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The Anatolian Middle Bronze Age kingdoms and Alalakh: Mukish, Kanesh and trade

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Abstract

The comparisons at the heart of this article concern the varying roles of cuneiform texts, instrumental analysis and artefacts at the Bronze Age capital of Alalakh, located in the northeastern Mediterranean region of southern Turkey. The production of fine artefacts, such as sophisticated metallurgy, glass, faience, ivory carving and, especially, bronze, was under palace patronage, while trade and the networks of inter-regional relations facilitated the transport of materials across great distances in the ancient Near East. Several lines of evidence suggest that exchange relationships between Alalakh and the Middle Bronze Age central Anatolian kingdoms, such as Kanesh, were established prior to the arrival of Hattusili I. One category of artefact, ivory and bone with metallic embellishments, is emphasised here since the crafting of ivory and bone entails the use of local resources, while the plating with precious metals reflects artistic expression and exploitation that is international in scope. Several analytical techniques are presented, such as lead isotope ratios, scanning electron microscopy and polarizing light microscopy, which have aided in defining the artistic expression of Alalakh and the production of artefacts of power and prestige.

Özet

Bu makalenin özündeki değerlendirme, Güney Anadolu'nun Kuzeydoğu Akdeniz kesiminde yer alan ve bir Bronz Çağ başkenti olan Alalakh'ta bulunan çiviyazılı metinlerin, buluntu analizleri ve insan yapısı nesnelerin değişik rolleri ile ilgilidir. Cam, fayans yapımı, fildişi oymacılığı, gelişmiş madenlerden ve özellikle bronzdan yapılan malların üretimi sarayın tekelindeydi. Diğer yandan bölgeler arası ticaret ve iletişim ağları malların tüm Yakın Doğu'da çok geniş bir coğrafyaya yayılmasını kolaylaştırmaktaydı. Bir dizi kanıt, Alalakh ile Kanesh gibi Orta Anadolu'nun Orta Bronz Çağı krallıkları arasındaki takas ilişkisinin, I. Hattusili döneminden önce kurulduğunu göstermektedir. Burada özellikle, üzeri madeni süslemeli fildişi ve kemik buluntu grubu üzerinde durulmaktadır. Fildişi ve kemik işçiliği yerel kaynakların kullanımını gerektirirken, değerli maden kaplama işi daha uluslararası ölçekte bir sanatsal bakış ve işçilik gerektirir. Alalakh'taki sanatsal bakış açısı ile güç ve itibara yönelik nesnelerin üretimini tanımlamamıza yardımcı olmak üzere kurşun izotop oranları, taramalı elektron mikroskobu ve polarize ışık mikroskobu gibi çok sayıda analitik yöntem kullanılmıştır.

This article addresses palace-based craft production and trade relations between Alalakh and Middle Bronze Age central Anatolian kingdoms. Considered to be one of the few viable outlets between Europe and Asia, the peninsula of Anatolia certainly was a bridge linking environments and facilitating cultural exchanges. Having said this, however, the metaphorical use of the word 'bridge' has long been problematical. Emphasising Anatolia as a bridge marginalises local developments and reduces the cultural landscape into an offshoot of other

areas. It is the notion of connectivity, and the capacity to absorb, that is implied here, which can lead auspiciously to great creativity and innovation by local populations. Therefore, this discussion of inter-regional exchange with central Anatolia is framed within Alalakh and central Anatolia's emphasis on the production of prestige items targeted at local élite consumption. Specialised production and exchange of luxurious items, and the raw materials to produce them, enhances status, facilitates formation of alliances and becomes vital for rituals,

which, together, underlie political power (Appadurai 2000). It was the growing political relationships of Alalakh and its north Syrian interaction sphere that set the stage for the development of power politics in the subsequent Hittite period.

It is important to underscore the fact that semantics should reflect reality, thus, some definitions used here will diverge from traditional archaeological practice. For example, since the importance of local developments is stressed, the settlements of early second millennium BC Anatolia are referred to collectively as 'Middle Bronze Age kingdoms' or by their name, Kanesh, and not as the Assyrian trading colonies – it seems strange to refer to these cities as colonies based only on the writings of non-local guest merchants living in the lower town of an Anatolian city. Another modification offered is to shy away from labelling Anatolia as a resource area *prima facie*, or as 'the periphery of Syria or Mesopotamia', and afford equal interpretive emphasis to the growth of complex political confederations, regional production differences brought about by varying skills and trade. Many of these factors played major developmental roles during the rise of the second millennium BC empire of the Hittites. Having established these sets of definitions, the trade relationships between central Anatolia and the area of the Amuq, the Mukish Kingdom and its capital, Alalakh, will be explored in terms of craft workshops and palace patronage. One category of artefact, ivory and bone inlaid furniture, is emphasised here since the crafting entails the use of local faunal resources, while the plating with precious metals reflects artistic expression and exploitation that is international in scope.

