

A NEW ROYAL STATUE FROM TELL MISHRIFEH/QATNA

Daniele Morandi Bonacossi

During the 2002 excavation campaign in Operation J, on the summit of the acropolis of Tell Mishrifeh (Fig. 4), a new example of high Old Syrian royal statuary was uncovered (MSH02.J.3087.712).¹ This specimen represents a significant addition to the collection of stone and bronze statues of sitting male figures found at the site to date (DU MESNIL DU BUISSON 1927a–b, 294, pls. 80:1, 89:1, and 21–23, fig. 59, pl. 80:2; DU MESNIL DU BUISSON 1935, 44–45, fig. 4, pl. 5:1–2; DUSSAUD 1926; RONZEVALLÉ 1914)² and, especially, to the rather limited corpus of Old Syrian basalt votive statues of kings, queens, and dignitaries already known mainly from Middle Bronze Age Ebla (DOLCE 2002; MATTHIAE 1962, 1965, 1966, 1967, 1992; MAZZONI 1980).

The presentation and discussion of this recently discovered artistic product of ancient Qatna's royal workshops is dedicated as a mark of respect and appreciation to Manfred Bietak, the archaeologist to whom we owe the first wide-ranging attempt at synchronizing and linking together the ancient civilizations, which flourished in the Eastern Mediterranean

during the second millennium BC, and the excavator of Tell ed-Dab'a, a key site for the study of cultural contact and interference between the Nile Delta and the Levant.

The headless dolerite³ statue represents a male figure wearing a mantle with rolled borders and sitting on a throne (Figs. 1, 2a–e), and was found in a secondary context in one of the fills of a refuse pit containing LBA I ceramic diagnostics (Fig. 3), which was dug into a large pottery manufacturing area of the MBA and LBA I period after its abandonment.⁴

After the ceramic factory of the LBA I Sub-phases 7d–c fell out of use, a large pit (SU 3088) was dug (during the following Sub-phase 7b) in the western part of a mud work platform in which two pottery kilns were inserted. This large refuse pit, 7.40 m long, cut the platform and used the northern face of a wall (3319) of a monumental building (Building 8, located immediately to the South) as retaining wall, slightly scoring its plastered face (Fig. 4).

The pottery material recovered from its foundation trench indicates that Building 8 was built in the early

¹ Height 41 cm; width 40.4 cm. Two more possible fragments of royal statues were found in the same Operation during the 2003 excavation campaign (MSH03.J.4040.701 and 4040.712). For a recent review of the results of the excavations carried out by the Italian component of the joint Syrian-Italian-German project at Tell Mishrifeh, cf. AL-MAQDISSI, LUCIANI, MORANDI BONACOSSO, NOVÁK, PFÄLZNER 2002 and MORANDI BONACOSSO *et al.* 2003.

² A further statue of a sitting male figure was recovered in the 1970ies during building activities carried out at the site and is now kept in the National Museum of Hama (kind information of Dr. Michel al-Maqdissi). In 2002 the German team working at Tell Mishrifeh uncovered, under the second millennium palace, a royal grave dating to the LBA I, the entrance to which was guarded by two identical Old Syrian basalt male figures, each sitting on a throne and holding a cup in the right hand which rested on the thigh (DOHMANN-PFÄLZNER, NOVÁK, PFÄLZNER 2003, 16, fig. 3).

³ Petrographical, chemical and physical analyses of the stone used for the statue were carried out thanks to the cooperation of the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums of Syria, which allowed to sample a small quantity of stone from a break in the base of the figure to be ana-

lyzed in Italy. I am deeply indebted to the Director General of Antiquities at the time, Dr. J. Ahmar, and to the Director of the Excavations Service and Archaeological Studies and co-director of the international Mishrifeh project, Dr. M. Al-Maqdissi, for their help and understanding. I am also very grateful to Dr. L. Maritan (Department of Mineralogy and Petrology, University of Padua) for having analyzed the stone. In most publications on Syrian statuary sculpted in black extrusive igneous rock, the material has not been scientifically studied and is generally labelled as basalt. We know now that the new statue recovered from Operation J at Mishrifeh was worked from a block of dolerite, a black extrusive stone, which differs from basalt in its much coarser texture. This type of stone, which was possibly extracted from the quarries located approximately 10 km to the North of Tell Mishrifeh (analyses of material sampled from this area are in progress), may have been preferred to basalt by the sculptors active in the royal workshops of Qatna because of its larger crystals, which lent more brightness to the statues.

⁴ On the pottery production area of Operation J, cf. MORANDI BONACOSSO 2003 and MORANDI BONACOSSO in print.

