

URBAN ELEMENTS IN EARLY BRONZE AGE SETTLEMENTS OF THE SYRIAN MIDDLE EUPHRATES

Lisa COOPER*

It is clear from the extensive excavation work that has been carried out in the Middle Euphrates of Syria that settlements with urban characteristics grew and flourished during the Early Bronze Age. In this paper I will highlight what those urban features are, and then contrast these features to those observed elsewhere in Greater Mesopotamia from the same time period. After considering this evidence, I will argue that Euphrates settlements followed a somewhat different organizational trajectory than those in other areas such as the Khabur Plains to the east or western Syria. I shall attempt to account for these differences by considering the cultural and environment context of settlement and society within the Middle Euphrates Valley. Further, I will argue there is no overarching model of cultural organization that can be applied to all of the settlements of this region, but rather, we must accept the existence of a variety of different co-existing systems, each representing a different aspect of a diverse population that had a host of varying economic interests, religious traditions and social interactions.

The period of focus is the Early Bronze Age, specifically between 2600 to 2100 BCE, during which time one sees an increase in the number of inhabited sites in the Euphrates Valley, as well as an increase in the size of many of these sites (**Fig. 1**). The beginning of this period coincides with the time of urban and state growth that took place to the east, in the region of the Habur Plains, and manifested at sites such as Tell Brak, Tell Leilan, Tell Mozan and Hamoukar (Akkermans and Schwartz 2003: 261; Ur 2002). To the west, the process of state formation and accompanying urban growth of some sites, notably Ebla, appears a century or two later, but it was equally substantial. In the Euphrates Valley itself, one too sees a period of urban growth, with several of its settlements taking on distinctively urban-like features.

Perhaps the most conspicuous features of the Euphrates urban settlements are their fortifications, which are often monumental in scale, comprising defensive walls, ramparts, towers and fortified city-gates. The origins of these defenses go back to the beginning of the EB, as observed at the site of Halawa Tell B, where a thick buttressed mud brick wall, reinforced several times over, enclosed the early habitations (Orthmann 1989: 87–88). In the earliest phases at Tell Habuba Kabira, a line of mud brick buildings were built side by side, their back walls forming a solid line along the eastern side of the site facing the Euphrates River (Heusch 1980: 161). With each subsequent phase at Tell Habuba Kabira, the system of defenses became increasingly elaborate and strong (**Fig. 2**). By the middle of the Early Bronze Age, substantial city walls had become a characteristic feature of a number of sites, including Jerablus Tahtani, Tell Banat, Tell al-‘Abd, and Munbaqa. The most imposing defensive systems appear in the late Early Bronze Age (2300–2100 BCE), attested at sites such as Tell es-Sweyhat, Tell Qannas, Halawa Tell A, Tell Habuba Kabira and Selenkahiye (Cooper 2006:73). At Halawa Tell A, the city wall was strengthened with regularly-spaced buttresses and corner towers. One can also note at Halawa the construction of a sloping rampart of earth and packed clay over the natural slope of the hill, built against the exterior side of the city wall (Orthmann 1989: 15, 17). A mudbrick casemate wall was constructed at Munbaqa, this feature dating to the mid-to-late

* University of British Columbia
(Paper for Tokyo Symposium: November 20–23rd, 2009)