Tell Atchana was originally designated site no. 136 in Robert Braidwood's Amuq survey of the 1930s. It was subsequently excavated by Sir Leonard Woolley from 1936–1939 and after World War II from 1946–1949 for the British Museum and Oxford University (Braidwood 1937; Woolley 1955). As was traditional during the era he was excavating, Woolley stressed the exotic and downplayed the mundane, local material culture. Aspects of Alalakh that reflected the nature of a regional state capital were, nevertheless, quite impressive; that is, the multi-lingual archives, a sequence of temples and palaces, and material indicative of a lively international discourse, if not shared artistic styles, with far-flung areas. The global nature of these cultural remains became the catalyst for the emergence of this Amuq capital as a special place of interest to the scholarly world.

The recent excavations at Alalakh are part of long-range, broadly-based archaeological investigations in the state of Hatay in southern Turkey which began in 1995 (Yener 2005). Three seasons of excavations took

place in 2003, 2004 and 2006. From their inception, the Amuq Valley Regional Projects (hereafter AVRPs) were conceived as a series of coordinated field projects enabling research into key themes about regional and inter-regional relationships. As work continues in refining the sequences of the early second millennium BC represented by Alalakh, a more nuanced understanding will emerge of the inter-site relationships of the Amuq survey sites, that is, the organisation of the Mukish Kingdom itself. Reconstituting the management practices of palace economies, in this case, one that is enthralled to a higher authority (Aleppo-Yamhad), requires data about Alalakh's interaction with satellite villages within the Amuq and its highlands. Glimpses can be caught of how palace patronage systems and local interaction was administered between vassals within the kingdom from the level VII tablets (Magness-Gardiner 1994). However, material cultural studies for intra-kingdom early second millennium dynamics still await the precision of well-stratified local ceramic sequences.

Nevertheless, earlier excavations at Alalakh yielded material evidence demonstrating specialised skills not only to make high status items, but also to organise the strategic production and trade of artefacts that would have theoretically concentrated privilege in certain sectors of the population. This is a strategy of rulers and other élites to assert control over technical knowledge, production, display and consumption of wealth, frequently in the form of fine artefacts made from precious materials (Liverani 1990; Helms 1993). Baines and Yoffee (1998) called this behaviour 'high culture', which they defined as élite production and consumption under the control of rulers and their gods (see also Sherratt, Sherratt 1991). Sophisticated metallurgy, glass, faience, ivory carving and especially bronze characterise the commodities produced in Alalakh workshops, while trade and the networks of inter-regional relations facilitated the transport of materials across great distances. At issue here is the extent to which there was a north-south nexus of exchange along the coastal eastern Mediterranean during the complex commercial trade networks of the Kanesh-Assur system, which, to date, by-passes the south.

The advantage of conducting research about the second millennium BC is the availability of textual documentation both in central Anatolia and at Alalakh, which is only a generation or so apart in date. During the early second millennium BC, the Near East was the locus of a remarkable economic and political tableau. Some texts from the kingdom of Kanesh hint at a world of complicated Anatolian politics; but the bulk of the texts provide real insight into exchanged commodities, some

managed by Assyrian merchants, such as metals, both precious and utilitarian, textiles and craft items. The Middle Bronze Age city of Kanesh is larger than originally thought (Özgüç 1999; 2003); some estimates range from 30–60ha in size, including the lower town where both the local populations and foreign Assyrian merchants resided (level II: dated ca 1974–1836 BC; level Ib: dated ca 1800–1728 BC; Veenhof 2003 and dating anomalies noted in Newton, Kuniholm 2004). Clearly what was earlier referred to as the ‘Karum’ or merchant ‘colony’ was actually a bustling lower town 2–3km long. That is, the Assyrian merchants were living side by side with the local, multi-ethnic Anatolian populations (Müller-Karpe 1994). Furthermore, the lower town was also heavily given over to industrial production, with malodorous metal-smelting workshops situated uncomfortably close to domestic quarters. From stylistic evidence, the products of the industry in the lower town, such as the duck-billed axes, gold jewellery, moulds and lead figurines and other items, appear to have been traded throughout Syro-Mesopotamia and Anatolia. Thus, it is possible to hypothesise lively exchanges of opulent gifts and perhaps brides with dowries within a growing context of trade, tribute and diplomacy during the Middle Bronze Age.

The later phases of Kanesh, level Ib, which can also be documented at Acemhöyük and Karahöyük-Konya, saw a shift in the direction of trade from northern Mesopotamia to Syria. The reasons for this are complex and evidence is based on stylistic linkages with inland Syrian sites such as Ebla (Matthiae 1989) and philological arguments. I would argue that the shift also encompassed the Levantine corridor along the Great Rift Valley of the eastern Mediterranean and Alalakh. Unfortunately textual and material evidence of contacts of central Anatolian sites with Alalakh or the southern coast of Turkey, often referred to as the land of ‘silver mountains and cedar forests’, are rare during the Middle Bronze Age. This is due in part to the depth of these deposits and the very small exposures in the previously excavated sites in the south, such as Tarsus, Mersin and Alalakh. The Middle Bronze Age levels of the coastal site at Kinet Höyük are now bringing new evidence to light (Gates 2006) and the reactivation of excavations at Mersin and Tarsus promise further clarification of this less well-known period in this region (Özyar 2005). The silver mountains of myth are, of course, the Taurus mountain range, where hundreds of silver and gold mines, as well as the Kestel tin mine, have been documented (Yener 2000). Highland pasture, as well as cedar, juniper and hard wood-forest resources, are part of the alpine Taurus, Amanus and Lebanese coastal mountains.

