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The Upper Khabur Region in the Second Part of the Third Millennium BC

Any periodization, whether based on historical sources or on archaeological evidence, is, in fact, an attempt to define transitions and to establish in this way a framework for the periods of cultural or historical homogeneity. In cultural terms, transitions may be seen as dynamic phases of the culture/society, whereas cultural periods should be considered as phases of relative stability.

As a rule, historic transitions do not need to correspond to cultural ones, as both refer to different classes of sources that are hardly related. Because of the scarcity of internal evidence, the historical scheme formed in Lower Mesopotamia based on Sumerian and Akkadian sources was adapted for the Khabur area, resulting in further inconsistencies in the chronology. In fact, the historic Akkadian period in the North starts with Naram-Su'en,

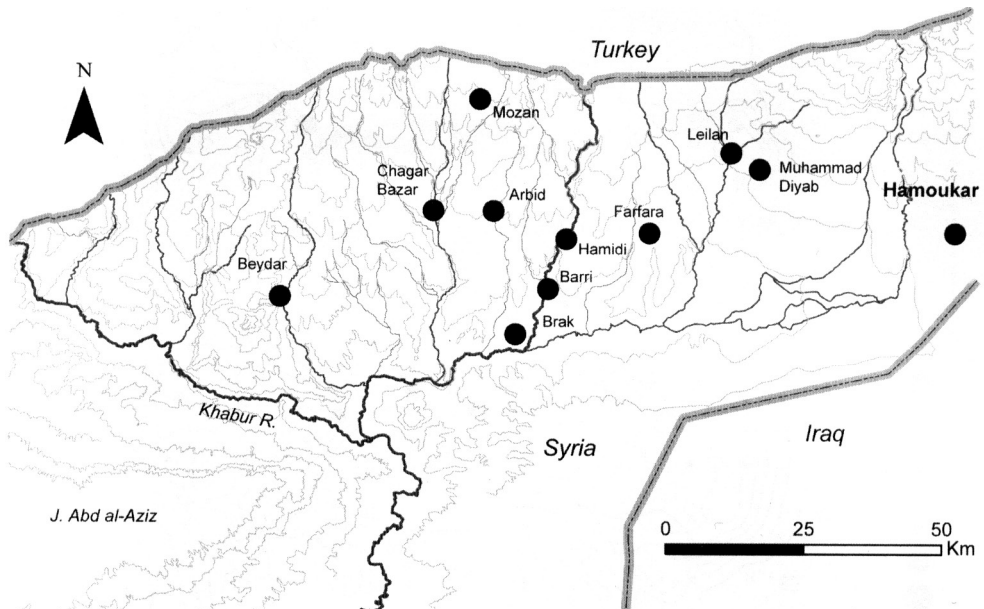


Fig. 1. The most prominent sites of the late 3rd millennium B.C. located in the Upper Khabur region [after Gibson et al. (2002), Fig. 1]

not with Sargon, as is the case in the South. Moreover, written sources appear in the Northern Jezirah late in the 3rd millennium (Early Jezirah III B: tablets from Beidar¹ and Chagar Bazar²) and are relatively rare. Abundant local sources are the only hope for establishing the historical developments in the area and, indeed, tablets found recently at Tell Beidar have helped to shed light on a relatively short episode of the later 3rd millennium history of the Khabur triangle.

The bulk of new evidence concerning, among others, the second part of the 3rd millennium BC has come from recent research carried out in the Khabur area and in neighbouring regions. Hence, the intention of this paper is to present an up-to-date view of the “Dark Ages” and transitional periods already identified in earlier research. The aim is to confirm or deny the existence of the “dark ages” and to characterize changes typical of the subsequent transitional periods during the second half of the 3rd millennium BC in the Upper Khabur region.

Chronology of the Khabur Area

The chronological framework for the Khabur area stems from Sir Max Mallowan's pioneer survey and excavation work carried out in the mid-thirties of the previous century (Table I).³ His discoveries at Tell Chagar Bazar and at Tell Brak established a cultural sequence for the area and provided chronological and historic parallels to southern Mesopotamia and Assyria. The most important historical link related to the 3rd millennium is a large structure built of bricks stamped with the name of Naram-Su'en of Agade. A group of tablets from Chagar Bazar offered, on the other hand, a clue to link the Khabur Ware pottery of the early 2nd millennium to the period of Samsi-Addu's kingdom in Upper Mesopotamia. The combined pottery sequence of Chagar Bazar and Brak resembled that of the Niniveh prehistoric pit, excavated also by Mallowan in 1928 and 1929. Archaeological links to the southern Mesopotamian culture of the 3rd millennium were scarce and in fact limited to glyptic and metalwork. Nevertheless, Mallowan introduced a south Mesopotamian term, “Early Dynastic”, to describe pre-Naram-Su'en 3rd millennium layers at Tell Brak⁴, a term which is still in use and has only recently begun to be replaced by “Early Jezirah”. It should be stressed that the Brak sequence turned out to be one of the most complete in the area, covering the entire 3rd millennium, though the period of Ninevite 5 pottery (EJ I–II) was under-represented at the site compared to the later pottery. This phase has been identified at Chagar Bazar and also at Brak during recent excavations by R. Matthews.⁵ The latest part of the Brak sequence (Late Akkadian and post-Akkadian) was

¹ Ismail et al. (1996); Milano et al. (2004).

² Gadd (1937).

³ Mallowan (1936); Mallowan (1937); Mallowan (1949).

⁴ Mallowan (1947), 1–48; for recent attempts at periodizing the 3rd millennium BC, cf. Pfälzner (1997), 240 Pfälzner (1998) 69–71; Lebeau (2000), Table I; Pruß (2004), 13–16.

⁵ Matthews (2003).

Tell Brak (<i>Mallowan 1947, Pl. LXIV</i>)	Tell Chagar Bazar (<i>Mallowan 1936, Fig. 2</i>)	Niniveh deep sounding (<i>Gut 1995, Tab. 27</i>)	“Historical” periods (<i>Oates et al. 2001, Tab. I</i>)	Cultural periods (<i>Lebeau 2000, Tab. II</i>)	Date BC (<i>Oates et al. 2001, Tab. I</i>)
Halaf	Levels 6–14	Niniveh 2c	Halaf	Chalcolithic	5000–4500
Ubaid			Ubaid	Chalcolithic	4800–4200
Uruk		Niniveh 3–4	Late Uruk	Chalcolithic	3400–3000
Jemdet Nasr			Jemdet Nasr?	Early Jezirah 0	3000–2850
Early Dynastic	Levels 4–5	Niniveh 5	Early Dynastic	Early Jezirah I–III	2850–2300
Sargonid	Level 3		Akkadian	Early Jezirah IV	2250–2150
III Dynasty of Ur			Ur III	Early Jezirah V	2150–2000
Hurrian (Khabur Ware)	Levels 1–2		Khabur Ware	Old Jezirah II	1850–1600
Subartu Ware			Mitanni	Middle Jezirah	1550–1275

Table I. Comparison of Sir Max Mallowan’s stratigraphy of the Khabur Area and contemporary historical and archaeological periodization.

identified in the final report as the Ur III period. The accuracy of Mallowan’s identification was underestimated despite his familiarity with Ur III pottery, because finds from this period came exclusively from much eroded layers.

The chronology of the Khabur region, proposed by Mallowan, survived not only the following twenty years when no activities were held in the area, but also the advent of new research in the late 1950s and a wave of excavations which started in the mid 1970s and reached an apex in the rescue projects of the late 1980s and 1990s. New links to South Mesopotamia were established on sites like Tell Chuera and Tell Hariri, but no site within the Khabur triangle itself yielded direct evidence of such relations. Despite the growing knowledge of local culture, the basic chronological periodization of the 3rd millennium BC followed Mallowan’s proposition, though some of the periods distinguished by him turned out difficult to identify at other sites in the area. The western part of the Khabur triangle and the Khabur valley going south seemed to be deprived of the earliest 3rd millennium settlements; also settlements from the very end of the 3rd millennium turned out to be extremely rare, both in surveys and in excavations carried out in the entire region.

