, by the degree to which society as a whole inclined towards the emulation of elite behaviour, and by their demand for different kinds of materials. EBA III-IV Syria comprised a diverse and multifaceted range of social formations and encompassed a large variety of institutional and domestic spheres of both consumption and production, which were often, but not necessarily, interrelated.

The emergence of state organizations in Syria, and the corresponding increase in political and economic centralisation, was the key driving force that stimulated the intensification of the control and accumulation of goods and resources, thus affecting the level of their procurement, production and consumption. High-value prestige goods were manufactured in, and owned by the state, and their use was restricted to the sphere of the palace and its personnel. Such objects functioned as markers of rank, and were deeply implicated in the symbolic and ideological representation of elites. Specialized crafts were thus administered by the state and proved an efficient mechanism of generating and controlling access to wealth. Other aspects of craft production, including goods intended for daily use like pottery, were manufactured in a variety of contexts often outside direct palace control, and the products were employed in a highly diverse array of social and economic contexts. Here too, however, the influence of elite

demand on craft production can be detected, in the form of changes in styles, raw materials and manufacturing techniques, all of which were likely to have responded to the scale and patterns of institutional demand. In addition, in the case of those products for which raw materials were relatively easy to procure, there may have been a further expansion of domestic demand stimulated by a combination of the desire to emulate elite behaviour and the reduced cost of mass-produced products.

About the Author

Stefania Mazzoni lectures on the archaeology of the ancient Near East at the University of Pisa. She has published extensively on aspects of economic activity in the Levant during the fourth and third millennia BC, and on artefactual material from the major Syrian urban centre of Tell Mardikh/Ebla. She is currently directing excavations at the multi-period site of Tell Afis in western Syria.

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