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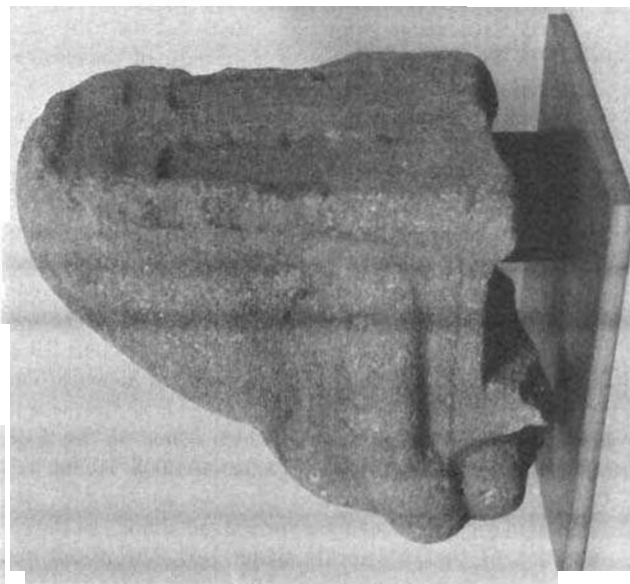
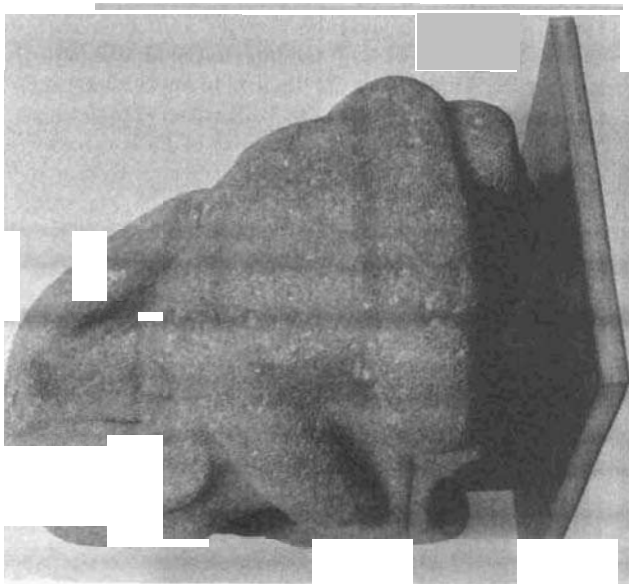
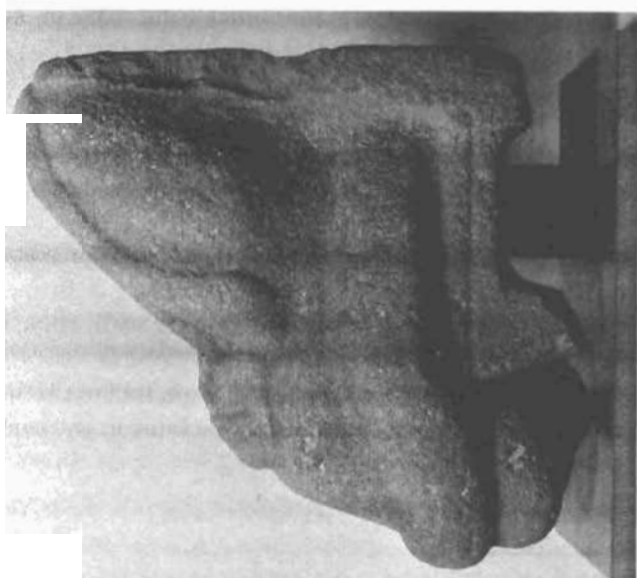
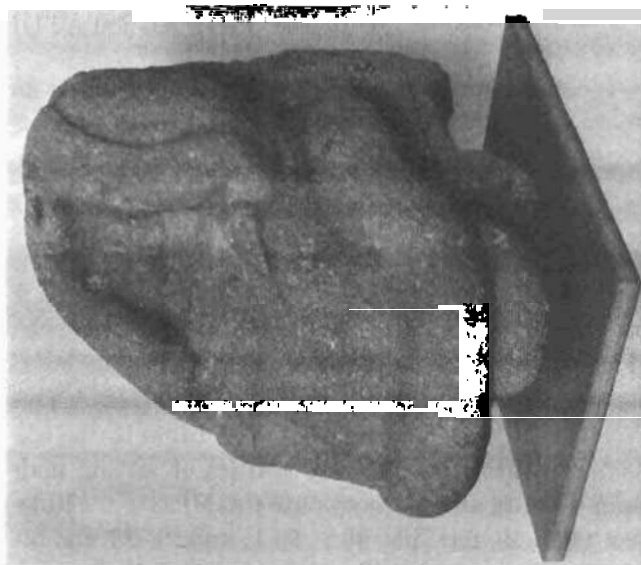
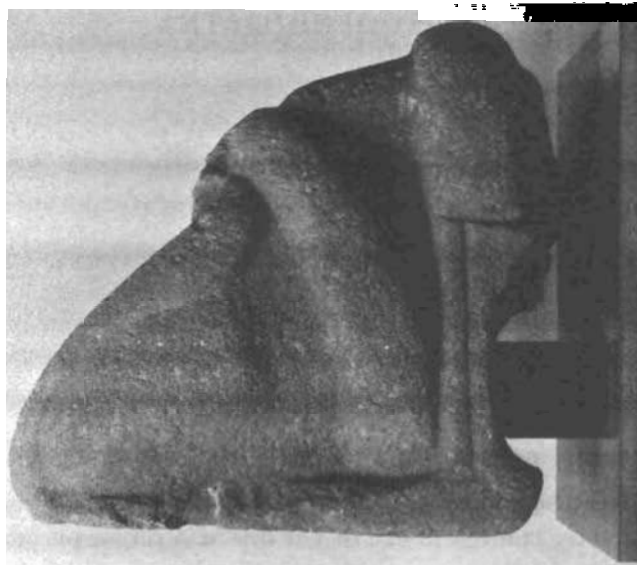