In the 18th/17th century BC Alalakh was an apparently prosperous city on the Orontes river, straddling the trade route between Mesopotamia and the Mediterranean Sea. As the capital city of the kingdom of Mukish, Alalakh was itself a vassal of Yamhad, modern-day Aleppo in Syria, which at the time was the most powerful local, independent kingdom. Sitting on fertile agricultural land, as well as important routes of access, the Amuq valley was likely to have been criss-crossed by traders, merchants and diplomats bearing gifts for the purpose of manipulating diplomatic relations. From Alalakh, Yarim-Lim and his successors managed his family’s holdings across the northern Levant until the early 16th century, when the city was conquered and sacked, probably by the Hittite king, Hattusili I (Bryce 1998). Yarim-Lim’s rule of Alalakh was marked by the construction of a new temple, palace and city gate. These structures, appearing in level VII, were monumental in scale and contained a host of rich, exotic artefacts.

The temple contained a long list of objects made from materials that originated all over the Near East, including ivory, metal, precious stones and ceramics. These riches probably reached their destination through complex exchange relationships between states and, in particular, wealthy households. Indeed, the alliances between cities were forged by marriages and gift exchanges (Yener 2006; in press), officially in the form of taxes on goods and, unofficially, in the form of presents shared among the ruling families and frequently given as offerings to temples. A treasure trove of precious objects was found (despite looting) in the palace, including pieces of furniture, statues, a comb, beads, lamps and other objects made from a bewildering variety of materials. These materials include ivory, obsidian, rock crystal, diorite, gold foil, shell, carnelian, glass, lapis lazuli and alabaster, many of which reflect the artistic expression of Alalakh. The sumptuous palatial luxury finds and deposits of raw materials stored in several rooms of the palace and temple structures underscore the importance of palace sector patronage and the production of artefacts of power and prestige.

It is believed that Alalakh’s location was at the ‘heart of ivory trade network and is evidenced by the store of elephant tusks found in palace VII’ (Stein 1997: 58; see also Miller 1986). More importantly, there was evidence of ivory production debris within palace levels IV and VII as well as in the royal precinct (the so-called private houses area) level II. Five massive tusks (1.6m) of an Indian elephant (*elephas maximus*; Woolley 1948: 14; 1955: pl. 16; Collon 1977) were found in room 11 of palace VII (fig. 1). Further proof comes from the record of an elephant bone with saw marks from level VIII



Fig. 1. Indian elephant tusks in the depot of the Hatay Archaeological Museum (photo: author)

(Woolley 1955: 288, n. 3), a lower jaw from level IV room 21 or 22 (Woolley 1939: 15; 1955: 123, 288) and a lower jaw from level II private houses (Woolley 1939: 15, n. 1).

Although the publications of Alalakh depict bone and ivory inlay, nothing prepared us for the hundreds of undocumented, variously sized, geometric shapes and fragments for inlaying furniture (fig. 2) which were found stored in Woolley's dig-house depot located on the mound (Yener 2002). A veritable warehouse of shapes and sizes in various stages of completion were represented in the assemblage. Many pieces of ivory, especially the ones which have curvilinear s-shaped profiles, appear to have a red pigment on them (fig. 3). Some appear to be musical instrument fragments (fig. 4). Given the finds of many bronze blades and other furniture inlay pieces, a workshop is plausible in rooms 11–13 of the level VII palace (Woolley 1948: 13). The popularity and local production of inlaid furniture in the Middle Bronze Age and subsequent Late Bronze Age (see Kantor 1956; Barnett 1982; Caubet, Poplin 1987) can be evidenced by similar caches of mosaic inlays found in Mitannian levels at Nuzi (Starr 1939: 487). The widespread production of inlaid ivory furniture continued in the Iron Age (Winter 1976).

The wealth of the palace obtained by trade, tribute or gifts is echoed in several Alalakh tablets, one of which mentions ivory. Alalakh tablet 366 from level VII cites silver for ivory (30 *GÍN KÙBABBAR ši-in-nu*). This tablet was found in an adjoining room to the elephant tusks (Wiseman 1953: 101, line 16; Lauinger 2007). Whether the ivory was from local Amuq elephants and thus supplied from satellite villages/and or hunted in the marshy areas of the Mukish plain or from further afield is not known. While tusks or the whole skull of an elephant can be imported, having the leg bones at a site suggests that a whole animal existed in the Amuq during an earlier period. Unpublished photographs from the archives of the Oriental Institute's Amuq excavations also document

elephant leg bones used as fire dogs in a hearth dating to the Chalcolithic period. A worked ivory artefact was found in Judaidah dated to the first mixed range (Braidwood, Braidwood 1960: fig. 103:5).

Several pieces (fig. 5) from the Alalakh depot boxes labelled level VII were selected for further instrumental analysis (Semon 2002) and investigated with a binocular microscope and scanning electron microscope (SEM). The small inlay piece of ivory, which appears to have been burnt, contains tool markings. Both the larger and shaped inlay sample contain structures readily identifying them as elephant ivory (fig. 6) and they are probably from the area of the tusk closest to the head where the large hollow pulp cavity is located (see Moorey 1999 and references).