The scarcity of historical data for the terminal part of the 3rd millennium, the apparent lack of pottery from this period at many sites located in the area, as well as the specific

situation encountered at the site of Tell Leilan constituted the background for a new hypothesis linking the absence of historical and archaeological sources with a regional collapse of settlement forced by a disaster of an environmental nature. This proposition, launched by Harvey Weiss in 1993⁶, stimulated research on environmental conditions not only in the Khabur Triangle, but also in the entire Near East.

Recent seasons of excavations in the Khabur Triangle area and the long awaited publication of the ceramic sequence from Brak⁷ have finally yielded the tools for a re-assessment of the chronology of the area. The evidence of the Ebla archives combined with evidence from Mari and new finds from the Khabur triangle itself (Tell Beidar, Tell Mozan) offered insight into the history of the later part of the 3rd millennium BC. Evidence retrieved during recent excavation seasons have made it possible finally to evaluate the periodization of the second half of the 3rd millennium BC. After a short review of sources, two alleged “Dark Ages” (Early Jezireh V and Old Jezireh I) will be subsequently discussed, as well as four “transitional” periods (Early Jezirah III A to III B, Early Jezirah III B to IV, Early Jezirah IV to V and Early Jezirah V to Old Jezirah I). (Table II)

Lower Meso- potamia (Historic)	Syrian Jezirah (Cultural/ Historic)	Syrian Jezirah (archaeo- logical)	Western Syria	Transitions (discussed)	“Dark ages” (alleged)
Jemdet Nasr	Terminal Uruk?	Early Jezirah 0	Early Bronze I		
Early Dynastic I	Early Ninevite 5?	Early Jezirah I	Early Bronze I		
Early Dynastic II	Ninevite 5/ ED II	Early Jezirah II	Early Bronze II		
Early Dynastic III A	Late Ninevite 5/ ED III	Early Jezirah III A	Early Bronze II		
Early Dynastic III B	Late ED III	Early Jezirah III B	Early Bronze III		
Akkadian	Akkadian	Early Jezirah IV	Early Bronze IVa		
Ur III/Guti	Ur III?	Early Jezirah V	Early Bronze IVb		
Isin/Larsa	Old Assyrian?	Old Jezirah I	Middle Bronze I		

Table II. Recently suggested chronological framework for the period ca. 3000–2000 BC [based on Lebeau (2000), Table II].

⁶ Weiss et al. (1993); Weiss – Courty (1993).

⁷ J. Oates (2001).

Sources

A. Historical evidence

Internal sources. Written sources of the 3rd millennium BC from the Khabur area are scarce. The only more substantial archive published is the one found at Tell Beydar, a site located in the central part of the area. The Beydar corpus, which is composed of about 240 tablets and inscribed bullae, consists of a single large archive of economic tablets stemming from the palace administration and a number of dispersed texts, some of which form another small archive. Texts have also been found at Tell Mozan (3 tablets⁸ and some seal legends have been published), Tell Chagar Bazar (2 tablets⁹) and Tell Brak (46 texts, including some inscribed bullae and school tablets¹⁰). New texts of the 3rd millennium were recently excavated at Tell Beidar, Tell Mozan and Tell Muhammad Diyab, but have not been published yet.

External sources. Two other Syrian archives provide information concerning the Khabur area. The most important source is the royal archive from Palace G at Ebla. Numerous cities located in Syria and northern Mesopotamia and persons going to or coming from them are mentioned in the texts.¹¹ The archives from Mari on Euphrates are limited to around 40 texts of mainly administrative character.¹²

The historical evidence of the southern archives, both of Sumer and Akkad, did not offer much assistance. Akkadian kings rarely raided this area, being probably more interested in the Cedar Mountains of the West. The extensive administrative archives of the Ur III period, which offered a specific insight into the administration of the Mesopotamian kingdom of the rulers of the Third Dynasty of Ur, seldom mention the names of Syrian cities, but even less often those of North Mesopotamian towns. It is clear that Syria, and the Khabur area specifically, was located outside the sphere of interest of the Ur III kings, this having extended along the Tigris as far as Ashur and Urbilum, which were still within the state, and even further North, to the vassal cities of Niniveh and the unidentified Šimānum.¹³ The most often mentioned locality of Syria is Mari: Ur-Nammu's son marries a daughter of Apil-kin, king of Mari, and messengers from this city often appear in the messenger texts. Other cities, as Ebla, Tuttul or Terqa, are sporadically mentioned, marking the commercial trail leading upstream along the Euphrates toward the Mediterranean; some others cities listed cannot be located on the map as yet (Abarnium, Mukiš, Uršu).¹⁴ For the Khabur area, the name of Nagar appears only when offerings to the "Lady of Nagar" are mentioned in the Drehem texts, while Urkeš, known also from the lion inscription of Tiš-atal, is mentioned only once, in relation to a person coming from this city to visit the south.

⁸ Milano (1991); Volk (2004).

⁹ Gadd (1937), 178, nos. A.391, A.392.

¹⁰ Eidem et al. (2001).

¹¹ Archi (1998).

¹² Charpin (1987); Charpin (1990).

¹³ Steinkeller (1987) Fig. 6.

¹⁴ Owen (1992).

B. Archaeological evidence

More than 30 archaeological sites of the 3rd millennium BC have been excavated in the Upper Khabur area.¹⁵ Digs were carried out on both large sites (cities) and small tells (villages, farms), the first as extensive, multi-annual research projects, the latter usually as salvage operations. In consequence, small sites tend to be tightly clustered in the areas of rescue excavation, while large sites are more or less evenly spaced. Several local surveys have also been undertaken, mainly around larger sites (Tell Brak, Tell Leilan, Tell Hamukar, Tell Beidar)¹⁶, but a more extensive survey was carried out by Meijer in the area east of Jaghjagh only.¹⁷ The remaining part of the Khabur Triangle was surveyed, but not systematically by Lyonnet.¹⁸ The chronological resolution of both these surveys in respect to the later 3rd millennium was rather low. Lyonnet distinguished only between the earlier and the later part of the 3rd millennium BC. Meijer differentiated pottery of EB I (Ninevite 5), EB II, EB III (Metallic Ware) and EB IV date¹⁹, but some of his “index fossiles”, especially for the badly represented EB IV period, have very little correspondence with the recently published “post-Akkadian” (period N) pottery of Brak. Consequently, his identification of the late 3rd millennium sites is dubious at the very least.

Decades of archaeological work in the Khabur region resulted finally in a high resolution pottery sequence for the area.²⁰ This sequence, based mainly on the exchange of unpublished information, will be developed in the framework of an international project devoted to the pottery of Northern Mesopotamia, led jointly by M. Lebeau and E. Rova. Recent seasons of fieldwork, available in the form of interim reports²¹, has also revealed that the settlement of the terminal 3rd millennium BC was much more extensive than it had been thought only ten years ago. Four settlements: Chagar Bazar, Hamukar, Barri and Arbid are to be added to Mozan (Urkeš) and Brak (Nagar), the sites already known for this period.

The alleged dark ages at the end of the third millennium BC

1. Early Jezireh V

A break in the Tell Leilan sequence of strata at the end of the Akkadian (Leilan II) period, observed during the excavations and dubbed Khabur hiatus 1, has been interpreted as a

¹⁵ Anastasio (1995), 191–228 and map on page 248; Anastasio et al. (2004), Maps 35, 40, 42.

¹⁶ Cf. map in Ur (2002b), Fig. 1. Particular bibliography: Tell Brak: Fielden (1979), Eidem – Warburton (1995); Tell Leilan: Stein – Wattenmaker (1990); Stein – Wattenmaker (2003); Tell Hamukar: Ur (2002a), Ur (2002b); Tell Beidar: Wilkinson (2000).

¹⁷ Meijer (1986).

¹⁸ Lyonnet (2000).