Fig. 1 Statue MSH02.J.3087.712
(Photographs M. Cusin)

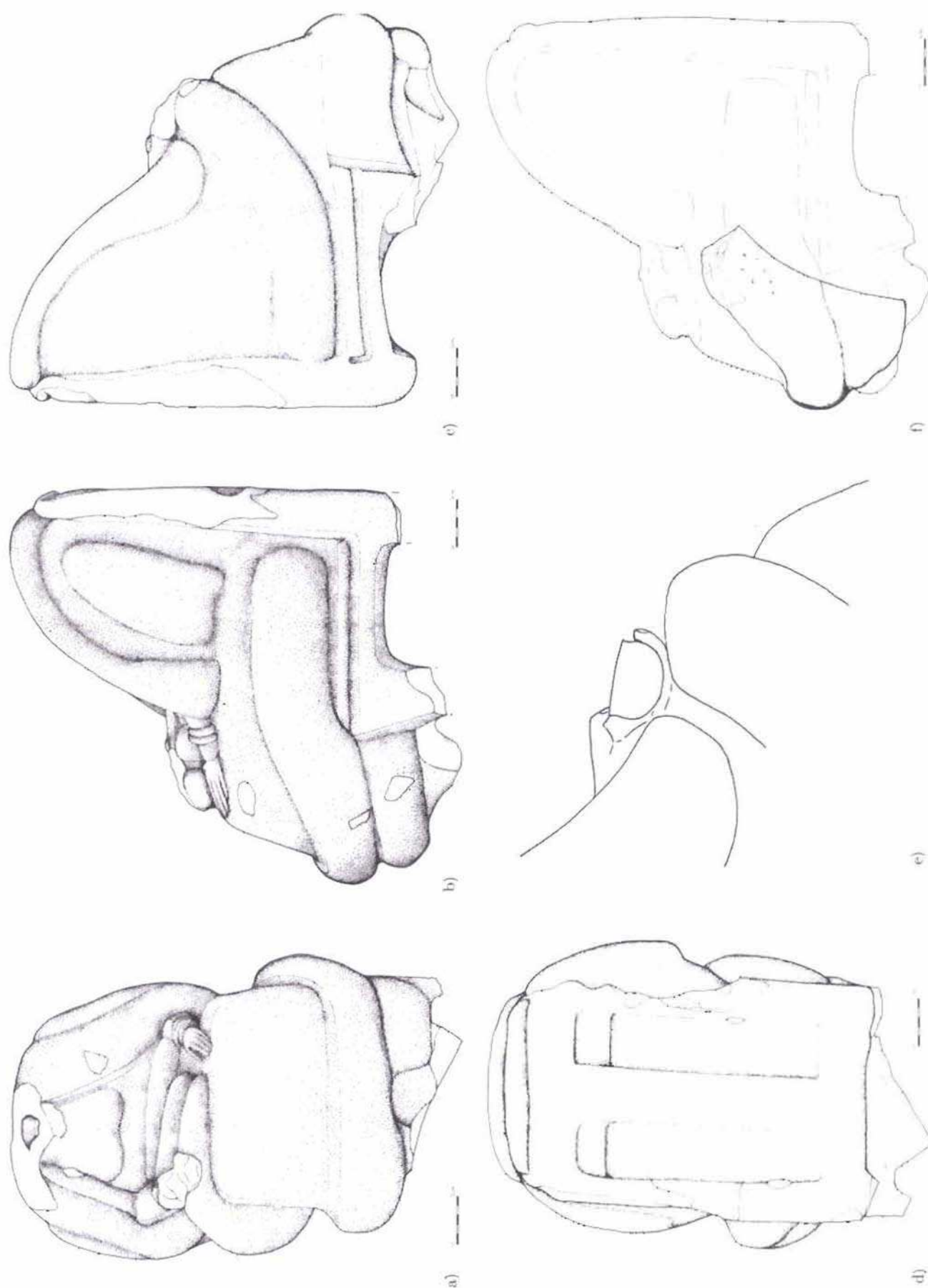


Fig. 2 a-d) Statue MSH02.J.3087.712; 2e. Reconstruction of the right hand holding a cup;
2f) Fragment of statue MSH03.J.4040.701 probably belonging to a dolente/basalt sculpture of a sitting male figure (Drawings S. Tinazzo)