The bone sample (fig. 5 right lower) was even more informative about indigenous decorative practices in the Middle Bronze Age. It is one of many inlay pieces which is incised with criss-crossing lines and painted with a reddish pigment. The red pigment is pervasive in many of the inlay pieces and brings to mind the two colours distinguished in Hittite texts for ivory: 'white' and 'red' *ZÚ.AM.SI BABBAR* and *ZÚ.AM.SI SA* (Güterbock 1971 [1997: 147]). Furniture is often described in Boğazköy texts as inlaid with ivory and covered with gold. A thorough investigation of the bone piece using the SEM detected a fragment of silver foil caught in the incised grooves (figs 7, 8). Furthermore, XRF spectrographic analysis indicated the inclusion to be 58.57% silver. The scoring perhaps facilitated the adherence of the foil to the bone, indicating that the whole inlay fragment was 'silvered'. This would suggest that the scoring on the inlay was not visible, but masked with foil, or at least partially covered. Bone is readily available, but painting it with pigments and overlaying or plating it with silver foil would elevate the decorated furnishing to a prestige item. The technique of colouring and inlaying furniture would reflect local preferences for textures, plating with foil and mixing bright colours. It is also entirely possible that some of the dark wood (ebony?) archived in the same depot (but not datable) would also be part of the practice of embellishing with complementary tones. Thus a myriad of pigments and silver plate on bone inlays were played off each other and juxtaposed with the brilliant white ivory materials. These polychrome traditions constituted the visual hyperbole of indigenous Alalakh furniture styles in the Middle Bronze Age. This tradition continued in Late Bronze Age Egypt, the Uluburun shipwreck cargo (Haldane 1993) and Ugarit (Feldman 2005). The polychrome practice of red-black-beige is reflected across media with the painted pottery traditions of Kanesh (Ozgüç 1986: pl. E) as well as the related polychromatic Syro-Cilician wares found at Alalakh and Kanesh.

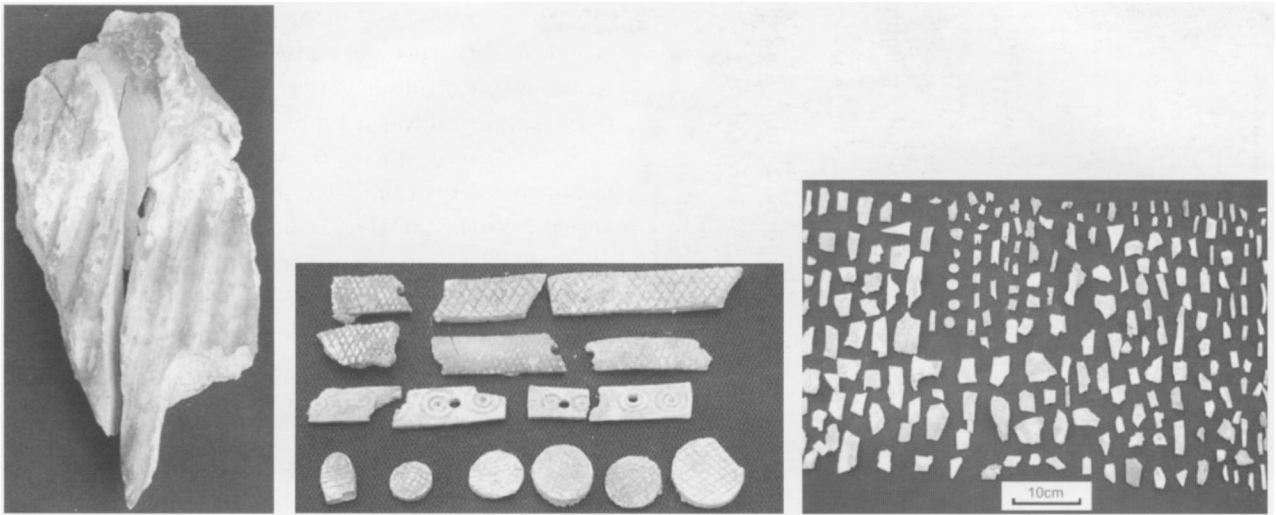


Fig. 2. Bone and ivory inlay fragments from the depot of the Alalakh dig house, 2000 (photo: author)