¹⁹ Meijer (1986), 32–33, Figs. 17–19; Lyonnet (2000), 18–19 and Table 3.

²⁰ Lebeau (2000).

²¹ Tell Mozan: Buccellati – Kelly-Buccellati (2000); Buccellati – Kelly-Buccellati (2001); Buccellati – Kelly-Buccellati (2002); Buccellati – Kelly-Buccellati (2004); Dohman-Pfälzner – Pfälzner (2001); Dohman-Pfälzner – Pfälzner (2002); Pfälzner et al. (2004); Tell Chagar Bazar: McMahon et al. (2001); Tell Hamoukar: Gibson et al. (2002); Ur (2002b); Tell Arbid: Bieliński (2000); Bieliński (2001); Bieliński (2002), Rutkowski (2006); Tell Barri: Pecorella (2002); Pecorella – Pierobon Benoit (2004).

reflection of a regional trend in the settlement pattern.²² Harvey Weiss attempted to explain the collapse of the settlement and the abandonment of the Khabur Triangle area on the basis of the results of environmental research carried out in the Khabur triangle in the early 1990s.²³ Weiss's original thesis was that a drastic change of environmental conditions towards aridity, which occurred at the end of the Akkadian period, was triggered by a punctual cataclysm, most probably of volcanic origin, which left thin layers of ashes identified on a number of the Khabur area sites, Tell Leilan included. According to Weiss, this volcanic event resulted in increased wind activity, temperature drop and reduced and less regular rainfall. Rapid deterioration of agricultural conditions forced abandonment of settlements existing in the Khabur area and migration towards southern Mesopotamia, where the increase of population during the Ur III period is evidenced.²⁴ The change of climate had a supra-regional character and may be observed throughout a large part the northern hemisphere (lake level reductions from East Africa to Tibet, settlement structure collapse from Portugal to the Indus).²⁵ According to Weiss, the catastrophe coincided with a collapse of Akkadian authority in the area at the end of the Akkadian period, and forced the Akkadians' withdrawal, evidenced by the planned abandonment and filling of some of the Brak public structures.²⁶ The hypothesis has been very well received by other archaeologists²⁷, despite it contradicted the Brak evidence from Mallowan's dig, and Mallowan's familiarity with the Ur III material can hardly be doubted after his participation in the excavations at Ur itself.

Weiss's thesis was an incredible stimulus for further research on the environmental conditions in the area, resulting in a better understanding of environmental changes, their causes, results and impact on ancient society.²⁸ Old pollen cores were re-examined, on-site and off-site sediments analysed and compared, climatic proxy data gathered in order to reconstruct ancient environmental conditions and, as an end outcome, understand the course of events which led to the alleged collapse.

The results of this recent research have introduced several corrections into Weiss's original proposition, which he has continued nonetheless to update and develop in a series of papers published after 1993.²⁹

1. Despite a spectral analysis of "tephra"-ashes from Leilan, scholars were not able to identify the volcano responsible for the explosion that triggered environmental change. Moreover, historical and modern sources both have shown that climatic disturbances re-

²² Weiss (1997).

²³ Weiss et al. (1993); Weiss – Courty (1993); Courty (1994); Courty – Weiss (1997).

²⁴ Weiss – Courty (1993), 143–5.

²⁵ Weiss (2000a), 210–12; Weiss – Bradley (2001), 610.

²⁶ Weiss (2000), 85–88.

²⁷ To illustrate the impact of Weiss's hypothesis on archaeologists I will quote from a recent paper by Peltenburg: "Having ruined the indigenous political and economic infrastructure, the departure of Akkad created a political vacuum that left communities ill-equipped to deal with declining agricultural productivity and competition for reduced high-yield lands. This coincides with Leilan collapse phase 2, when conditions of low agricultural activity prevailed". [Peltenburg (2000), 200].

²⁸ For instance: Nüzhet Dalles et al. (1997).

²⁹ Weiss (1997b); Weiss (2000a), Weiss (2000b), Weiss (2001).

sulting from volcanic activity do not exceed 18 months.³⁰ Consequently, they could hardly be a cause of long-term climatic change on a regional scale, and certainly not of change observable throughout the entire northern hemisphere.

2. Further analyses of the “tephra”-ashes, collected from a number of sites located not only in the Khabur region, but also in Syria and Palestine³¹, revealed similar mineral composition, including the presence of minerals typical of asteroids. At the 3rd ICAANE in Paris in 2002 M.-A. Courty proposed that “a violent air blast event” responsible for producing “tephra-like” mineral spherules encountered on the mentioned sites resulted from small bolide entering atmosphere from outer space. This event resulted in a thermal and wind blast, and caused wild fires in the area, leading to the destruction of plant cover and triggering in effect a rapid erosion of ground surface and increased dust deposition.³² Courty believes that the “blast event” effects may be confused with sudden aridification.³³ A distant reflection of this event is to be recognised in a South Mesopotamian literary composition, *Course of Agade*³⁴, describing a period of drought and “flaming pot-sherds” dropping from the sky, though it may be interpreted just as well as the result of a “volcanic event”.

3. “Tephra” and ashes appeared in well stratified contexts at Tell Brak³⁵, namely on the latest floor of the FS Layer 5 public complex which was ritually closed in the early part of the Akkadian period at Brak, thus earlier than previously proposed dates for the “triggering event”. Two C14 samples from the same level give dates of 3990 + 50 and 3950 + 60 BP (calibrated: 2580–2460 BC ($\pm 1\sigma$) or 2700–2300 BC ($\pm 2\sigma$)). Consequently, the abandonment of this complex at Brak predates significantly the end of the Akkadian (EJ IV) period on the site. This date correspond with dates of the “tephra” deposits on other sites (Table III). In consequence, the natural disaster which caused the deposition of the “tephra” spherules could be related neither to the abandonment of the Khabur Plain by the Akkadians nor to the settlement collapse in the region during the EJ V period.

4. Off-site analysis of sediments in the area of Leilan and north-east of Hasake revealed steady dust deposition during the entire Leilan II period, resulting most probably from extensive agriculture, as there is no vegetation to protect agricultural land from wind erosion during most of the year. This change was accompanied by slow change in water conditions, consisting first of all of the occasional heavy rain-shower. The “post-event period” features thinner particles of aeolic deposits and evidence for rapid accumulation of the sediment, assumedly as a result of higher-energy wind activity, thin plant cover and low humidity (high humidity acts as a cohesive and prevents soil particles from being blown away). Occasional crusts suggest heavy rain-showers instead of more evenly distributed rainfall.³⁶

³⁰ Courty (2002).

³¹ Courty (1998); Courty (1999).

³² Courty (2002).

³³ Courty (2001), 367.

³⁴ Attinger (1984) lines 120–124 and 175 and commentary on p. 117; Michałowski (1986), lines 127–130 and 303–313.

³⁵ Courty (2001).

³⁶ Leilan: Courty (1993), Courty – Weiss (1997), 116–39; Hamoukar: Wilkinson (2002), 92–98; Beidar: Wilkinson (2000), 3.

Site	Laboratory no.	Date BP ($\pm 1\sigma$)	Calibrated date BC ($\pm 2\sigma$)
Tell Brak, CH 97	Beta – 110930	4040 \pm 50 BP	2605 – 2400 BC
Tell Brak, CH 97	Beta – 125320	4170 \pm 40 BP	2885 – 2595 BC
Tell Chuera, CVI: 2a110	Lyon – 473	3980 \pm 55 BP	2610 – 2317 BC
Tell Leilan, Tr 1.2m lower burnt soil	GifA 96233	3790 \pm 90 BP	2469 – 1924 BC
Tell Leilan, Tr 1.2m Upper burnt soil	GifA 96236	3980 \pm 70 BP	2832 – 2230 BC
Tell Beydar (I)	Beta – 10929	3850 \pm 50 BP	2460 – 2140 BC
Tell Beydar (F)	Lyon – 474	3825 \pm 55 BP	2442 – 2063 BC
Terqa 97 – K1B 225	Beta – 110931	3950 \pm 50 BP	2575 – 2300 BC
Terqa 96 – K1A 200	GifA 97801	3930 \pm 60 BP	2545 – 2290 BC

Table III. C-14 dates of the “Akkadian Air Blast Event” on various sites of northern Syria [after Courty (2001), Tab. 59].