MBA I. Only the northeastern corner of the building and part of its eastern wall 3409 have been excavated so far, but it can already be safely stated that we are dealing with a monumental building,⁵ probably with a public function, which must have occupied a large part of the acropolis summit immediately to the West of the pottery manufacturing area.

Building 8 was then partly demolished and encapsulated within the expanding ceramic factory of the MBA II and LBA I; it seems probable that most of the building has disappeared,⁶ though it cannot be excluded that its central and western part may have at least partly survived under the modern cemetery located to the West of Operation J. The possibility of reconstructing its layout in the future cannot therefore be excluded, though nothing is left – at least in the area excavated so far – of the floor of this imposing building.

The fills of the refuse pit 3088, which abutted Building 8 to the South, consist of various deposits of gravel, ash and fragments of mud-bricks and decomposed mud-brick material associated with LBA I pottery fragments that were thrown into the dump from the North at different stages, forming a series of superimposed layers sloping to the South. In one of the fills, a basalt statue portraying the enthroned figure of a headless king wearing the characteristic thick-bordered 'Syrian Cloak' was found. The statue was probably wrapped in a straw mat, copious remains of which were found underneath its left shoulder. This suggests that we are dealing with the intentional burial of this royal figure, perhaps a pious attempt to save in some way the statue of a deceased king.⁷

Finally, after the dump fell out of use (Sub-phase 7a), a circular pit 3318 containing small stones and a monumental basalt slab on edge was cut into its fills (Fig. 3).⁸

The discovery contexts of the two other possible royal statue fragments (MSH03.J.4040.701 and 4040.712) recovered from Operation J during the

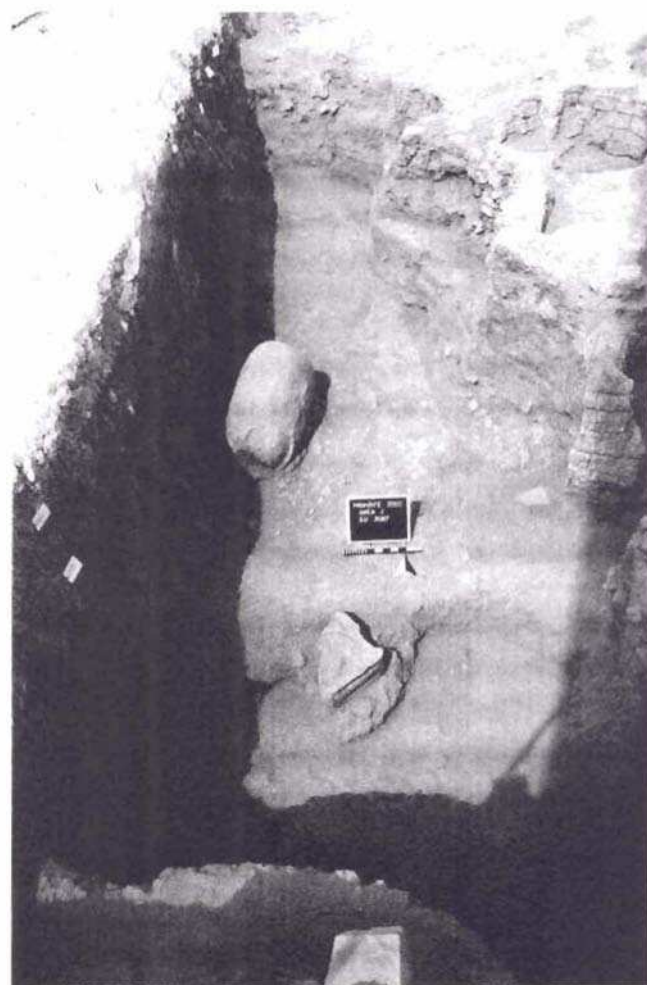


Fig. 3 Refuse pit 3088 of Sub-phase 7b with statue and pit 3318 of Sub-phase 7a with basalt slab 3317.702 *in situ* (Photograph M. Çınar)

2003 excavation campaign were different. During the IA II, these fragments were reused to build the stone foundations of the Phase I wall 4040 of Building 12, a construction consisting of three elongated rooms containing two large silos and several basalt artefacts (pestles and querns) used for the processing and storage of cereals.