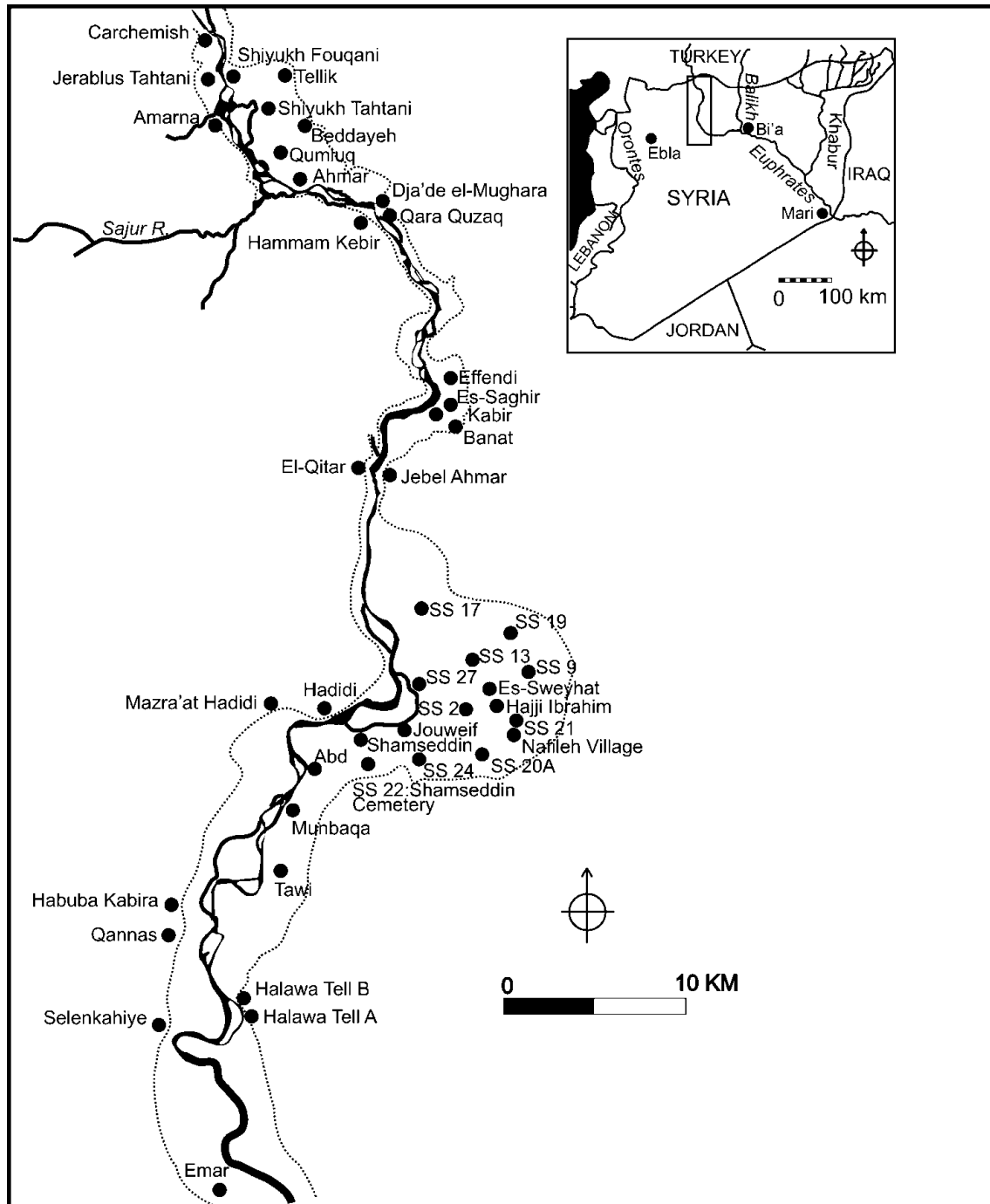


Fig. 1

third millennium BC (Eichler et al. 1984: 73; Machule et al. 1986: 81–83). At Selenkahiye, the city is enclosed by a city wall and furnished with towers, a fortified gateway, and fronted by sloping glacis (Van Loon 2001: 3.86, 3.89). As a last example of fortifications, we may turn to the recent excavations at Tell Jebel Bazi, where the remains of a defensive system on top of the 60-metre high citadel hill have been identified. Here the excavators found a series of stone walls and a monumental gate building, the central element of which was a chamber gate (Otto 2006: 11).

As further testimony to urban life, several of the Euphrates EB settlements comprised densely spaced blocks of domestic houses and associated streets. The neighbourhoods of Halawa Tell A,

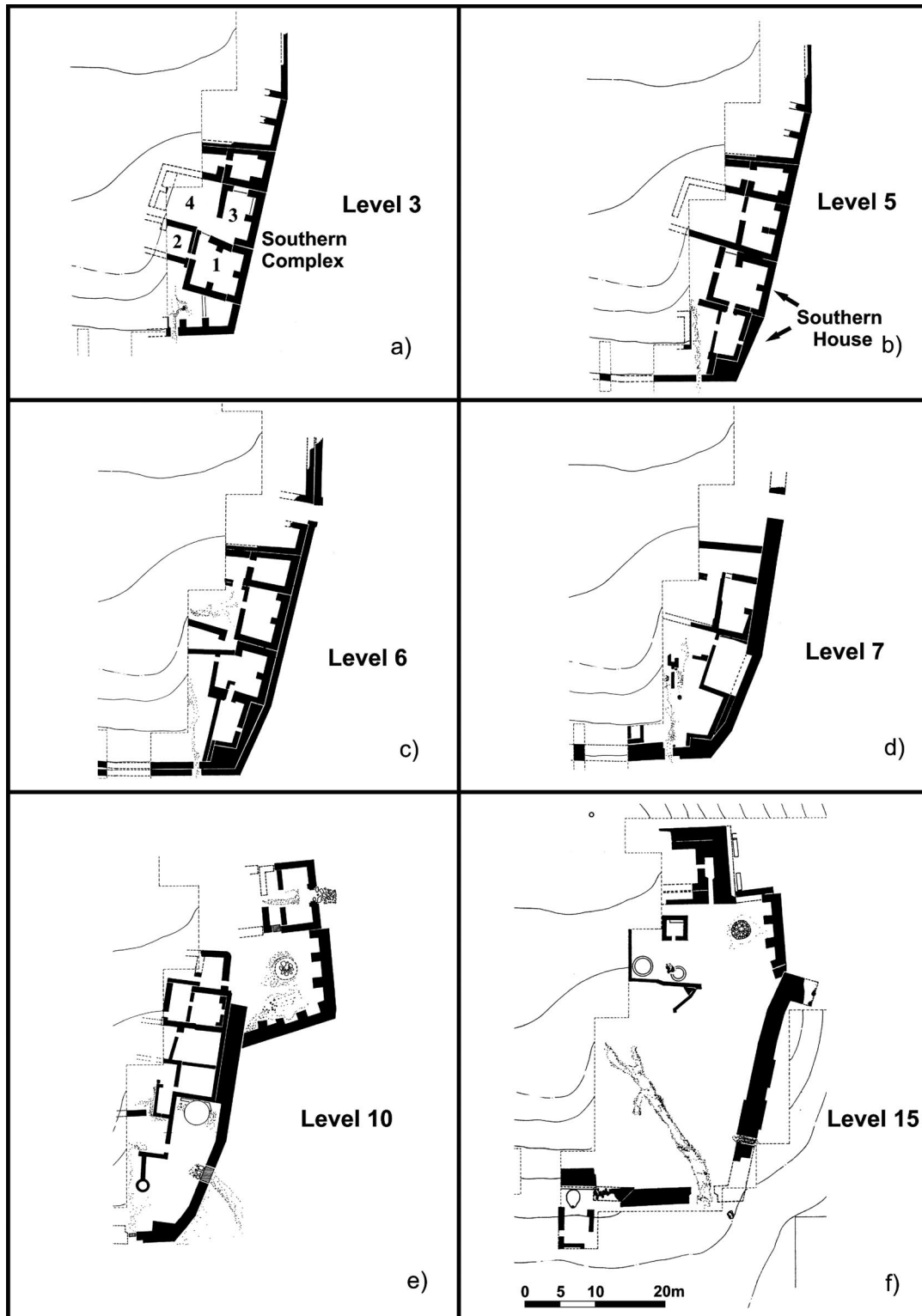


Fig. 2

from the mid-to-late third millennium BCE, are well preserved both to the north and south of a temple *in antis* complex (Fig. 3) (Orthmann 1989: Beilage 8–10). The houses were arranged side by side in blocks, and aligned on either side of streets that ran the length and breadth of the settlement. While over time the internal layout of the houses changed due to various modifications, they seem