More favourable conditions observed again as the changes in soil conditions returned after a period of time. The dynamics of those changes are difficult to date; Weiss³⁷ assumed that the arid period corresponded to the entire length of Leilan Hiatus 1, i.e., lasted 300 years, but neither the precise date nor the length of this period could be reconstructed basing on available data.

5. Climatological simulations of ancient precipitation based on a reconstructed position of the sub-tropical Jet-stream, which determines which area receives winter rainfall in the northern part of the Near East and summer rainfall (monsoon) in the south, demonstrate a rapid decrease of rainfall in the Khabur area from 4600 BP calibrated on.³⁸ Mean annual rainfall at that moment was about 50 mm higher than at present and reached a level of 540 mm (for Qamishli). The rainfall value reached its minimum around 4350 BP at a level about 430 mm *per annum* and then started to rise gradually, but did not reach the value of present rainfall.³⁹ The rainfall values oscillated between these two levels throughout the 2nd millennium, with another minimum of about 420 mm at around 3300 BP, to decrease significantly just after 3000 BP, when it dropped to the lowest value since the Younger

³⁷ Weiss et al. (1993), Courty – Weiss (1997), 108–9.

³⁸ Bryson – Bryson (1997), Fig. 5.

³⁹ The present rainfall value of 490 mm used by Bryson and Bryson (1997) is not in accordance with other sources. Wallen and Perin de Brichambaut give for Qamishli a mean value of 432 mm [Wallen – Perin de Brichambaut (1962), Tab. B]; Wirth (1971), 90, Tab. 2 a mean value of about 460 mm; Wilkinson (1997), 74 of 444 mm. In consequence, all figures of rainfall quoted above should be lowered by about 10 %.

Dryas (375 mm). This reconstruction does not correspond fully to the reconstruction proposed by Weiss and to other proxy data. According to it, an increasing improvement of the climatic conditions was supposed to occur after “the Akkadian Event” and the rainfall level during the last two centuries of the 3rd millennium and for the first half of the 2nd millennium was very similar and only slightly lower than the present one. This picture is in opposition to archaeological evidence which, according to Weiss, reflects three centuries of settlement collapse in the area, and to pedological evidence, which witnesses decrease of rainfall throughout the entire later part of the 3rd millennium. On the other hand, recently published results of the analysis of plant remains collected at Brak indicate no identifiable variation between the Akkadian and post-Akkadian crop-and-weed assemblages.⁴⁰ A significant change in environmental conditions has to be reflected in the composition of plant assemblages; in consequence, the similarity of assemblages from subsequent periods points to a similarity of natural conditions. Generally, recently published studies point rather to stable rainfall conditions, probably only slightly less favourable than the conditions today.

6. Recent research does not support the idea of a general abandonment of the Khabur area. Two regional centres of the Akkadian period continued to exist. Brak was ruled by a local dynasty of Hurrian origin⁴¹ and even more powerful kings, bearing the Hurrian title *endan*, ruled Mozan.⁴² In Brak no change in the size of the city has been evidenced, and some important buildings, such as the palace of Naram-Su'en, were reconstructed and used.⁴³ The administrative building at Mozan was in use for a relatively short period of time and was later overbuilt with houses.⁴⁴ The most surprising discovery was a part of an extensive house, which belonged to Puššam, a trader representing in the area a merchant from another city or coming from this city, possibly Tintir in South Mesopotamia (according to the legend on his personal seal, found on more than 250 sealings).⁴⁵ This direct link to the south is in clear opposition to the South Mesopotamian written sources which, as demonstrated above, hold extremely scanty evidence for contacts with the Khabur area.

Beside two large cities: Urkeš and Nagar, a number of smaller settlements of the same date have been identified recently in the area: Chagar Bazar, Arbid, Barri and Hamukar.⁴⁶ The presence of smaller settlements confirms D. Oates's thesis that large cities, such as

⁴⁰ Charles – Bogaard (2001), 325–6.

⁴¹ Cf. impression of a seal of Talpuš-atili, “the sun of the country of Nagar”, Matthews – Eidem (1993), 202; Frayne (1997), 460; Eidem et al. (2001), 105, no. 3; Oates – Oates (2001), 393, Fig. 376.

⁴² Wilhelm (1998). For other rulers of Mozan of this period, who as a rule bear the title of *lugal* and Hurrian names: Ewrim-atal, Šatar-mat, Atal-šen and, Ann-atal, bearing the title “lord” only, cf. Steinkeller (1998); Buccellati – Kelly-Buccellati (2001), 90–92, Abb. 19; Buccellati – Kelly-Buccellati (2002), 114, Abb. 3.

⁴³ Oates – Oates (2001), 392. It is also possible that a post-Akkadian palace was constructed over Naram-Su'en's fort, cf. Oates – Oates (2001), 393.

⁴⁴ Buccellati – Kelly-Buccellati (2002), 110–15.

⁴⁵ Dohman-Pfälzner – Pfälzner (2001), 121–27, 135–7; the Puššam seal, cf. Abb. 19. For a different interpretation of the legend of the seal, cf. Buccellati – Kelly-Buccellati (2002), 114 n. 4.

⁴⁶ Cf. note 21. Cf. settlements in the neighboring areas: Kharab Seyyar [Meyer et al. (2001)] to the west and Tell Rimah [Postgate et al. (1997), 27–29], Tell Taya [Reade (1968), 264], Niniveh [McMahon (1998), 12–17, Figs. 8–9; Gut et al. (2001)] and Tell Jikan [Oguchi (2003), 86–94, Fig. 4] to the east.

Nagar for instance⁴⁷, have to be supported by a local network of settlements. The publication of a well stratified assemblage of pottery from this period from Tell Brak has finally provided archaeologists with a precise tool to sort through pottery from surveys and excavations in the area. This will result most likely in the subsequent identification of settlements from the period soon.

Two instances of recent identification of EJ V deposits may be quoted to illustrate the hypothesis about the expected rapid increase in the number of settlements dated to this period. The first of them relates to the excavations at Tell Arbid, where pottery predating Khabur Ware and clearly later than the EJ IV assemblage was retrieved already in 1998.⁴⁸ No definite identification of this pottery was possible prior to June 2001, when Professor J. Oates showed the Brak EJ V pottery to the present author during the latter's short visit to Cambridge. During the subsequent season more pottery in sound architectural context was found at the site, making the identification of the EJ V settlement sure. The other instance relates to German work at Tell Mozan, where EJ V period settlement was found during the second season of excavations, filling an alleged hiatus in the occupation of the site.⁴⁹

Due to the recent publication of late 3rd millennium assemblages from Tell Brak⁵⁰ and increasing knowledge of EJ V pottery from other sites, it is possible to describe pottery types typical of the period. Stone Ware and dark-rim orange bowls continue, as well as ring bases, comb and rope decoration, though both ring bases and comb decoration typical of both periods vary. Ring bases, especially those of fine-ware bowls, are very low. Comb decoration is more complicated now; beside multiple wavy lines, it also includes comb impressions. Conical beakers of concave bottom are now usually string-cut and of very high proportions. New elements include forms of the vessels: recessed bead rim bowls, grooved rim bottles, shallow, irregular bowls of string-cut base, large biconical potstands, rounded and ovoid jars with bead rim. Also the surface treatment is different: horizontal ribbing appears on the shoulders of jars, as well as radially burnished patterns inside flat bowls. Animal appliqué decoration appears as well as sporadically painted motifs, sometimes executed with paint but more often with bitumen. Two typical assemblages of EJ V pottery were identified: one typical of Brak (encountered also at Tell Arbid) and another, typical of Mozan, characterised by bowls with carination and jars of grooved ribbon rim.