⁵ Its walls are preserved for a total of 7,25 m in foundation and elevation and are 3,80 m thick. Wall 3409 has been already brought to light for a length of 20 m.

⁶ Building 8 has been also severely damaged in its northeastern part by the water tower of the modern village.

⁷ On the practice of burying royal statues for ritual or magic reasons, which in Syria and Anatolia is documented from the MBA through the IA II and III, cf. the cases of the group of statues buried in the region of the porch of Temple P2 at Ebla (MATTHIAE 1992), the statue of Idrimi of Alalakh, interred in a pit in an annexe of the Temple of Alalakh IB (WOOLLEY 1955, 88–89, pl. 12b), of the royal

statue from Zincirli now in the Istanbul Museum, which was found near the *Khilani J* (VON LUSCHAN and JACOBY 1900, 238–289, 362–369, figs. 194, 261–268, pl. 64), and of the Ankara Museum statue uncovered in one of the inner rooms of the "Lions Gate" of Malatya (DELAPORTE 1940, 35–38, pls. 14, 26–28).

⁸ Due to its shape and size, the latter might be interpreted as a monumental threshold robbed from a public building or perhaps as a betylus-type stone resulting from the sack of a temple (on the cult of betyles in second millennium Syria, cf. DURAND 1985a–b).

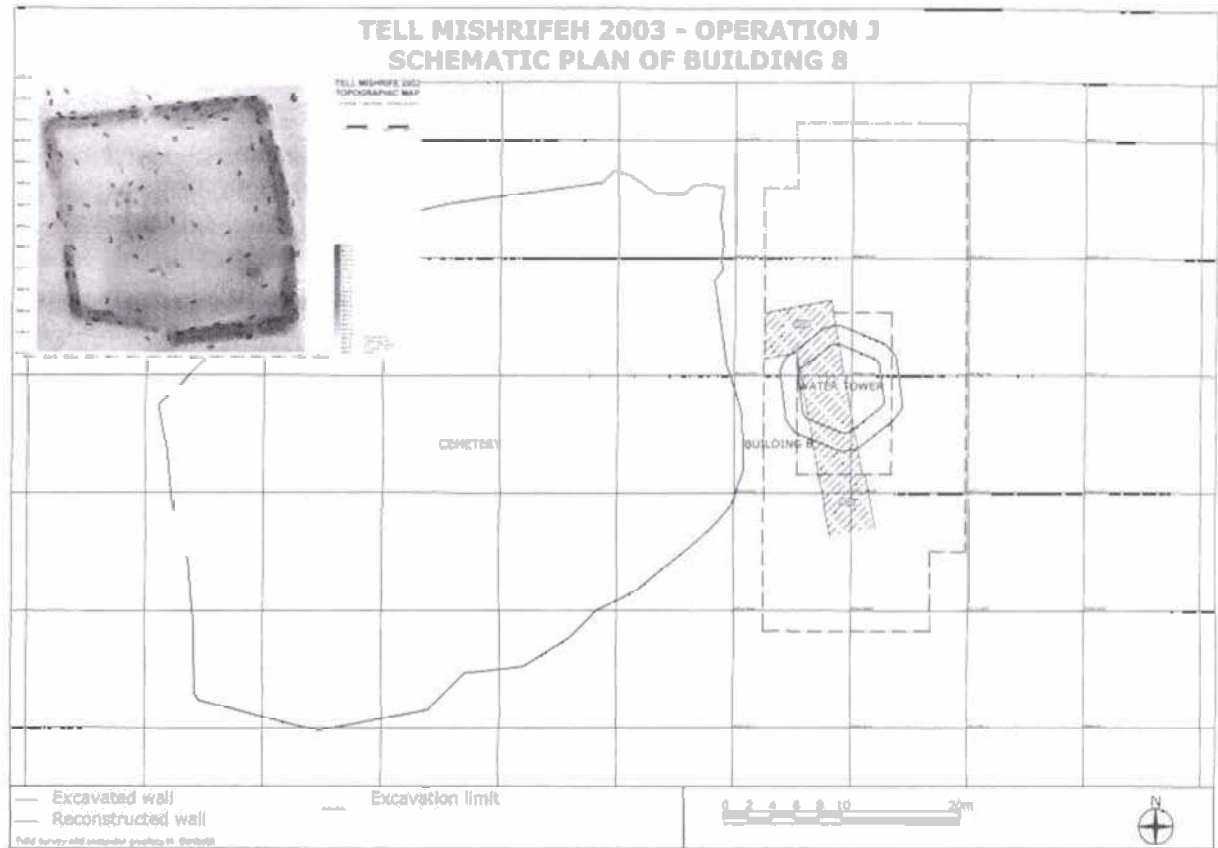


Fig. 4 Topographic map of Tell Mishrifeh (Topographic survey A. Beinart and A. Marchesini) and schematic plan of Building 8 (Drawing M. Garibaldi)