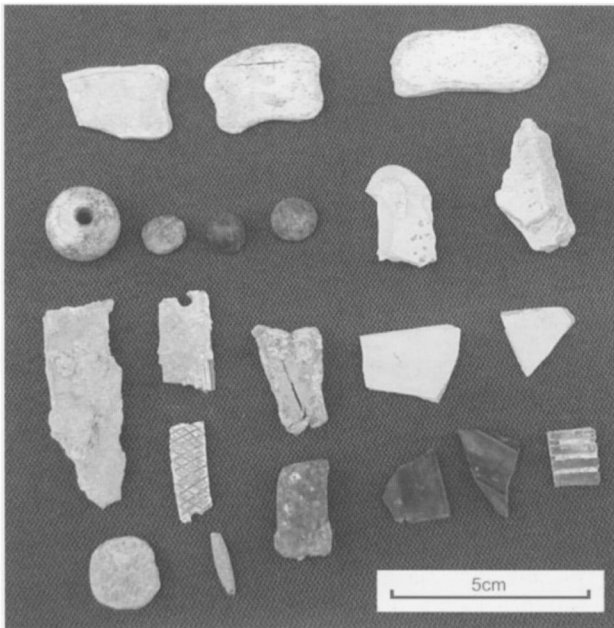


Fig. 3. Ivory, burnt bone or ebony inlay pieces from the depot of the Alalakh dig house, 2000 (photo: author)

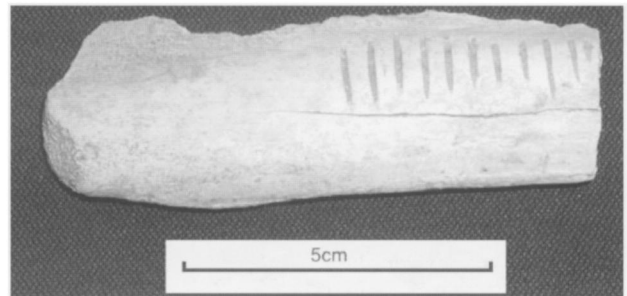


Fig. 4. Bone musical instrument with scoring from the depot of the Alalakh dig house, 2000 (photo: author)

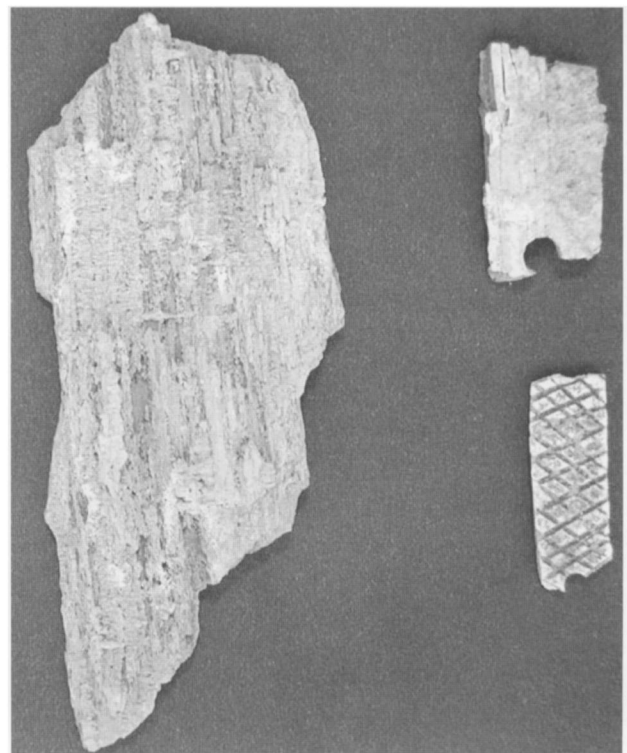


Fig. 5. Samples of bone and ivory subjected to instrumental analysis, 2002 (photo: Anna Semon)



Fig. 6. Raw material, rear face corner: a closer look at the structure of ivory with SEM at 330x (photo: Anna Semon)

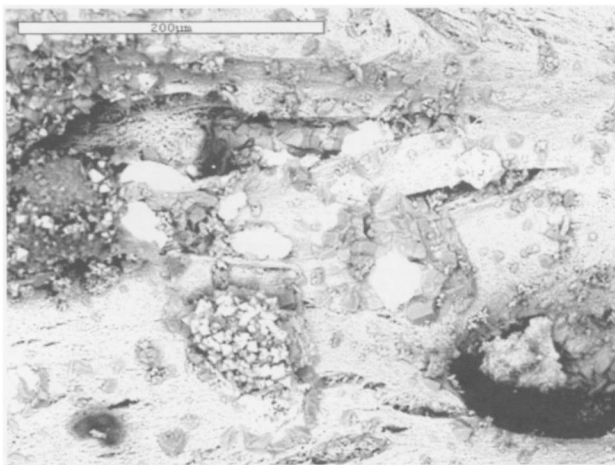


Fig. 7. Bone inlay, front incised side: bone structure from SEM at 50x (photo: Anna Semon)

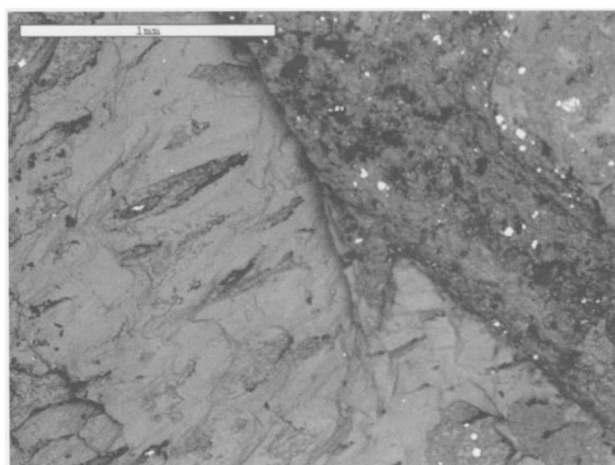


Fig. 8. Bone inlay, rear face: area where inclusion of silver (58.57%) was found surrounded by platelets of calcium with SEM at 330x (photo: Anna Semon)