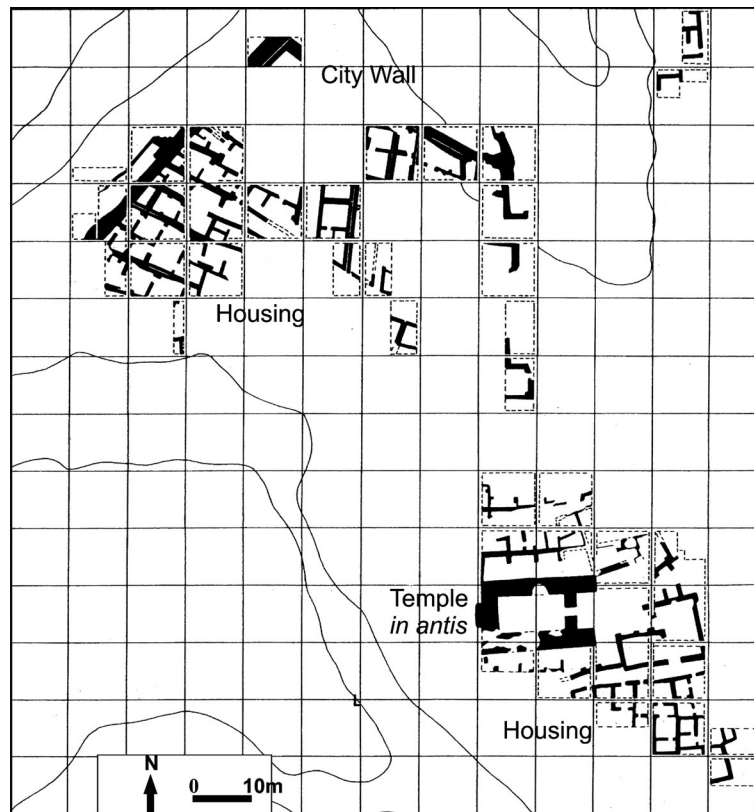


Fig. 3

originally to have been laid out with similar interior room arrangements and uniform sizes and proportions within each of the city blocks (Pfälzner 2001: 349–50). One can assume that this phenomenon is indicative of some form of urban planning, entailing a coordinated effort on the part of the town's inhabitants for its planning, funding and construction (Cooper 2006: 106).

Urban planning is also evident at the site of Tell Hadidi, where excavations in an area in the lower town revealed blocks of late EB houses arranged for more than 48 metres along one side of a street (Dornemann 1979: 117). The presence of such a long thoroughfare through the settlement could only have been the result of careful town planning in conjunction with the laying out of well-aligned city blocks.

Evidence for housing is extensive at Selenkahiye. In Excavation Area B, houses were found arranged on either side of two long streets. Unlike the arrangement at nearby Halawa A, however, the houses at Selenkahiye seem to have been planned and laid out rather loosely within the settlement, and they exhibit considerable variety in terms of their size, shape and room number and interior room arrangements (Van Loon 2001: 3.50–3.83; Cooper 2006: 107–113). Even so, the houses clearly represent a densely built-up area of urban occupation, and the artifactual remains found within them reflect a full range of domestic activities, small-scale craft industries and commercial exchanges, altogether comprising typical households within a thriving, urban context (Van Loon 2001: 3.64, 3.74–3.78, 3.99–101).

Craft production, particularly the production of metalwork, textiles and pottery, is generally well-attested and some of the evidence suggests that craft activities could attain a high level of specialization. Metal was prolifically available, as reflected by the wealth of metal weapons and pins recovered from EB tombs at Tell Ahmar, Jerablus Tahtani, Tell Banat, Tell es-Sweyhat Halawa Tell A, Selenkahiye and the neighbouring cemetery at Wreide, most dating from the middle to later

part of the Early Bronze Age (Cooper 2006: 221–22). Evidence for metalworking, found in the form of stone moulds for axes and daggers, crucibles, tongs, terra-cotta bellows, copper tools and raw copper ingots, have been retrieved from mid-to-late 3rd millennium contexts at Tell Ahmar (in the form of univalve moulds), Tell Qara Quzaq (a stone mould and crucible), Jerablus Tahtani (crucibles and dagger mould), Tell es-Sweyhat (crucible, bronze tongs), Tell Hababa Kabira (raw copper ingots, tubular part of a terra-cotta bellows, copper tools and a limestone mould for various types of axes), and Tell Qannas (stone mould). Most of this evidence has been found in contexts associated with elite households and elite activities (Cooper 2006: 171–75).

Evidence testifying to textile production, namely spinning, weaving and the dyeing of cloth, takes the form of vats and pigments at Tell Habuba Kabira, bobbins at Jerablus Tahtani, spindle whorls from Tell es-Sweyhat and Tell Banat, and the possible remnants of looms from Tell Banat (Heusch 1980: 168; Strommenger 1980: 71; Peltenburg et al. 1997: 7; Zettler 1997b: 39, 42; Porter and McClellan 1999: 16, 20; Porter 2002b: 158). Last, pottery production has been attested. Two-chambered up-draught kilns have been uncovered at Tell Habuba Kabira, outside of the city wall (Strommenger 1980: Abb. 74–75; Heusch 1980: 172), Halawa Tell A (Orthmann 1981: 61), and Tell es-Sweyhat (Zettler 1997: 47). Tell Banat offers rich evidence for the production of pottery in the form of several kilns concentrated in one sector of the site, along with a multi-roomed production building, ash dumps of slag, vitrified pottery and vessel discards (Porter and McClellan 1998: 14–23; 31). The vessel-types represented in these kiln refuse deposits show uniformity in terms of their overall size, body shape, rim and base features. It was additionally observed that the paste and temper of the vessels is fundamentally the same throughout, with the exception of differences in the colour of the fired vessels, which would mainly be attributable to fluctuations in kiln temperatures during the firing process (Porter and McClellan 1998: 21–23). It seems likely that these pots were the product of specialists, sufficiently accomplished in their craft to produce uniformly similar products many times over.

As a last urban feature, we may note evidence for long-distance trade and exchange. Exotic, valuable objects are particularly prolific in several of the Euphrates graves. Tomb 302 at Jerablus Tahtani, contained objects of gold, silver and rock crystal, ostrich eggshells and ivory plaques (Peltenburg 1999: 102). Tomb 7 at Tell Banat had an equally rich repertoire, characterized by objects of lapis lazuli, an inlaid ostrich egg, a gold pendant, and over a thousand gold beads of a variety of shapes that were found strewn over the body of the deceased, showing excellent parallels to beads from Anatolian sites such as Poliochni and Troy (McClellan and Porter 1999: 110). These items were obtained through long-distance trade, or else they reflect gift exchanges and tribute taking place between various elite groups and leaders within individual communities. Peltenburg observes that this type of networking “entailed acculturation to an exclusive courtly society, and this in turn introduced new behavior that visibly set leaders apart and legitimated their position” (Peltenburg 2008: 235).

It seems clear from the evidence that I have described that several Euphrates settlements went through a period of urban development during the Early Bronze Age. But would it be incorrect to say that these Euphrates sites ever attained the same level of urban complexity as has been observed in other parts of Greater Mesopotamia during this period. Moreover, when we look more carefully at the urban elements that we have just described, they do not always compare well in function and significance to those found in other Upper Mesopotamian urban communities. For the remainder of my paper I will highlight these Euphrates differences: I will describe features that the majority of Euphrates sites clearly do not possess and possible reasons for their absence. I will also discuss the background context of some of the Euphrates urban elements and suggest reasons for their distinctive forms and functions.