Fragment MSH03.J.4040.701 probably belonged to a dolerite/basalt sculpture⁹ of a sitting figure similar to – though larger than – the statue recovered from the refuse pit. The fragment might correspond to the left lower leg covered by a mantle with swollen borders of an enthroned royal figure (Fig. 2f).¹⁰ The characteristic classic Old and Middle Syrian royal mantle with rolled borders is clearly recognizable. The sculpture fragment was later reworked into a large quern and finally used as a building stone in the foundations of wall 4040 (Building 12). The identification of dolerite/basalt fragment MSH03.J.4040.712 is more problematic; its interpretation as part of a statue cannot be considered unequivocal.¹¹

As observed above, these remains of dolerite/basalt statuary probably belong to at least two votive statues

of male personages – most likely deified royal ancestors¹² – each sitting on a throne, wearing an elaborate mantle with rolled borders and holding a cup in the right hand, which rests on the thigh and with the left hand stretched out on the knee.

The left wrist of statue MSH02.J.3087.712 wore a double bracelet. The head, which was not found in the dump, must have originally been fastened to the body of the statue by means of a dolerite tenon sculpted from the same stone block as the head, or possibly by a metal rod, as indicated by the presence of a 3 cm deep round hole with a diameter of 3 cm at the base of the neck.¹³

The statue bears a few surface abrasions which do not generally hinder the reading of the sculpture. The understanding of the right hand of the male fig-

⁹ No study of the stone has yet been carried out.

¹⁰ Height 37 cm; width 21.6 cm.

¹¹ Height 23.2 cm; width 21.2 cm.

¹² The interpretation of sitting or standing male figures in bronze and stone wearing a cloak with thickly rolled borders and an ovoid tiara (possibly existing also in the case of

our headless statue) as deified royal *rapi'uma* has been convincingly proposed by MATTHIAE (1990, 346–349 with further bibliography).

¹³ It is impossible to ascertain whether the head was executed in a different material (metal?) from the rest of the body. No parallel for such a practice is known so far for MBA Syria.

ure is, however, hampered by a rather extended abrasion. Nonetheless, the irregular rounded shape, which the abraded stone still shows, and especially the presence of a rounded bulge immediately after the wrist, which is what survives of the knuckle of the right thumb represented in the act of holding a cup,¹⁴ indicate that the personage held a drinking bowl in his right hand (Fig. 2:a-c, e).

The typology of the sitting male figure holding a cup is very widespread in Old Syrian votive statuary – not only royal statuary – from the archaic phase onwards (cf. footnote 14; MATTHIAE 1992, 117–118; MAZZONI 1980, 82–83). This figurative tradition continued through the Middle Syrian statuary production of Hazor¹⁵ and into the New Syrian period, from which it is documented by the Tell Halaf funerary statues (MOORTGAT 1955, 35–37, 123, pls. 1–9, 153).

Unfortunately, the shape of the cup, which the personage held in his right hand, cannot be reconstructed. We can not ascertain whether the bowl was of the well-known carinated type with out-turned rim, well attested during the MBA I and the first part of the MBA II, but which was no longer in use in the final phase of the MBA II (MATTHIAE 1992, 118; NIGRO 2002).

No precise chronological indication is therefore provided neither by this antiquarian element or by the general – long lasting – iconography of the sitting male figure.

Similarly, the throne on which the figure sits does not add any significant information in this respect, especially because a detailed comparison with the numerous chairs and thrones represented in the Old and Middle Syrian statuary and in particular in the glyptics is not possible due to the unexceptional structure of the throne and the miniaturistic character of the representations on cylinder seals.¹⁶

The only antiquarian element that can offer some dating evidence with regard to our statue – though only in very broad terms – is represented by the mantle with rolled borders. The chronological evolution of clothing items in second millennium Syrian statues

and, especially, the iconographic and stylistic rendering of mantles have been the object of intense debate among scholars; a general consensus on this issue, however, has not yet emerged (COLLON 1975, 140; MATTHIAE 1992; MAZZONI 1979 and 1980; PORADA 1957, 195; SCHROER 1985, 65; WINTER 1987, 205–216). Recently, SCHROER (1985, 65) and WINTER (1987, 205–216) have denied any value as a chronological indicator to the mantle typologies due to the fact that some temporal overlapping among the different types is certainly found. This is of course true, but a closer evaluation of the different cloak typologies combined with a stylistic analysis not just of the mantle, but of the whole figure, may lead to more precise chronological classifications of the second millennium votive royal statuary.