In addition to silver foil, Alalakh has also yielded gold sheet plated on ivory, as exemplified by the ivory roundel with the *signe royale* motif in gold foil (Woolley 1955: pl. 77: AT/38/79). Perhaps signifying an attribute of Ishtar, stamped *signe royale* motifs were found on large-scale storage jars at several Middle Bronze Age kingdom sites, and at Kanesh the stamp seal itself was found (Özgüç 1986: 57, pl. 92: 6; the *signe royale* motif is also found incised on a contemporary bronze axe from Konya-Karahöyük [Alp 1968: pl. 249, no. 758], as well as on stamp seals from Acemhöyük [Özgüç 1980: fig. III, 38]).

There is substantial evidence that the gold and silver for this ivory and bone inlaid furniture came from local sources in the Amanus and Taurus. For instance, the gold would have originated from hydrothermal veins in the well-known gold mines of the Amanus (Çağatay, et al. 1991). The silver for the foil would no doubt come from the central Taurus silver mines, although analyses have not been conducted on the inclusions. However, results of lead isotope analysis on a number of metal finds from the 2003 and 2004 excavations demonstrate that Alalakh was supplied from the Taurus mountains and other, as yet undefined, sources (Lehner, Burton in preparation). Previously published lead isotope analyses (Sayre, et al. 1992; 2001; Yener, et al. 1991) of artefacts from Assur (Old Assyrian level graves) and the Acemhöyük silver hoard from the Sarikaya palace (Özten 1997), as well as Kültepe bronzes, demonstrate that all these cities were being supplied from the same resource zone (figs 9, 10). Whether there is a common and centrally controlled administrative system that linked the resource areas and urban centres or, alternatively, the highland extraction patterns reflect serendipitous itinerant mining and/or transhumance is not known. However, given the linkages of the Taurus mountains to the Amuq sites going back to the fourth millennium BC (Judaïdah figurine silver helmet and copper blade from Amuq F levels), the network was well-established and well-travelled for thousands of years.

Artefacts of ivory and bone, such as knife handles, plaques, boxes and figurines, abound at Alalakh (Woolley 1955: pls 75–78); including the as yet unpublished finds from the 2003, 2004 and 2006 excavation seasons. Although many, it can be argued, share attributes with central Anatolian examples, only a stylistic parallel is discussed here. Both Alalakh samples come from Late Bronze Age levels, but certainly could have been influenced by earlier prototypes in ivory. The carved gazelle-shaped ivory handle with long graceful neck (fig. 11) has two holes for attachment, perhaps to a knife, and comes from levels IV–V (Woolley 1955: pl. 76: AT/47/62). This piece has strong stylistic affinities with a polishing stone from the Old Palace of Kanesh