Harvey Weiss's hypothesis, assuming a collapse resulting in abandonment that covers the entire post-Akkadian period in the Khabur area, cannot be accepted in the light of recent research. First of all, there is no abandonment phase in the central part of the Khabur area during the EJ V period. Two flourishing centres exist in Urkeš and Nagar, supported by a network of smaller settlements. Pottery of the period, due to the publication of the EJ V assemblages from Brak, is relatively well known (Fig. 6); moreover, two geographic variations of the pottery repertoire exist: one typical of Brak, encountered also at Chagar

⁴⁷ Oates – Oates (2001), 393.

⁴⁸ Bieliński (2000), 278; Bieliński (2001), 318; Bieliński (2002), 284, 291, Fig. 6; Rutkowski (2006).

⁴⁹ Cf. stratigraphical tables resulting from the 1999 campaign [Dohmann-Pfälzner – Pfälzner (2000), Abb. 2] and from the 2000 campaign [Dohmann-Pfälzner – Pfälzner (2001), Abb. 5].

⁵⁰ J. Oates (2001), 170–77.

Bazar and Arbid, and another one typical of Mozan. Climatic proxy data are not conclusive, but it is clear that the rainfall level did not drop as low as originally suggested by Weiss. Also the natural disaster supposed to trigger climatic changes did not happen at the end of the Akkadian period but earlier, probably in the first part of the period and resulted, most likely, in temporary climatic fluctuation. The EJ V period cannot be considered as a “dark age” anymore.

2. Old Jezirah I

No settlement of this period was identified beyond doubt, despite the fact that some major sites in the area reputedly had not been abandoned. A continuity of settlement has been suggested for Mozan and Brak, and also for some sites located outside the Khabur area.⁵¹

No characteristic pottery of this period has been recognized, but this does not mean that no such pottery existed. Some examples of sherds, which may date in this period are known from Tell Brak (area SS, dated provisionally to the Isin-Larsa period⁵²). Some vessels from the earliest graves discovered by Mallowan at Chagar Bazar⁵³ and some dispersed sherds from Muhammad Diyab⁵⁴ may also belong to this early period. Mozan seems to have been occupied throughout this period, at least in areas which have been excavated⁵⁵, but no pottery of OJ I date has been published yet. The pottery sequence may be gleaned to some extent from finds at Tell Taya (level V)⁵⁶ and Tell Rimah (layer AS3, under the Old Jezirah II period temple).⁵⁷ Pottery, which, judging from its stratigraphical position, may belong to the OJ I period, has also been excavated at Tell Arbid. The sherds from Tell Arbid are as a rule very coarse slow-wheel products with much coarse vegetable temper. The surface is usually chocolate-brown in colour and wet-smoothed. Painted motifs occur occasionally (horizontal lines, exceptionally also slashed triangles) and are always executed with very thin, semi-transparent plum-red coloured paint, sometimes so thin that it is difficult to notice it on the surface of the sherd.⁵⁸ Similar colour and technique appear to be

⁵¹ Oguchi (1997), 196, Fig. 1, 1–7 (Khabur Ware period 1). Particular sites and regions: Tell Rimah (level A3): Postgate et al. (1997), 27–9, Pls. 59–60; Tell Taya (level V): Reade (1968), 257; Reade (1982), 74; Ashur: (Ishtar temple D) Andrae (1922), 115; (Nabu temple IIb) Dittmann (1990), 164 For the situation in the Euphrates Valley, cf. Nigro (1998), 274–79, Fig. 3, for the Balikh Valley: Nigro (1998), 280, Fig. 4.

⁵² Oates (2001), 173–4, Figs. 206, 416.

⁵³ For instance, Graves G1–3, which may predate the earliest structures of the early phase of layer 1, cf. Mallowan (1936) 55, Fig. 2.

⁵⁴ Faivre (1992), Figs. 19: 3, 5–6; 20: 3–4.

⁵⁵ The German sector: Level C6A, cf. Dohmann-Pfälzner – Pfälzner (2001), 127–33, Abb. 5; later labeled as level C6 (Dohmann-Pfälzner – Pfälzner (2002), Abb. 3). The American sector: phase 4b in AK, containing graves, pottery kilns and houses over the Ur III period fill of the Royal Store (Buccellati – Kelly-Buccellati (2000), 152, Fig. 7; Buccellati – Kelly-Buccellati (2001), Abb. 2; Buccellati – Kelly-Buccellati (2002), 115, Abb. 3).

⁵⁶ Reade (1968), 256–7, Pl. LXXXVII, 25.

⁵⁷ Postgate et al. (1997), AS phase 3, 27–28, Pl. 59–60.

⁵⁸ This assemblage of pottery will be the subject of a Ph.D. dissertation prepared by Agnieszka Pieńkowska (Institute of Archaeology, Warsaw University).

characteristic of some of the OJ I sherds from Tell Taya⁵⁹, but, on the whole, the pottery of this period varies significantly from site to site.

The only argument why there should be an OJ I settlement and pottery in the area is circumstantial. When the Old Assyrian merchants started to lead their caravans to Anatolia prior to 1900 BC⁶⁰, the trail went through the Khabur area and local settlements located there were listed as caravan stations in some preserved itineraries. Some of these bear names which correspond to or repeat the names of the settlements known to exist in the area during the late 3rd millennium BC. It is quite unlikely that the names of settlements would survive for a few generations if the entire area had been abandoned.

The Old Jazira I period appears as a typical “Dark age” period. No settlement of this period is known, no pottery characteristic of more than a single site has been presented, no information concerning either the history or culture of the area is available.

Cultural Transitions of the Second Part of the 3rd Millennium BC (Table IV)⁶¹

1. The EJ IIIA – EJ IIIB transition

Period EJ IIIA: During this period local palaces appeared (for instance, the earliest phase of the palace at Tell Beidar⁶² and the earlier “public building” at Tell Arbid⁶³) and are reputedly seats of local rulers. Seals start to be commonly used during this period, as evidenced by numerous seals and sealings discovered in public and private contexts, and this phenomenon points to a rapid development of administrative practices.

Pottery typical of this period includes (fig. 2): Local Late Excised Ninevite 5, early types of Metallic Ware (red or brown in colour), Painted Bichrome Jazirah stands, trumpet-shaped stands with cruciform windows, hemispherical bowls, bowls and jars with rounded base, small bowls with tiny flat base, small globular spouted bottles, Cooking Ware pots with triangular handles on the rim, jars with rectangular turned-out rims.

Period EJ IIIB: Local palaces exist (cf. later phase of palace at Tell Beidar⁶⁴ and later phase of the “public building” at Tell Arbid⁶⁵), but some cities in which they function are dependent on regional centres which appear for the first time as political entities. Nagar seems to be the most important centre in the area, mentioned, beside Kish, in the Ebla archives. We know about princesses of Ebla marrying into the royal houses of Kish and Nagar, though in the case of Nagar, it was a daughter of a second-rank wife who was married to the son of the *en* (king) of Nagar.⁶⁶ The Ebla archives inform about the political structure of the area: the king of Nagar accompanied by some satellite rulers travelled to

⁵⁹ Tell Taya: Reade (1968), 264.

⁶⁰ Veenhof (2003), 39–42 and 57.

⁶¹ The characteristic pottery changes during subsequent cultural periods follow the model presented by Lebeau (2000), 174–177.

⁶² Bretschneider – Jans (1997), 72–79; Lebeau – Suleiman (2003).

⁶³ Bieliński (2002), 289–90.

⁶⁴ Bretschneider – Jans (1997), 79–85; Lebeau – Suleiman (2003).

⁶⁵ Bieliński (2002), 284–8, Fig. 5.

⁶⁶ Biga (1998).