Turning now to other cities in Northern Mesopotamia and Syria, we may note some striking

site components which are virtually unattested within the Euphrates valley. The site of Tell Leilan, for example, highlights the tremendous strides in urbanism and state formation which northern Mesopotamian settlements could experience. Around 2600 BCE, we see a remarkable transformation from a 15-hectare town to a massive 90 hectare urban complex surrounded by a high fortification outer wall (Risvet 2007: 185). Even more impressively, the site possessed a central high place — the Acropolis — which dominated over the surrounding 65 hectare Lower Town, and which contained the remnants of a elite public complex, characterized by several grain storerooms covering an area of about 300 square metres, a cultic platform and industrial installations (get reference!). An abundance of cylinder seal impressions within the storerooms attests to the administrative nature of this area (get reference!). It seems clear that by 2600 BCE, there had emerged a ruling stratum at Tell Leilan which appears to have controlled ritual activities at the site, as well as presided over vast quantities of surplus grain at the centre of what was probably a complex distributive economy.

Further indications of the growing urbanism of Tell Leilan and its centralizing tendencies can be recognized in the surrounding countryside. When that site grew to 90 ha, the regional settlement systems shows signs of a major reorganization, producing a four-tier hierarchical pattern, comprising secondary centres, towns and villages from which the urban centre of Leilan would have systematically extracted large-scale agricultural surpluses (Stein and Blackman 1993: 32; Stein and Wattenmaker 2003: 366). Other similar Early Bronze Age settlement hierarchies have been detected elsewhere in the Jezireh of Upper Mesopotamia (Wilkinson and Tucker 1995: 81).

Travelling now to Ebla in western Syria, we have an equally clear picture of centralization and state development occurring within an urban complex of the third millennium BCE. By 2400 BCE, this site was characterized by a central high mound, dominated by a vast, rambling palace, the dwelling place of the king and his extensive royal household of high officials, servants and scribes. Physically, the elevation and monumentality of this palace sets it well apart from the other buildings at the settlement. Within the structure palatial authority is marked by the presence of a large open “Court of Audience” with a raised throne dias, and by the presence of rooms where thousands of cuneiform tablets have been found attesting to the wealth and centralized authority of the local royal establishment. Thousands of palace officials artisans and labourers were paid in food rations supplied by the palace. Moreover, we learn that the king owned thousands of sheep and that the palace oversaw the mass-production and distribution of woolen textiles, one of its principal industries (Akkermans and Schwartz 2003: 239). The royal household’s long-distance contacts with distant lands are well attested by stone vessels from Egypt, for example, and chunks of un-worked lapis lazuli from far-off Afghanistan. Like elites elsewhere in Mesopotamia, the king and his royal entourage participated in banquets or feasts to celebrate and perpetuate their elite status. This finds reflection at Ebla in the hundreds of distinctive drinking cups found throughout the place (Mazzoni 2003: 185). The palatial establishment at Ebla was clearly a force to be reckoned with and its wielded economic and political power over a vast hinterland.

In contrast to sites such as Tell Leilan and Ebla, no comparable levels of centralized authority are attested among the Euphrates settlements. Large-scale secular structures, probably the residences of elite individuals, are sometimes attested, but they rarely take a central elevated position within the settlements. The elite structure on the central mound at Tell es-Sweyhat is perhaps the one exception to this rule, and to this we will return later. The large size and opulent furnishings of Buildings 6 and 7 at Tell Banat are the most likely candidates for palace-style structures, but they were not located in an exceptionally visible or elevated place at the site (Porter 2002b: 167). Their close proximity to tombs as well as their position directly over an earlier mortuary tumulus suggests the buildings’ association with funerary traditions at the site (McClellan 1999: 418–19; Porter 2002a: 16). Their owners may have sponsored many of the site’s funerary rites, and played important roles in their cults, but there is little physical evidence to suggest that they represented a centralized authority

that wielded authority over *all* aspects of Tell Banat society.

Besides the near-absence of centrally located, elevated elite complexes, the lack of political or economic centralization is also reflected in the settlement patterns of the surrounding countryside. In the Euphrates region of Syria, it is difficult to confirm any type of three or four-tier hierarchies, as has been postulated for the Jezireh to the east, where smaller towns and villages essentially became the tributaries of the larger cities during the mid-third millennium (Cooper 2006: 58). Settlement hierarchies are completely unattested in the southern part of the region below Tell Hadidi, where the river valley is relatively narrow. To the north, wider river embayments appear to have afforded a greater concentration of Early Bronze age settlements of varying sizes. When we examine the characteristics of these sites, however, it is difficult to discern, beyond their different sizes, which settlements were “centres” and which served as subsidiaries or “tributaries.” Socio-economic complexity is evident at many of these sites, regardless of their size and location. To give one example, in the embayment south of Carchemish at least five EB sites are attested. At 2 ha, Tell Ahmar is one of the smallest sites, but it has yielded a late EB tomb of monumental proportions and highly valued tomb objects, suggesting a high degree of wealth and access to resources on the part of the individuals who were interred within the tomb. What is such socio-economic inequality doing in a small site like this? In light of evidence such as this, it may be fallacious to reconstruct a truly ranked settlement hierarchy in the Euphrates Valley. Rather, we might view settlement within these systems as possessing complementary or specialized functions, possibly serving the large communities in some respect but at the same time maintaining high degrees of autonomy and authority (Cooper 2006: 61). The fact that the region is characterized by several different avenues for appropriating wealth: commercial opportunities afforded by trade along the Euphrates River; the agricultural productivity of the river valley, and the pastoral and additional dry-farming possibilities of the steppe land beyond, might go far to explain this unusual configuration of settlements and their unique characteristics.

Even among settlements where urban features have been detected, it is clear they never achieved the scale, complexity and magnitude of cities elsewhere in Northern Mesopotamia and Syria. Euphrates’ city walls, while sometimes extensive, for example, rarely appear to have been centrally planned and constructed in a single undertaking. On the contrary, these site’s defenses appear to have been the result of several centuries of building and refurbishment, leading only gradually to the imposing edifices exhibited in the latest EB phases. Moreover, investigations have usually failed to detect any consistency as to the layout and construction of defensive features from sector to sector within a settlement. For example, Tell es-Sweyhat’s outer fortifications varied from one city sector to another: they ranged from an earth rampart (in the eastern lower town), to a possible casemate system (in the northwestern side of the outer town), to a possible double line of walls (in the northwest and northern stretch of the outer town) (Zettler et al. 1996: 33; Zettler 1997: 49; figs. 3.13–14). Similarly, the city wall at Selenkahiye does not appear to have been consistently built. There are changes in the direction of the wall, changes in wall dimensions, no regular placement of buttresses and towers and variation in the number and scale of reconstructions and enlargements (Van Loon 2001: 3.103). It is suggested that that the actual construction and refurbishment of Selenkahiye’s wall was left to individual quarters, or blocks of the settlement, rather than under the supervision and construction of a single central authority.