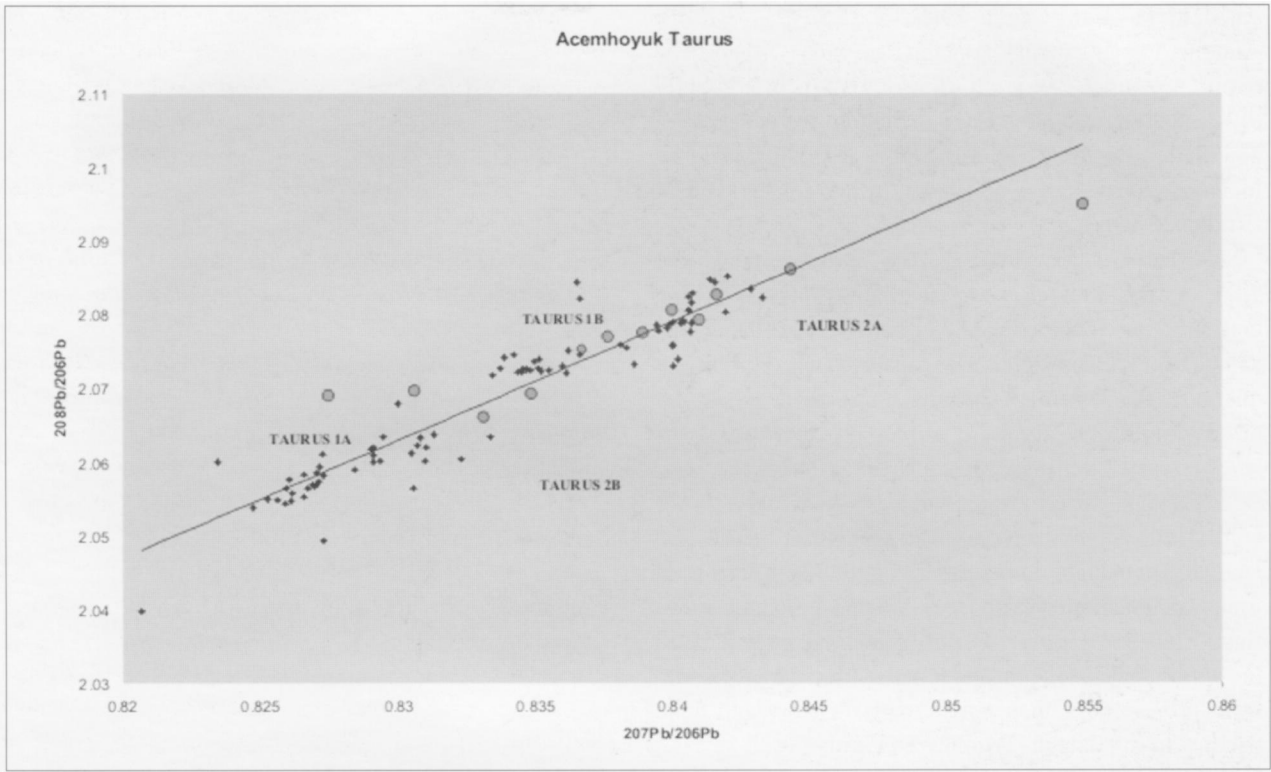


Fig. 9. A stable lead isotope ratio 208/206 versus 207/206 scatter plot of all the ore specimens and Acemhöyük silver cache presently found to be compatible with the Taurus ore fields. Percentage relative standard deviations 208Pb/206Pb ± 0.048; 207Pb/206Pb ± 0.026

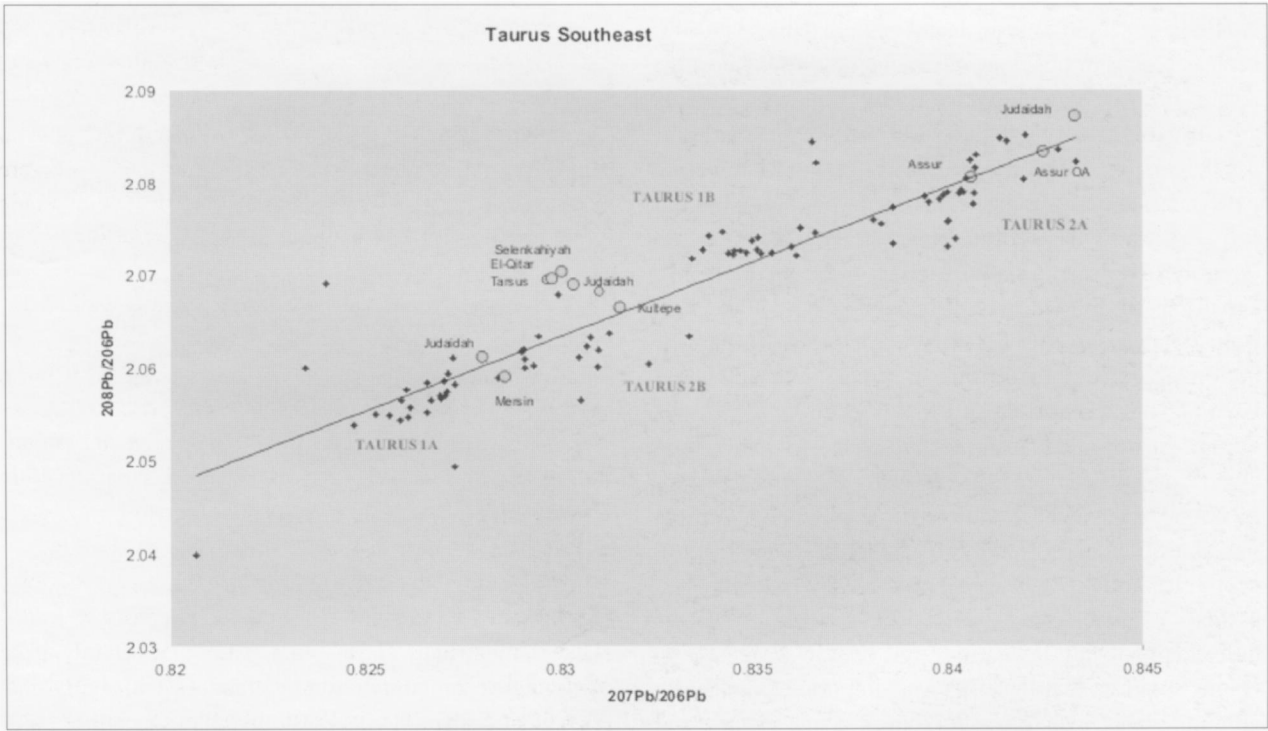


Fig. 10. A stable lead isotope ratio 208/206 versus 207/206 scatter plot of all the ore specimens from Kültepe, Assur, Judaidah, Mersin, el-Qitar and Selenkahiyeh presently found to be compatible with the Taurus ore fields. Percentage relative standard deviations 208Pb/206Pb ± 0.048; 207Pb/206Pb ± 0.026

dated to level II (Özgüç 1999: pl. 100: 1) (fig. 12). Another example from Alalakh level II (perhaps III) temple (Woolley 1955: pl. 76: AT/47/24), in a slightly different style, is a bone finial depicting two gazelles (?) adjoined at the neck (fig. 13). The eyes are depicted by incision and two holes have been drilled for attachment to a knife or staff.