“DARK AGES”:

Period	Description	Evaluation
1. EJ V	Flourishing settlements at Brak and Mozan (local rulers and archives known), smaller at Chagar Bazar, Arbid, Barri and Hamukar. Distinctive local pottery types	<u>not dark at all</u>
2. OJ I	No settlement known, no pottery known	Pitch dark

TRANSITIONS:

Period	History/society	Settlement	Culture	Texts
EJ III A	Local palaces, local rulers	Medium and small size sites, Urbanization	Syrian Seal style Metallic ware	No texts known
1. <u>EJ III A–III B Cause: Local development</u>				
EJ III B	Growth of political entities like Nagar at the expense of smaller centres (Nabula).	Progressing nucleisation Maximum extent of cities	Pottery change Local palaces cease to function Destruction horizons	Beidar Chagar
2. <u>EJ III B–IV Cause: External influence, limited environmental stress</u>				
EJ IV	Naram-Su'en fort and administration in Brak Replacement of some local rulers	Gradual abandonment of small sites	Pottery change Brak official buildings cease to function	Brak Mozan
3. <u>EJ IV–V Cause: environmental stress</u>				
EJ V	Independent Hurrian rulers Commercial ties with the South	General abandonment of small sites, some large sites entirely or partly abandoned	Pottery change Language change	Brak Mozan
4. <u>EJ V–OJ I Cause: environmental stress</u>				
OJ I	no information	Total abandonment(?)	no OJ I pottery known	no texts known
	Old Assyrian trade roads (from mid-20 th century BC on)	Caravan stations exist		Kanish

Table IV. “Dark Ages” and “Transitions” in the Upper Khabur region in the later 3rd millennium BC [modified from Lebeau (2000), Tab. IX].

Tuttul to swear peace with Ebla.⁶⁷ Apparently, the growing influence of Nagar (Tell Brak) resulted in the elimination of at least some local rulers and the subjugation of others.⁶⁸ This situation is reflected by the archaeological evidence to some extent. The local palace existing in Beidar served as an administrative centre, occasionally visited by the king of Nagar who was the ruler of both cities. His visits are documented on the tablets from Beidar, as food given on these occasions to the King, his courtiers and animals was registered in the local archive.⁶⁹ Two monumental complexes discovered at Brak date to this period (area SS and the Brak Oval)⁷⁰ and represent a new quality in architecture, namely huge administrative and ritual structures reflecting the needs of regional rulers.

The IIIB pottery changes consist of the disappearance of Late Ninevite pottery, Bi-chrome Painted stands, jars with rounded bottoms and turned-out rims. New pottery categories that appear include (Fig. 3): Black Metallic Ware, Spiral-burnished Syrian bottles, Combed Wash Ware, globular bottle with suspension lugs, jars with incision on the internal side of the rim, ovoid jars, cylindrical stands with windows, hemispherical bowls with knob handles, Grey “Stone Ware” and small bowls with flattened base.

A rapid change in society is observable, featuring a growing political organization of the area. Small political entities typical of the EJ IIIA period, localized in every township, were dominated by a few larger centres of regional or even supra-regional importance (Nagar, for instance). In Nagar, a new “capital” city emerged, consisting of huge ritual complexes intended to meet cult needs and to articulate royal authority (Brak, area SS). Cuneiform texts are encountered for the first time in the area. A gradual change in pottery accompanies this process.

2. The EJ IIIB – EJ IV transition

The end of the EJ IIIB period is marked by abandonment levels encountered on numerous sites, associated occasionally with evidence of conflagration and extensive inventories found in situ. They occurred at Brak (CH, level 6, ER level 5, Oval)⁷¹ and at a number of other sites, both large and small, and are often interpreted in relation to the coming of the Akkadian army.⁷² The presence of the Akkadians in the area is clear from the existence of the so-called Naram-Su'en palace at Brak (identification by inscriptions on bricks used for its construction). Akkadian influence is evidenced by two fragments of stone vases bearing the name of Rimuš found at Brak, as well as by administrative texts from Brak which use Akkadian formulas.⁷³ It seems that Nagar lost its independence, as monumental com-

⁶⁷ Archi (1998), 5.

⁶⁸ Lerberghe (1996); Sallaberger (1998); Sallaberger (1999a); Sallaberger (1999b), 129–30. Sallaberger – Ur (2004).

⁶⁹ Ismail et al. (1996), texts nos. 79–81, 85, 88–90, 96–98, 101, 106, 109–10, 113–14, 122.

⁷⁰ The SS complex was erected towards the end of EJ IIIB, cf. Oates – Oates (2001), 380–82, 391–92, but the Brak Oval may be slightly earlier (Emberling et al. (1999), 14; Emberling – McDonald (2001), 35).

⁷¹ Oates – Oates (2001), 383–389; Emberling et al. (1999), 14; Emberling – McDonald (2001), 34–35.

⁷² They may well be evidence of the “air blast event” mentioned above, when discussing the EJ V period.

⁷³ Eidem et al. (2001), 103, texts nos. 1 (Rimuš), 2 (Naram-Su'en), 14, 74, 76.

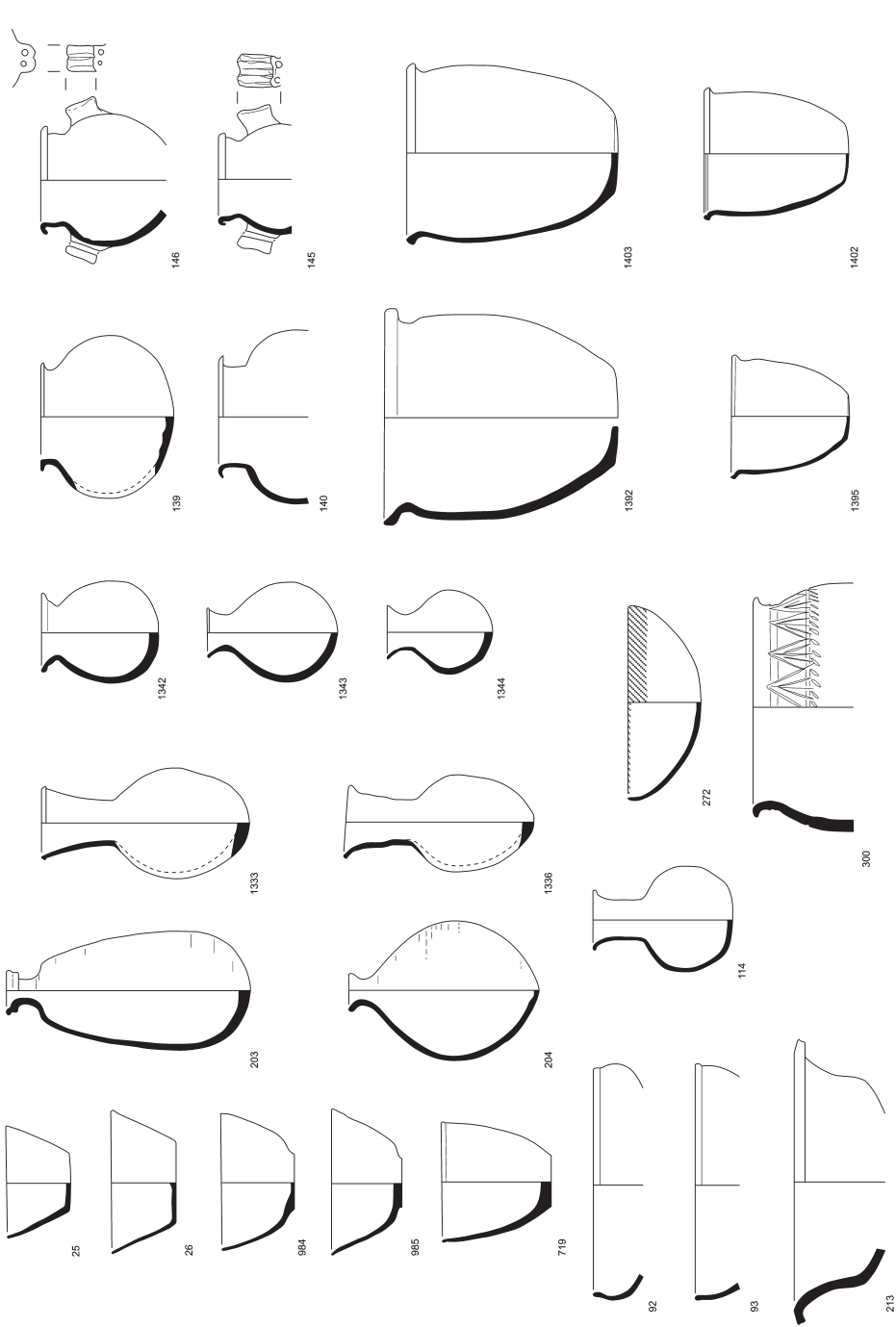


Fig. 4. A typical pottery assemblage of the Early Jazirah IV period from Tell Brak [numbers provided refer artefact drawings in Oates – Oates (2001)].