One can easily contrast this decentralized picture to that of an urban settlement such as Tell Chuera to the east, where the defensive walls, and indeed the entire interior layout of the city, appear to have been the work of a single organization or institution. Similarly at Tell Leilan, the construction of its massive city wall coincided with the planned neighbourhoods and streets of the lower town and the grand public complex on the Leilan Acropolis (Risvet 2007: 204). This work is most probably that of a centralized elite authority with the manpower and resources to undertake this massive

expansion which effectively transformed the town into a city that had a new dominant role in the Eastern Habur Plains (Risvet 2007: 205). The same can be said for walled, planned cities elsewhere to the east, such as at Tell Mozan, Hamoukar, Tell Khoshi and Tell Taya around the same time (Risvet 2007: 185; and n. 9).

One further comment can be made about the fortifications at Tell Leilan and other Jezireh sites: their function went beyond that of simply providing protection for the inhabitants against hostile attacks and raids. The monumentality of these defensive works played a forceful symbolic role, demarcating the cities from their hinterlands of villages and fields, and serving to highlight over a wide distance their preeminence, and the place from which their authority and wealth emanated. We doubt that such defensive systems in the Euphrates River Valley ever attained the same scale of symbolic import. They certainly did not ostentatiously highlight the hegemony of any one settlement over another. We must conclude that the Euphrates fortifications' purpose was truly defensive: they provided protection for the inhabitants and their possessions, and they testify to the ever-present threat of hostilities that characterized the region throughout much of the Early Bronze Age. These hostilities may have come from intruders from the surrounding steppe land, they may have been the result of competitive neighbouring polities, or they may represent the territorial aspirations of rulers from other Mesopotamian states (Cooper 2006: 69). That Euphrates settlements were sometimes the victims of attacks, possibly from these outside forces, seems particularly well illustrated at the Citadel of Bazi, where its monumental gate building (Building 2) was thoroughly destroyed by a military event and covered with thousands of sling bullets and numerous flint arrowheads (Otto 2006:11).

Turning now to Euphrates craft production, much of the evidence has been found in domestic contexts as opposed to separate specialized workshops. In the case of the kilns which were found outside of the city walls, the lack of other associated craft facilities does not suggest that they were part of large-scale production centres. An exception are the proliferation of kilns and workshops at Tell Banat, but this site's pottery industry appears to be connected to the site's unique mortuary function, and need not be tied to the presence of an elite centralized authority with control over its production (Cooper 2006: 198).

When we turn to other cities elsewhere in Northern Mesopotamia and Syria, we see a greater intensity of craft specialization, and even evidence that some of this production was sponsored and supported by the state. Inscribed tablets from the Ebla Archives provide useful information about the organization of production. Careful records were kept, for example, of the raw materials collected by the palace and then stored in their storehouses. In the case of metals, the tablets record that the tribute from one city alone amounted to 15,000 ingots of bronze, 100 gold bars and 840 silver bars. Metalsmiths, who were organized into "labour squads" and supervised by overseers from the royal palace, were employed to work these raw materials into a range of goods (Archi 1982: 211–13; Stein and Blackman 1993: 51–53). The Ebla palace's involvement with textile production on a grand scale is indicated by tablets which describe the palace-owned "wool house," which employed hundreds and labourers, and whose inventories list thousands of manufactured garments of varying qualities (Archi 1982: 211; Stein and Blackman 1993: 52). This type of craft organization is surely more complex than anything taking place in the Middle Euphrates, and it emphasizes the wealth and preeminence of the state institutions which controlled these industries.

Monumental architectural features are certainly attested with the Syrian Euphrates, but rather than being massive, centrally located, elevated cultic platforms, as observed at Tell Leilan and Tell Mozan, or grand palaces set at the apex of the settlements, as at Ebla, they take the form of mortuary monuments and large, splendidly appointed tombs. It is clear from these monuments that Euphrates society, and the elites who directed this society and constructed their own forms of authority, were focused on quite different traditions, many of which emphasized the power and continuing force of

the ancestors. Such a focus is almost certainly due to the prominence of kin-based tribal groups, whose populations dominated parts of the Euphrates Valley and surrounding hinterlands (Peltenburg 2008: 240).

Included among these monumental mortuary structures is the imposing White Monument (Mortuary Monument 1), one of several monumental tumuli located at Tell Banat. Standing over 20 metres in height, its exterior face was covered with a thick coating of white plaster, and corrugated in horizontal bands (McClellan 1998: 244–45). Several discrete deposits of human and animal skeletal parts, and pottery were cut into the sloping sides of the monument, this being interpreted as the final stage of a multi-stage burial practice, in which parts of bodies, previously interred elsewhere, have been taken for re-burial on the White Monument (Porter 2002b: 160–61; Peltenburg 2008: 223–24). This act has been interpreted as highlighting the corporate nature of the community, whereby individual identity is de-emphasized in favour of a collective dead, and it indicates a society based on kin and community, rather than an emphasis on a stratified society (Porter 2002b: 170; Peltenburg 2008: 224).

Although north of the Syrian border, the Turkish site of Gre Virike should not be ignored due to its similarity to the Mortuary Mounds of Tell Banat. Gre Virike's outstanding feature is a large raised platform that supported a mausoleum complex and open paved summit, where associated rituals could take place. This platform has been interpreted as a cult place for the public display of the community's ancestors. As has been pointed out, the notable lack of wealth disparities among the dead suggests a funerary complex organized by a collective group (Okse 2005; Peltenburg 2008: 223).

At the same time as such potent symbols of unity and social parity were being perpetuated, there was an opposing tendency within Euphrates society towards the establishment of social-economic hierarchies, characterized by wealthy and powerful elites. But these elites' attachment to the tribal-based ancestor-centred ideologies is suggested by their continued sponsorship of the White Monument at Tell Banat and the corporate ideology it showcases, at the same time as they were constructing their own funerary monuments in the form of finely built and richly appointed stone or brick tombs. Such tombs have been recognized at Tell Banat, Jerablus Tahtani, Tell Ahmar and Tell Bi'a. Even though these tombs are in reality overt symbols of the exclusionary strategies of an elite group, the fact that they are being cast in the form of a funerary monument represents a continuing attempt on the part of their owners to link themselves to the past and the tribal ancestor traditions that defined that past.