Briefly, three main cloak types are documented in Old and Middle Syrian statuary and glyptics:

1. A mantle with a thin double edge,¹⁷ which is portrayed on seals until around 1750 BC (MATTHIAE 1992, 121–122).
2. A cloak with fringed borders,¹⁸ which is widely found in statues and in glyptics from the second half of the nineteenth century BC. The fringed cloak seems to become less frequent around 1750 BC and it disappears totally by the end of the eighteenth century (MATTHIAE 1992, 122).
3. A mantle with rolled borders that wraps around the sitting figure in an elaborate way. The cloak with swollen rounded borders, which is seen also in the Mishrifeh statue and known from around 1750 BC, was probably introduced into the classical Old Syrian glyptics under the influence of the Aleppo workshops, where it most likely originated (MATTHIAE 2000, 186, 212).

In the Yamkhad royal glyptic found at Alalakh VII, the mantle with rolled borders is frequently represented from the reign of Abba-El, son of Hammurabi I (mid-eighteenth century BC; cf. COLLON 1987, no. 542) and continues to be well attested during the reigns of his nephew Niqmeuh, son of

¹⁴ As is shown, for instance, by statues TM.65.A.234, TM.68.G.70, TM.72.S.13, TM.64.B.24, TM.71.B.952, TM.75.Q.500, TM.88.P.627, and TM.89.P.314 from Ebla (MATTHIAE 1992, pls. 50:1, 52:4, 53:2; MAZZONI 1980, 82).

¹⁵ Statues from the LBA III temple, stratum IA and well 2157 from the LBA II temple, stratum IB (YADIN 1966, pls. 326–327 and 330). An earlier date for the latter, at the end of the high Old Syrian period (between 1750 and 1600 BC; cf. MATTHIAE 1992, 126) has been advocated on the basis of

iconographic and stylistic considerations by S. MAZZONI (1980, 82, 96–97).

¹⁶ For a discussion on the evolution of the chairs in the Old Syrian statuary and glyptics, cf. MATTHIAE 1992, 119–120.

¹⁷ As seen on Ibbit-Lim's torso from Ebla (MATTHIAE AND PETTINATO 1972).

¹⁸ Such as in the statues from the P2 Temple at Ebla (MATTHIAE 1992) and in those found in the antechamber of the Royal Grave at Qatna. Cf. also footnotes 2 and 14.

Yarim-Lim II (COLLON 1987, no. 214), and Yarim-Lim III (around 1630 BC; COLLON 1987, no. 215).¹⁹

In the Ebla glyptics, the royal mantle with rolled borders is well-known thanks to several jar impressions recovered from the Old Syrian destruction level of Room L. 3100 in the Western Palace. The impressions belong to the dynastic seal of a prince, who was the son of king Indilingur of Ebla, probably the ruler during whose reign the city fell to the siege of the Hittite king Mursili I. The impressions can be dated to the period c. 1650–1600 BC.

This type of mantle with swollen borders is well represented in a class of royal bronze figurines, such as the statuette of a standing king from Sueidiah dated to the seventeenth century BC (NEGBI 1976, 170 no. 1432, pl. 31), the bronze figurine probably from Mishrifeh now kept in the Louvre Museum, which demonstrates the survival of the classical Old Syrian figurative and stylistic tradition until the sixteenth–fifteenth centuries BC (cf. DUSSAUD 1926 and 1949, 61–62, fig. 26; MATTHIAE 1962, 54–55; SPYCKET 1981, 285, pl. 182; RONZEVILLE 1914), and the statuette of a sitting king from Megiddo IX–VII, sixteenth–fifteenth centuries BC (LOUD 1948, pl. 235).

The stylistic and iconographic parallels with the limited series of bronze figurines mentioned above show that this important element of clothing was in use until the fifteenth century BC. The royal votive stone statuary, however, indicates that this antiquarian element may be found until the fourteenth–thirteenth centuries BC,²⁰ whilst in the glyptics the cloak with swollen borders is used only until the late seventeenth–early sixteenth centuries BC.²¹

Although the archaeological context of our Operation J statue would thus lead us to place this example of high royal votive statuary in the early Middle Syrian period (sixteenth–fifteenth centuries BC), we must keep in mind that it was originally placed elsewhere and then subsequently ritually buried in a Sub-phase 7b refuse dump. Furthermore, the anti-

quarian elements, such as the mantle with rolled borders, allow to us to date this royal sculpture as from the late Old Syrian period (c. 1750/1700–1600 BC).

The stylistic execution of the body of the personage, elegant but rather static and slightly stocky, differs from the elongated stylistic rendering of the tall and thin standing and sitting human figures which characterize Middle Syrian metal and stone statuary.²² Furthermore, the elaborated wrapping of the rolled borders of the cloak around the king's body and their plastic arrangement on his lap in three soft and swollen parallel folds bring this statue close to the baroque tendency typical of the late Old Syrian period (TEISSIER 1984, 74).