plexes in areas FS and SS at Brak were ritually closed and filled with earth during the earlier part of the Akkadian period.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, some of the local centres were still independent. The best known case is that of Urkeš, where numerous sealings discovered in an extensive public building witness the presence of a local dynasty⁷⁵, related to the royal house of Agade by a dynastic marriage.⁷⁶

The repertory of pottery from period EJ IV (fig. 4) include several types known from the EJ IIIB period: Metallic Ware, Stone Ware, Spiral Burnished bottles, Combed-wash pottery. Ovoid and rounded shapes disappear, as do forms like the double-mouthed jars. New elements of the repertory include greenish “*sila*” bowls, truncated conical bowls, beakers with concave base, band-rim bowls, bowls with bead rim and concave base, tall-necked jars, dark-rim orange bowls. Comb, incised and rope decoration patterns appear as well as ring bases and double, tubular lugs.

The coming of the Akkadians is widely accepted as the cause of changes characteristic of the EJ IIIB–EJ IV transition. This explains changes in the political situation, such as the subjugation of some centres from the previous period and the replacing of local authority with the royal Akkadian administration (Nagar) or securing Akkadian influence in independent cities by diplomatic ties, royal marriages included (Urkeš). Weiss and Senior have argued that Akkadian influence is traceable also in the economy. The observed intensification of agriculture and the introduction of large-scale food distribution (presence of “*sila*” bowls) is interpreted as introducing southern economic traditions with which the Akkadians were clearly familiar.⁷⁷ Less favourable environmental conditions and a growing degradation of the fields resulting from centuries of agriculture during preceding periods are quoted as a reason for these changes in agricultural management. The evidence for the deterioration of agricultural conditions, discussed already above, cannot be considered presently as the reason that forced the Akkadians to use the more intensive and more efficient southern system. It seems more likely that the introduction of Akkadian-rooted administration in Nagar consisted of a mechanical copying of a system which worked perfectly in other parts of the country, despite the fact the local conditions varied considerably from the conditions in the South. On the other hand, this system was well suited to provide local administration with human working power, which would be necessary to carry on such projects as, for instance, building Naram-Su'en's fort in Brak. Changes in the political situation, as well as changes in the economy are hardly reflected in the pottery assemblages. Changes are not very pronounced and are hardly related to historic events in all likelihood.

⁷⁴ The date is based on the evidence of seals, cf. Oates – Oates (2001), 389–91.

⁷⁵ Buccellati – Kelly-Buccellati (2001), 90–93, Abb. 19.

⁷⁶ Seal impressions of Tar'am-Agade, daughter of Naram-Su'en, married to the ruler (*endan*) of Urkeš, cf. Buccellati – Kelly-Buccellati (2000), 136–41, 153–55, Fig. 3.

⁷⁷ Senior – Weiss (1992).

3. The EJ IV – EJ V transition

The end of the EJ IV period is usually referred to the collapse of Akkadian authority in the area. The withdrawal of the Akkadians is a process that is difficult to explain as it is not clear what was its cause and how it had proceeded. Several explanations of this process have been offered in the literature⁷⁸, but a convincing reconstruction has yet to be presented. There is no doubt, however, that texts of “Akkadian” formulation cease to exist; Hurrian rulers and occasional texts written in Hurrian appear, suggesting not only a switch of power, but also a population change. It is possible that this change started already during the EJ IV period and proceeded with greater intensity once Akkadian rule had come to an end.⁷⁹

The EJ V period is discussed extensively above, in a section devoted to the analysis of the “Dark Ages”. It has been argued by Weiss that the collapse of settlement triggered by a natural disaster of some kind is characteristic of the period after the withdrawal of Akkadian authority from the north. There is no doubt at present that there was no collapse of settlement in the area. Two important centres of authority continued to exist during this period, one in Mozan and the other at Nagar, both ruled by independent kings of Hurrian origin. As the Oateses⁸⁰ have rightly pointed out, it is hard to believe that large centres, such as the two cities mentioned above, could have flourished without a hinterland and indeed some settlements of this period have been recently identified in the area. Also, the unfavourable change of climatic conditions seems to be much less pronounced than held by Weiss.

The pottery of period EJ V⁸¹ (fig. 5) varies from that of the previous period with regard to the forms encountered, the technique used for pottery-making, the surface treatment and decoration (for a more specific description, cf. above). A very interesting observation concerns the differences between the pottery assemblage typical of Tell Mozan and that of Tell Brak. It seems that two ceramic provinces may be distinguished, centred in the most important cities of the period. Hence, we have to deal not only with a change in the pottery, but also with a development of pottery provinces characterized by an extent varying from that which was current for the EJ III period.⁸²

4. The EJ V – OJ I transition

The settlement and alleged pottery of period OJ I (fig. 6) has been described above in the chapter devoted to the OJ I period. The pottery of the OJ I from the area is hardly known⁸³ and it is impossible to define any characteristic features. This situation is in clear opposi-

⁷⁸ For instance: Weiss – Courty (1993); Weiss et al. (1993), Weiss (2000a); Peltenburg (2000); Oates – Oates (2001), 392–94.

⁷⁹ Richter (2004).

⁸⁰ Oates – Oates (2001), 393.

⁸¹ Rutkowski (2006).

⁸² For the extent of pottery provinces during EJ III–IV, cf. Lebeau (2000), 174–77, Tabs. VI–VIII.

⁸³ Oguchi (1997); Nigro (1998), 280–81.