The prevalence of pastoral tribes with their emphasis on kin-based descent groups and reference to ancestors, explains many of the unique characteristics of the Middle Euphrates Valley, setting it apart from other regions of Mesopotamia and Syria. The notion that a pastoralist-based society prevailed in the Euphrates Valley was first introduced by Anne Porter to account for the unique funerary character of Tell Banat, and it has been further elaborated by Edgar Peltenburg, in his research of Euphrates funerary practices (Porter 2002b; Peltenburg 2008). As is argued, pastoral groups are usually typified by inclusive or corporate ideals, where power is shared across different groups and sectors of a society (Blanton et al. 1996; Porter 2002b: 167–68; Peltenburg 2008: 219). One can argue that the large, accessibly mortuary monuments are particularly clear manifestations of such corporate strategies. Such monuments countered the centrifugal tendencies of these tribal societies, since they provided a central focus of tribal groups when they brought their flocks to the well-watered river valley during their seasonal cycle of grazing (Peltenburg 2008: 221). And even though the prominence of monumental elite tombs signifies an opposing trend towards more exclusionary strategies, these tombs' presence still marks the existence of the same kin-related tribal groups; they are also places where the veneration of the tribal ancestors could occur, albeit access to those ancestors was now largely controlled and possibly limited by the ascendant elites who constructed and maintained these structures (Peltenburg 2008: 232).

But is this pastoralist model sufficient to explain *all* of the unique characteristics of settlement that we may observe in this Euphrates region? Did all Euphrates settlements have significant connections or relationships with mobile pastoralists, and did this pastoralist model permeate all of their social and religious institutions? I would argue that this was not the case, and that with a closer inspection of evidence from the entire assemblage of sites, we begin to see a much wider array of organizational forms than what was originally assumed to exist.

Space prevents an extensive list, so only a few examples are presented here: funerary mounds and monumental tombs where tribal traditions centred on ancestor veneration are evident at some EB sites, but not all sites possess these unique features. Excavations at Halawa Tell A have failed to provide evidence for funerary rituals. The dead were buried in shaft tombs in the slopes of the mound outside of the walls of the city and no unusual or prominent funerary rituals or ceremonies seem to accompany these burials. On other hand, Tell Halawa A is characterized by a religious complex in the form of a long-roomed temple-in-antis, set within its own enclosed precinct and featuring other accompanying buildings and shrines (Orthmann 1989: 63–66). It is clear that a lively cult existed at Halawa A, although the religious traditions of this cult were probably quite different than those associated with the ancestor funerary monuments found elsewhere. We wonder if this temple religion is connected, not to the tribal pastoral communities inhabiting the steppes beyond the valley, but to the long-lived settled populations of the river valley. Long-roomed temples of similar plan have been found elsewhere, namely at the sites of Munbaqa, Tell Kabir and Qara Quzaq, and we wonder if their religious traditions are similar to those at Halawa A (Porter 1995: 129–30; Olávarri and Valdés Pereiro 2001:29). It is certainly notable that at the sites where the long-roomed temples have been revealed, no evidence exists for funerary monuments or other evidence related to ancestor veneration.

Turning to Selenkahiye, although the site lacks a large-scale structure on the scale of a palace with a centralized, kingly authority, there does exist an elite household. Dubbed the “Southern Mansion”, it was substantially larger than the other buildings of the settlement, and distinguished by a unique configuration of interior rooms, all of which clustered around a central columned room (**Fig. 4**). The artifacts from the building included unbaked clay sealed jar stoppers, as well as cylinder seals, and they attest to the prolific administrative or economic activities of the building’s occupants (Van Loon 2001: 3.35–36, 3.40). This evidence suggests that the Southern Mansion’s owners owed their prosperity, not to their connection through kinship ties to some prominent ancestral tradition, or a religious institution, but their energies in the sphere of commerce. The fact that this wealth emanated from a household suggests that perhaps greater scrutiny should be made of the significance of city households, and their important role in structuring the socio-economic organization with the EB Euphrates sites.

On the subject of households, I turn finally now to the site of Tell es-Sweyhat. Located in the centre of a relatively fertile grassy embayment, Tell Sweyhat had a long settlement history spanning much of the Early Bronze Age, but it only reached its fluorescence late in the EB (c. 2300–2100 BCE), after the point when many other settlements had been abandoned or were in decline (Zettler 1997: 51). By this period, Tell es-Sweyhat had grown to a size of 40 ha, and was distinguished by an extensive lower town and city wall. Its most prominent feature was its central elevated mound, where a elite building had been constructed. Dubbed the “Burned Building” owing to the massive conflagration that destroyed it sometime around 2100 BCE, the structure contained numerous rooms where grain, liquids, traded good and household equipment were stored (**Fig. 5**). But none of this evidence suggests that the inhabitants of this structure comprised a centralized authority that held sway over the entire economic, religious and social life of the settlement. The building lacks the administrative trappings that have been found at other acropolis complexes such as at Ebla and Tell Leilan. Nonetheless the size of the building, its multiple rooms, and its central, elevated position