In synthesis, the antiquarian, iconographic, and stylistic elements discussed above suggest that this statue of a deified royal ancestor from the summit of the Qatna acropolis should be dated to the late Old Syrian period (1750/1700–1600 BC).

The statue fragment MSH03.J.4040.701 from a wall of Building 12, which possibly corresponds to the lower leg of an enthroned royal figure with a mantle with rolled borders, seems to share the same antiquarian (mantle) and stylistic (soft and plastic execution of the swollen cloak borders) characteristics of the headless royal statue. We may hypothesize that this statue fragment dates to the very same period.

Since at least two contemporary and possibly similar votive royal statues have been recovered from Operation J—although from different archaeological contexts—and since we know that at Ebla²³ and at Qatna itself²⁴ pairs of statues were dedicated in temples and put in royal graves during the Old and Middle Syrian periods (MATTHIAE 1992, 117), we cannot rule out that statues MSH02.J.3087.712 and MSH03.J.4040.701 belonged to a similar pair.

This leads us to the question of the original placement of the two statues discovered in Operation J. It seems probable that the statue and the monumental

¹⁹ Further representations of this type of mantle in the Old Syrian glyptics are: COLLON 1987, nos. 216–218, 453, 511, 543–544, 707, 770, 790, 932. See also TEISSIER 1984, nos. 451–455, 457, 478, 522.

²⁰ Cf. the so-called 'El statuette' in dolomite probably portraying a king on his throne from the *Rhyta* Temple at Ugarit (MALLET 1987).

²¹ However, it has to be kept in mind that seals from stratified Syrian contexts of the early Middle Syrian period, that is from the epoch included between approximately 1620 and 1500 BC are extremely rare (TEISSIER 1984, 73–74).

²² Cf., for instance, the Jabbul head (DUSSAUD 1926, 341, pl.

71), the bronze figurine of a standing king from Sueidiah (NEGBI 1976, 170 no. 1432, pl. 31), and the bronze deified figurine of a sitting king from Mishrifeh (DUSSAUD 1926; RONZEVILLE 1914).

²³ Cf. the group of votive figures from Temple P2 (MATTHIAE 1992) and the fragmentary statues from Temple D (MATTHIAE 1967, 126–127, 130, 138, pl. 60:2–3) and Temple G3 on the acropolis (MATTHIAE 1980, 60–61, fig. 13).

²⁴ Cf. the pair of identical statues of sitting royal ancestors placed on both sides of the entrance to the royal grave underneath the palace (DOHMANN-PFÄLZNER, NOVÁK, PFÄLZNER 2003, 16, fig. 3).

threshold – or perhaps even a betylus-type stone²⁵ – discovered in secondary contexts in the two LBA I dumps of Sub-phases 7b and 7a result from the robbing of an earlier, abandoned Middle Bronze Age public building which, considering the size and weight of the statue and the architectural elements found in its proximity,²⁶ was probably located not far away from where they were found.

We may hypothesize that the re-used basalt architectural elements and the royal statues originally came from Building 8, which, with its imposing size,²⁷ must have towered from the top of the acropolis over the whole city. Excavation here has only just begun and much remains to be discovered.

For this reason, nothing can be said so far about the function and layout of public Building 8, which was erected during the very early part of the MBA I and abandoned during the late MBA II or early LBA I.

However, its monumentality, its location on the summit of the central mound of the acropolis, i.e. the highest and most central part of the city, the possible

presence in it of a pair of late Old Syrian king statues, and above all the fact that it was erected at the very onset of the second millennium BC – when the later Royal Palace had not yet been constructed – and remained in use during the whole MBA, are all elements that do not allow to exclude that Building 8 may have been Qatna's earlier Royal Palace or, alternatively, one of the religious buildings of the Old Syrian city of Qatna, perhaps the dynastic temple. In this respect it is worth remembering that Temple D, which has been interpreted by its excavator as the sanctuary of the ruling dynasty (MATTHIAE 1989, figs. 155–160), was situated on the acropolis of contemporary Ebla in a location which parallels that of Building 8.

However, until future excavations will make a more extensive exploration of Building 8 possible, the interpretation of this public building as the royal palace or temple of the Old Syrian city and the proposed consecration in it of a pair of statues portraying enthroned deified royal ancestors must remain hypothetical.

²⁵ Cf. footnote 8.

²⁶ On the trodden floor 2444 of Iron Age II Phase 1, a large basalt basin was found. Originally this basin was most likely a column base 2 m in diameter with a moulding running all around its smoothed circumference, which was probably dug up nearby and transformed into a wine press in the Iron Age II (cf. MORANDI BONACOSSÌ 2003, 109, fig. 26).

Immediately to the SW of the basin, on the same trodden floor, a further basalt threshold or lintel with a central rectangular socket, which probably housed a bolt which closed the door, was uncovered.

²⁷ Cf. footnote 5.

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