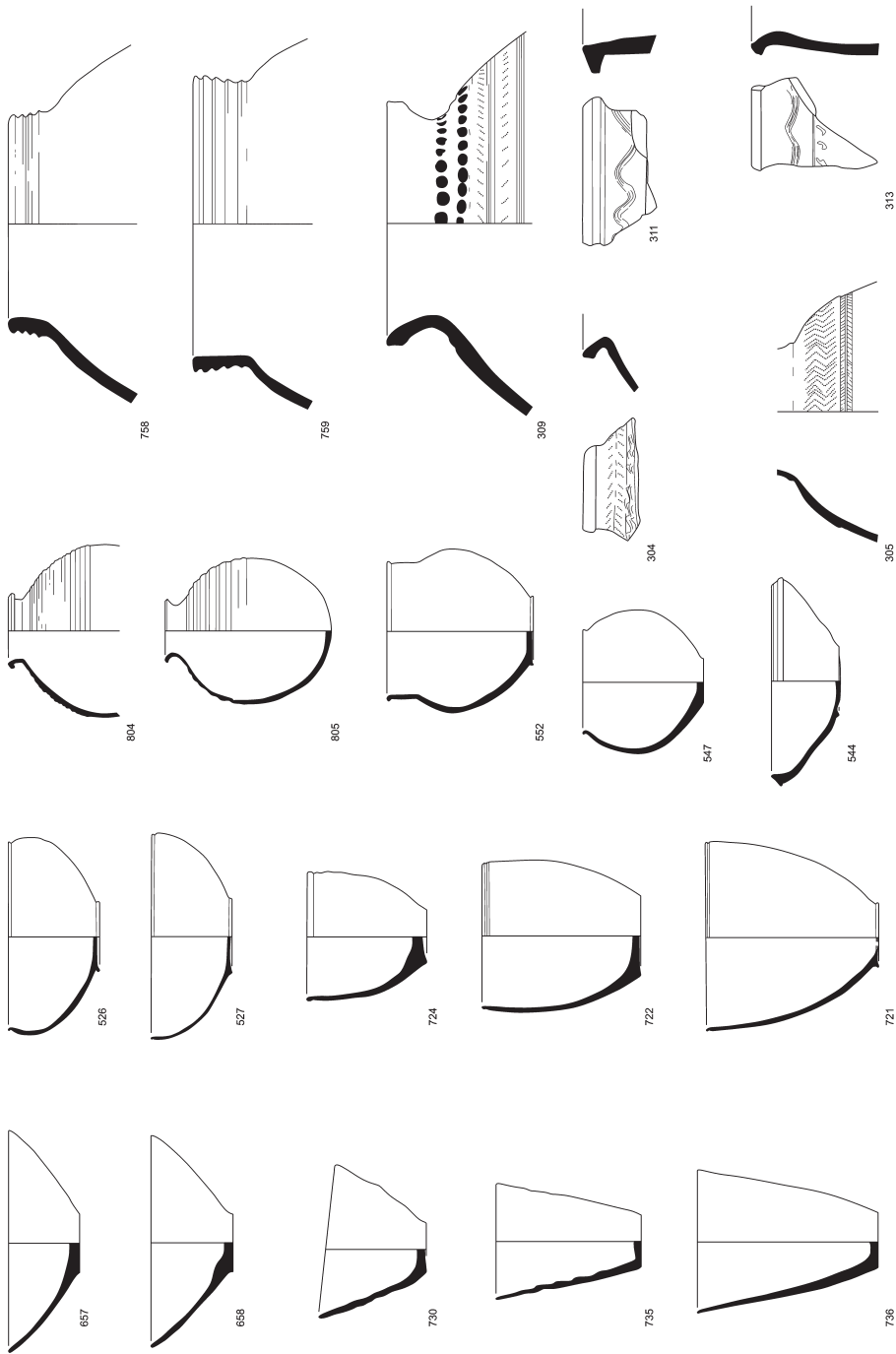


Fig. 5. A typical pottery assemblage of the Early Jazirah IV period from Tell Brak [numbers provided refer artefact drawings in Oates – Oates (2001)].

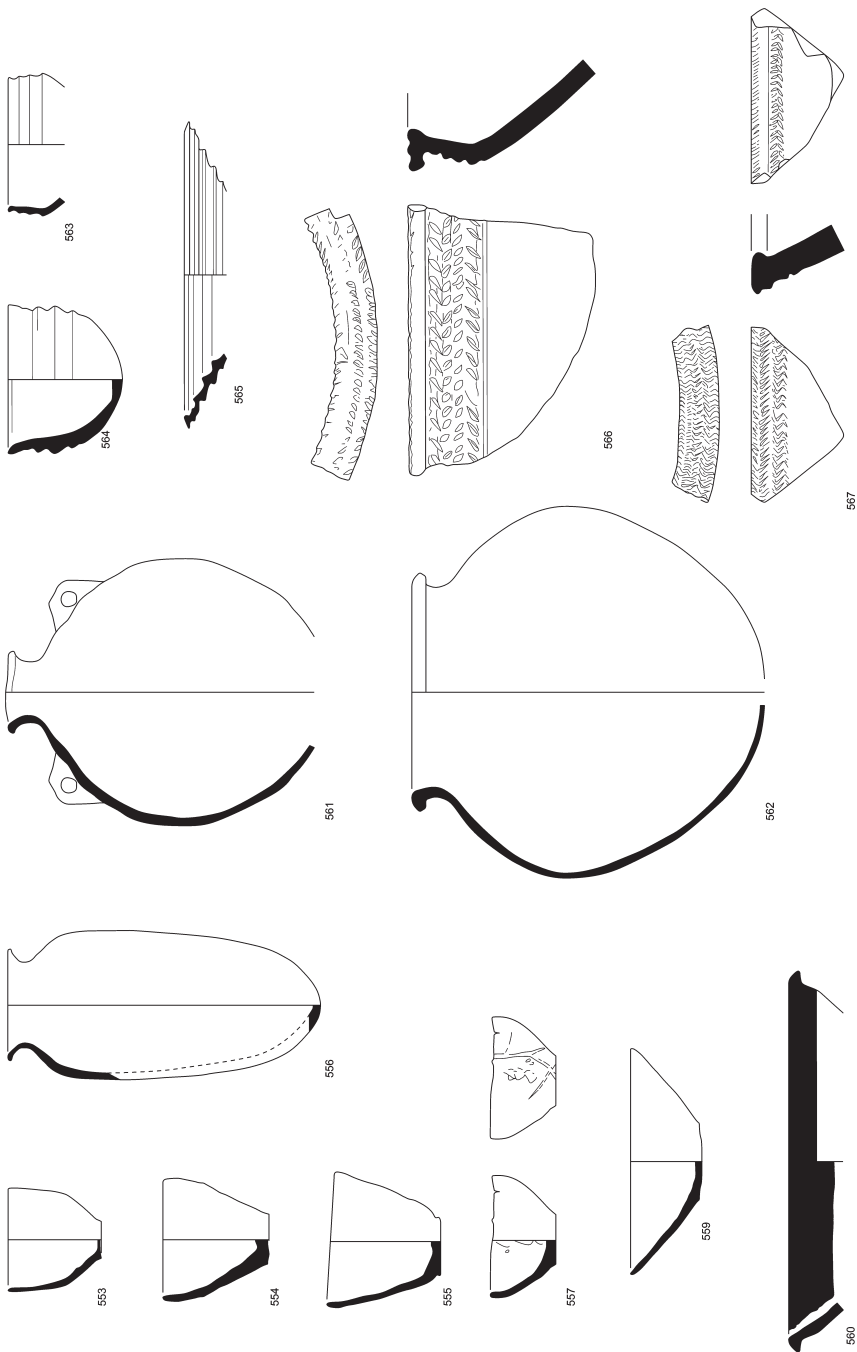


Fig. 6. Alleged Old Jazirah I period pottery from Tell Brak [numbers provided refer artefact drawings in Oates (2001)].

tion to the EJ V pottery, which is presently well defined. As far as the settlements are concerned, it is not clear whether any of the excavated sites revealed a continuous occupation sequence. Hence, there is clear contrast between the situation in the EJ V period, when two huge cities and a number of smaller settlements existed in the area, and the situation during the OJ I period, when no settlement existing at the time can be identified beyond any measure of doubt at the moment. Still, it is a lack of evidence for the OJ I period that is responsible for the opposition between the EJ V and the OJ I period. This situation can easily change once new evidence has been retrieved from excavations and then the nature of the transition will have to be reconsidered.

Conclusion

This paper contains an analysis of two “dark ages” and four transitions from one cultural period to another, all traditionally identified in the periodization of the later part of the 3rd millennium BC in the Khabur region.

The alleged dark ages, the EJ V period and OJ I period, are of a differing nature. Due to recent archaeological work in the area, the EJ V period cannot be considered as a dark age anymore. Beside the two large cities, which were seats of local royal dynasties, a number of smaller settlements has been identified, the pottery of the period is relatively well known and cuneiform texts, though extremely rare, exist. On the contrary, the OJ I period is one of the most mysterious in the archaeology of the region. No settlement of this date has been identified beyond doubt, no typical pottery is known and there is no written evidence from the area.

The transitions observed in the culture of the Khabur area in the second part of the 3rd millennium are well established. Moreover, the changes concern not only the material culture, although these changes are the most easily observable to archaeologists, but also local society and are reflected in the history of the region. Factors triggering these changes are of various nature: development of local communities, influence from South Mesopotamia, population movements and environmental stress, the latter being a factor the importance of which has been very much stressed during recent years, but which appears now to have a much more limited influence. Only the last of the transitional periods (EJ V to OJ I) is less understood, mainly because of poor knowledge of the OJ I period.

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