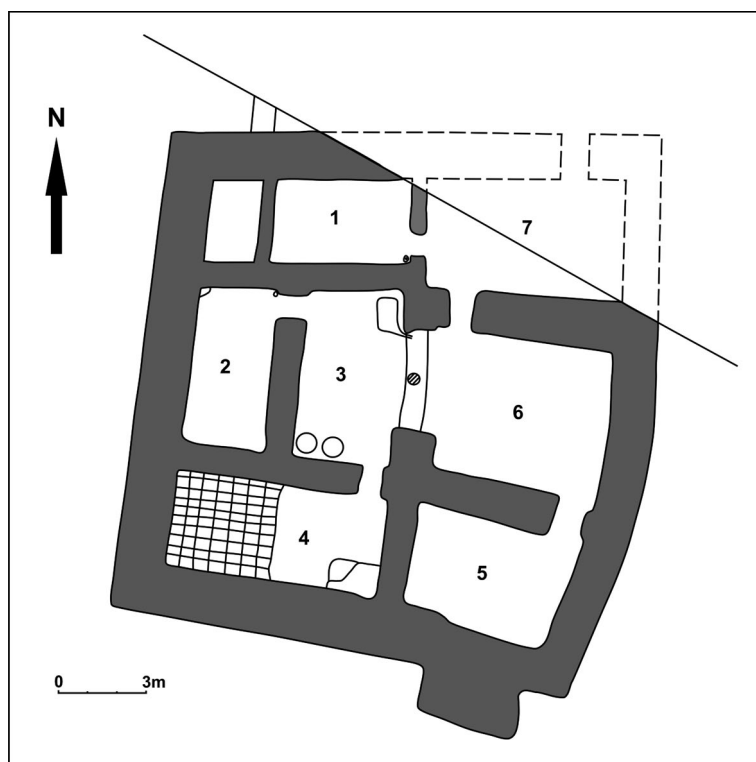


Fig. 4

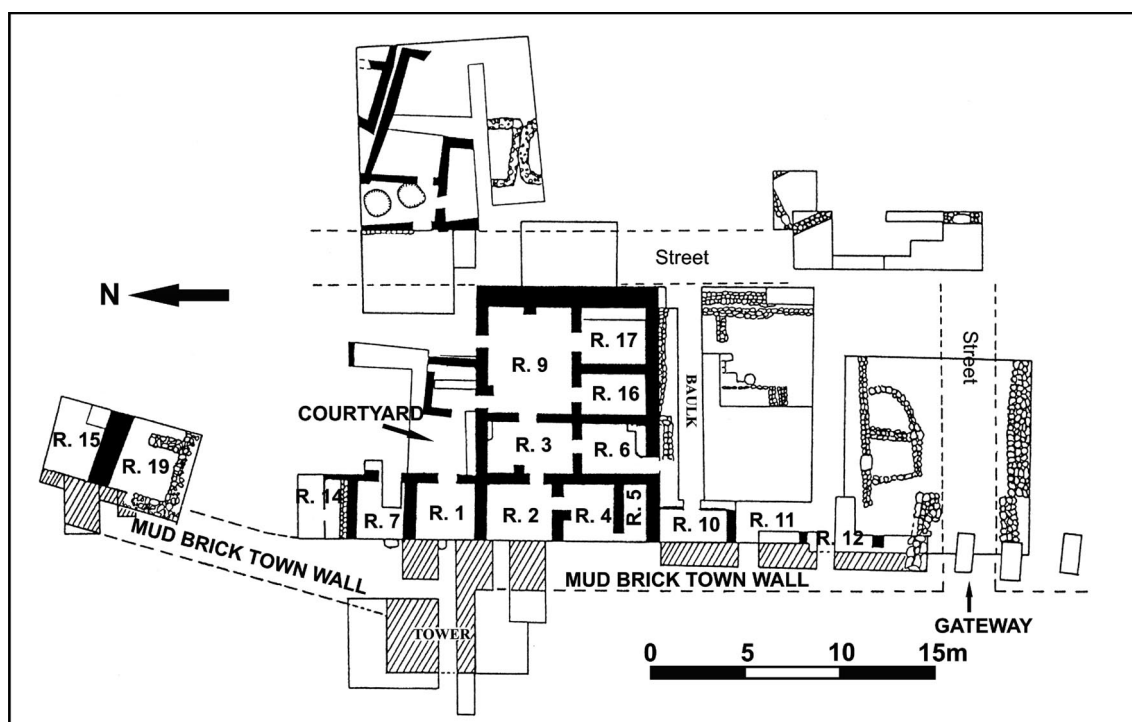


Fig. 5

of the building *does* indicate some kind of wealth and preeminence within the community. Like Selenkahiye, we cannot find any evidence of funerary monuments or elite tombs that can be linked to these elite owners, and thus their position does not appear to emanate from their kinship ties to ancestors. Nor is their connection to any pastoral mobile groups indicated by the nature, layout or contents of the building. Rather, we suspect that the Burned Building's owners accumulated their status through commercial exchanges. This is suggested by the number of imported vessels found within the building, and the discovery of an inscribed cuneiform weight, dating to the UR III on paleographical grounds (Holland 1975). Alternatively, perhaps the owners of the structure attained wealth through a combination of ventures that were both commercial and agro-pastoral in nature. And they may also have been called upon to mediate disputes or make decisions within the community, as suggested by the recent discovery of a contemporary bench-lined "reception" building, which has also been found on the high mound near the Burned Building (Danti and Zettler 2002: 39–40). Whatever the case, we are confronted through the Sweyhat evidence with the development and prominence of a site complex that cannot be easily explained by the pastoral tribal model on its own. We must give consideration to other co-existing and perhaps competing modes of social-economic organization that must have existed at this time and appear to have varied from one settlement to the next. Moreover, evidence for the acquisition of wealth and status within one particularly energetic household forces us once more to look carefully at this urban institution, and factors that enabled households such as this to acquire wealth and status during this period.

In summary, the development of urban society with the Euphrates Valley of the Early Bronze Age is attested, although I have tried to point out that urbanism never developed to the same magnitude as it did elsewhere in Northern Mesopotamia and Western Syria where it accompanied the growth of powerful, centralized states. Moreover, when we look at the individual Euphrates sites, we are struck by the incredible diversity of their size, layout and constituents. Given this variability, it seems overly simplistic to apply one model of social-economic organization to the entire area during the millennium BCE. On the contrary, one should see a variety of organizational options and the adoption of several different types of socio-political strategies for which the success, stability and prosperity of the settlements and region was attained and maintained for several centuries.

Bibliography

- Akkermans, P. and Schwartz, G.
2003 *The Archaeology of Syria. From Complex Hunter-Gatherers to Early Urban Societies (ca. 16,000–300 BC)*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Archi, A.
1982 "About the Organization of the Eblaite State," *Studi Eblaïti* 5: 201–220.
- Blanton, R., Feinman, G.M., Kowalewski, S.A. and Peregrine, P.N.
1996 "A Dual-Processual Theory for the Evolution of Mesoamerican Civilization", *Current Anthropology* 37:1–14.
- Cooper, Lisa
2006 *Early Urbanism on the Syrian Euphrates*. London: Routledge.
- Danti, M. and Zettler, R.
2002 "Excavating an Enigma. The latest discoveries from Tell es-Sweyhat", *Expedition* 44: 36–45.
- Dornemann
1979 "Tell Hadidi: A Millennium of Bronze Age City Occupation", in D.N. Freedman (ed.) *Archaeological Projects from the Tabqa Dam Project – Euphrates Valley, Syria*, (AASOR 44) Cambridge, MA: American Schools of Oriental Research, pp. 113–51.