The salient features of the ivory and bone industry at Alalakh can be found in central Anatolia as well. These craft practices include the polychromatic embellishments using sheet gold and silver, as well as the use of pigments on bone and ivory. This is perhaps reflected in the decoration of bone furniture with inlaid elements from a level II burial at Kanesh (Özgüç 1986: 71, pl. 123–24, fig. 52). A tube-like implement which carved out concentric circles was used to decorate the inlays. Hatching, herringbone designs and guilloche patterns are found on bone and ivory pieces at Kanesh (Özgüç 1986: figs 51–54; 1999: fig. A34), providing further similarities in carving styles. The meander patterns on a bone handle from Kanesh have their counterparts in ivory and bone handles from Alalakh (Woolley 1955: pl. 77).

At Acemhöyük, dating to ca 2000–1750 BC, a cache of carved ivory artefacts was found in association with unworked ivory and the fragmentary tusk of an Indian elephant (Deniz, et al. 1991; AC80 level III, west pit). Other supportive evidence attests the existence of an important elephant ivory industry at the site (Barnett 1982: 32; Bourgeois 1992). Other materials which would have served to furnish and embellish these ivories, such as blocks of obsidian, silver and gold foil, were also part of the Acemhöyük palace finds. Guilloche patterns are also found impressed on gold foil, suggesting their use as plating on bone or ivory. In addition to the patterning, there is further evidence of plating with gold foil at Acemhöyük (Özgüç 1999: pls 76: 2, 100: 2) and possibly silver foil used on ivory (Özgüç 1999: pl. 86: 3). Luxurious boxes made of hippopotamus tooth inlaid with iron, copper, lapis lazuli, silver and gold further the notion of polychromatic themes tying together central Anatolia and Alalakh.

The silver cache from Acemhöyük was made from silver originating in the Bolkardağ-Taurus mines mentioned above. These and other Acemhöyük ivories at the Metropolitan Museum were made in workshops in central Anatolia (Özgüç 1966; Mellink 1969), contrary to earlier suggestions that these items came from Syria as the Egyptianising Levantine style would suggest. T. Özgüç suggests that the ivory was imported from Syria; although it is also possible that it came from local Anatolian (Indian) elephants. It is, however, important to point out that even if the raw materials did indeed come from a more distant location, nevertheless, craft

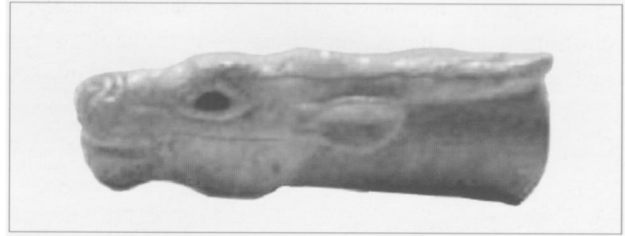


Fig. 11. Ivory gazelle head and long graceful neck (Alalakh AT/48/62 levels IV–V) (photo: author)

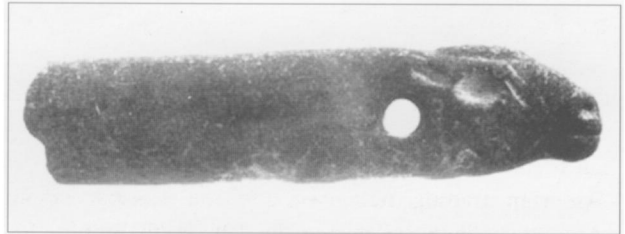


Fig. 12. Gazelle whetstone from Kanesh II (Özgüç 1999: pl. 100: 1)



Fig. 13. Two animals (gazelles?) carved in the round, hollowed out and adjoined at the neck from level II temple (Alalakh AT/47/24) (photo: author)

specialists were part of the mobile dynamic of trade, slavery and tribute during this period. Certainly it is obvious that the common craft practices with ivory and the stylistic affinities suggest that the specialists may have come from the greater Amuq and northern Levantine region bringing with them their idiosyncratic artistic styles.

The materials that constituted the palace patronage of crafting luxury items come from all over the Near East and demonstrate Alalakh's central location along far-reaching trade routes, one of which surely must have been Kanesh. In terms of transportation and routes of access, the Amuq valley, and its territorial centre, Alalakh, would have been a major receiver as well as a gateway to these Syrian and Levantine sites. Furthermore, connectivity with this trans-Anatolian region can sometimes be inferred from preciousities, technologies and a shared style of material remains, setting the stage for the later Hittite Empire and its largely unexplained obsession with this area. However nebulous they may be, Hittite imperial tastes and necessities from the northern Levant/southern Anatolia were nurtured in an earlier period which is famous for its Assyrian trading networks and the nascent central Anatolian kingdoms during the 19th–17th century BC. In terms of relational associations, intriguing signs of specialised production and some type of fluid but unspecified form of exchange, perhaps of ideas and religious practices, existed between the centre at Kanesh and Acmhöyük in central Anatolia, and Alalakh and the Mukish Kingdom in the Amuq.

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