- Eichler, S., Frank, D.R., Machule, D., Mozer, G. and Pape, W.
1984 "Ausgrabungen in Tall Munbaqa 1983", *Mitteilungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft* 116: 65-93.
- Heusch, J.-C.
1980 "Tall Habuba Kabira im 3. und 2. Jahrtausend: Die Entwicklung der Baustruktur", in J.-C. Margueron (ed.) *Le Moyen Euphrate*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, pp. 159-78.
- Holland, T.A.
1975 "An Inscribed Weight from Tell Sweyhat in Syria", *Iraq* 37:75-76.
- McClellan, T.L.
1998 "Tell Banat North: The White Monument", in M. Lebeau (ed.) *About Subartu. Studies devoted to Upper Mesopotamia. Vol. 1: Landscape, Archaeology, Settlement*, (Subartu 4) Turnhout: Brepols, pp. 243-69.
1999 "Urbanism on the Upper Syrian Euphrates", in G. Del Olmo Lete and J.-L. Montero Fenollós (eds) *Archaeology of the Upper Syrian Euphrates. The Tishrin Dam Area. Proceedings of the International Symposium Held at Barcelona, Jan. 28th-30th, 1998*, Barcelona: Editorial AUSA, pp. 535-72.
- McClellan, T.L. and Porter, A.
1999 "Survey of Excavations at Tell Banat: Funerary Practices", in G. Del Olmo Lete and J.-L. Montero Fenollós (eds) *Archaeology of the Upper Syrian Euphrates. The Tishrin Dam Area. Proceedings of the International Symposium Held at Barcelona, Jan. 28th-30th, 1998*, Barcelona: Editorial AUSA, pp. 107-16.
- Machule, D., Karstens, K., Klapproth, H.-H., Mozer, G., Pape, W., Werner, P., Mayer, R., Mayer-Opificius, R. and Mackensen, M.
1986 "Ausgrabungen in Tall Munbaqa 1984", *Mitteilungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft* 118: 65-93.
- Mazzoni, S.
2003 "Ebla: Crafts and Power in an Emergent State of Third Millennium BC" *Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology* 16: 173-191.
- Okse, A. Tuba
2005 "Early Bronze Age Chamber Tomb Complexes at Gre Virike (Period IIA) on the Middle Euphrates", *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 339: 21-46.
- Olávarri, E. and Valdés Pereiro, C.
2001 "Excavaciones en Tell Qara Quzaq: Campañas IV-VI (1992-1994)", in G. del Olmo Lete, J.-L. Montero Fenollós and C. Valdés Pereiro (eds) *Tell Qara Quzaq II. Campañas IV-VI (1992-1994)*, Barcelona: Editorial AUSA, pp. 13-76.
- Orthmann, W.
1981 *Halawa 1977-1979*, Bonn: Dr. Rudolf Habelt.
1989 *Halawa 1980-1986*, Bonn: Dr. Rudolf Habelt.
- Otto, A.
2006 "Archaeological Perspectives on the Localization of Naram-Sin's Armnanum", *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 58 (2006): 1-26.
- Peltenburg, E.
1999 "Tell Jerablus Tahtani 1992-1996: A Summary", in G. Del Olmo Lete and J.-L. Montero Fenollós (eds) *Archaeology of the Upper Syrian Euphrates. The Tishrin Dam Area. Proceedings of the International Symposium Held at Barcelona, Jan. 28th-30th, 1998*, Barcelona: Editorial AUSA, pp. 97-105.
2008 "Enclosing the Ancestors and the Growth of Socio-Political Complexity in Early Bronze Age Syria", in G. Bartolini and M. G. Benedettini (eds) *Buried Among the Living. Roma 26-29 Aprile 2006*, Roma: La Sapienza, pp. 215-47.
- Peltenburg, E., Campbell, S., Carter, S., Stephen, F. and Tipping, R.
1997 "Jerablus-Tahtani, Syria, 1996: Preliminary Report", *Levant* 29: 1-18.
- Pfälzner, P.
2001 *Haus und Haushalt. Wohnformen des dritten Jahrtausends vor Christus in Nordmesopotamien*, Mainz am Rhein: von Zabern.

- Porter, A.
 1995 "The Third Millennium Settlement Complex at Tell Banat: Tell Kabir", *Damaszener Mitteilungen* 8: 125–63.
 2002a "The Dynamics of Death: Ancestors, Pastoralism, and the Origins of a Third-Millennium City in Syria", *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 325: 1–36.
 2002b "Communities in Conflict. Death and the Contest for Social Order in the Euphrates River Valley", *Near Eastern Archaeology* 65: 156–73.
- Porter, A. and McClellan, T.
 1998 "The Third Millennium Settlement Complex at Tell Banat: Results of the 1994 Excavations", *Damaszener Mitteilungen* 10: 11–63.
- Risvet, L.
 2007 "The Third Millennium Wall at Tell Leilan, Syria: Identity, Authority and Urbanism", in J. Bretschneider, J. Driessen and K. Van Lerberghe (eds) *Power and Architecture. Monumental Public Architecture in the Bronze Age Near East and Aegean*, Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, pp. 183–211.
- Stein, G. and Blackman M.J.
 1993 "The Organizational Context of Specialized Craft Production in Early Mesopotamian States", *Research in Economic Anthropology* 14: 29–59.
- Stein, G. and Wattenmaker, P.
 2003 "Settlements Trends and the Emergence of Social Complexity in the Leilan Region of the Habur Plains (Syria) from the Fourth to the Third Millennium B.C." in E. Rova and H. Weiss (eds) *The Origins of North Mesopotamian Civilization: Ninevite 5 Chronology, Economy, Society*, Turnhout: Brepols, pp. 361–86.
- Strommenger, E.
 1980 *Habuba Kabira. Eine Stadt vor 5000 Jahren. Ausgrabungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft am Euphrat in Habuba Kabira*, Mainz am Rhein: Von Zabern.
- Ur, Jason
 2002 "Surface Collection and Offsite Studies at Tell Hamoukar, 1999." *Iraq* 64: 15–44.
- Van Loon, M.N.
 2001 *Selenkahiye. Final Report on the University of Chicago and University of Amsterdam Excavations in the Tabqa Reservoir, Northern Syria, 1967–1975*, Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut.
- Wilkinson, T.J. and Tucker, D.J.
 1995 *Settlement Development in the North Jazirah, Iraq: A Study of the Archaeological Landscape*, Warminster, UK: Aris and Phillips.
- Zettler, R.L.
 1997 "Surface Collections and Excavations in the Lower Town and Lower Town South", in R. Zettler (ed.) *Subsistence and Settlement in a Marginal Environment: Tell es-Sweyhat, 1989–1995 Preliminary Report*, MASCA Research Papers in Science and Archaeology 14. Philadelphia: Museum Applied Science Center for Archaeology, University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, pp. 35–72.
- Zettler, R., Miller, N.F., Weber, J.A., Peregrine, P. and Danti, M.D.
 1996 "Tell es-Sweyhat, 1989–1995. A City in Northern Mesopotamia in the 3rd Millennium B.C.", *Expedition* 38: 14–36.