On the Northern frontier of the Ebla Kingdom during the Early Bronze Age IVA. The Birecik Valley and the Kingdom of Abarsal in the left bank of the Middle Turkish Euphrates

En la frontera norte del reino de Ebla durante el Bronce Antiguo IVA. El valle de Birecik y el reino de Abarsal en la margen izquierda del Éufrates Medio

Summary
The Early Bronze (EB) Age IVA in the Birecik region, which covers part of the second half of the 3rd millennium BC, north of the modern city of Birecik, on the left bank of the Middle Turkish Euphrates, shows (as most of the EB Age) a likely cluster of sites around the small center of Surtepe Höyük, and with the position of Tilbes Hoyuk as a probable local sanctuary.

This historical period, referred to in ancient Mesopotamian sources, that is equivalent to the end of the Early Dynastic (ED) and beginning of the Akkad Empire in Northern Mesopotamia. It was also the time of Ebla (northern Syria), an expansionist power, destroyed in the 23rd century BC. Mardikh IIB1 is the period of the archives (2400-2300 BC), the apparent greatest phase of splendor of that kingdom, during the 3rd millennium BC. The oldest pact cited in a text from Ebla, focuses on Abarsal, later a vassal state and still no located on the archaeological records. Recently, the Abarsal city-state has been searched by north of Carchemish.

We put these facts in relation to similar events that occurred during the EB IVA in archaeological sites in the area between the Balikh and the left bank of the Middle Euphrates, with which Birecik seems to have some type of cultural link. The relationship of the North Syrian kingdom of Ebla to the Birecik valley area in EB IVA may offer an important clue about the presence of the kingdom of Abarum/Abarsal in the area.

Key words: Early Bronze Age IVA, Ebla, Abarsal, Akkad Empire. Birecik
Resumen

El Bronce Antiguo IVA en la región de Birecik, que cubre parte de la segunda mitad del tercer milenio a. C., al norte de la moderna ciudad de Birecik, en la margen izquierda del Éufrates medio turco, muestra (como durante la mayor parte del Bronce Antiguo) una agrupación de asentamientos alrededor del pequeño centro de Surtepe Höyük, mientras Tilbes Höyük debía ser un santuario local.

Este período histórico en las antiguas fuentes mesopotámicas es el equivalente al final del Dinástico Arcaico y el inicio del Imperio de Akkad en el norte de Mesopotamia. Fue también la época de Ebla (norte de Siria), un poder expansionista destruido en el siglo XXIII a. C. Mardikh IIB1 es el período de los archivos (2400-2300 a. C.), la aparente fase de mayor esplendor del reino en el tercer milenio. El acuerdo más antiguo citado en un texto de Ebla tiene su foco en Abarsal, posteriormente un estado vassallo, todavía no localizado arqueológicamente. Recientemente, la ciudad-estado de Abarsal ha sido buscada al norte de Carchemish.

Relacionamos estos datos en relación con eventos similares que ocurrieron durante el Bronce Antiguo IVA en los yacimientos arqueológicos del área entre el Balikh y la margen izquierda del Éufrates medio, con el cual Birecik parece haber tenido algún tipo de lazo cultural. La relación del reino de Ebla del norte de Siria con el valle de Birecik durante el Bronce Antiguo IVA puede ofrecer una importante clave acerca de la presencia del reino de Aburam/Abarsal en la región.

Palabras clave: Bronce Antiguo IVA, Ebla, Abarsal, Imperio de Akkad, Birecik

1. Introduction

Archaeological levels during the Early Bronze Age, which covers mostly of III millennium BC, in the Birecik region, north of the modern city of Birecik, on the left bank of the Middle Turkish Euphrates show a likely cluster of sites around the small center of Surtepe Hoyuk, and with the position of Tilbes Hoyuk as a probable local sanctuary during this period.

In this period there are relations, and subsequent political control, and then wars and destruction in many places. It could well be a cyclical pattern and have happened before in the Birecik area. We have been able to distinguish two periods of population disruption in most of the places mentioned during the III millennium BC, mainly at the end of the local EB Ib and at some point in the Mid-Late EB (perhaps at the end of the EB III). However, we see two different patterns. While EB II seems a period of abandonment of almost all the places mentioned in our study on place, except Tilbes Höyük, there are no signs of destruction in the sites. On the other hand, at the end of the EB III there was a period of (ritual?) destruction in buildings (witnessed in Tilbes) in addition to violence during the end of...
the EB IVA, with an increase in burials in the area. Subsequently, there was a continuity of settlement in Tilbes Höyük, but not at Tilvez, although the nature of the use of both places seemed to partially change with new reconstruction and appearance of other buildings.

We put these facts in relation to similar events that occurred during the EB IVA in archaeological sites in the area between the Balikh and the left bank of the middle Euphrates, with which Birecik seems to have some type of cultural link. The relationship of the North Syrian kingdom of Ebla to the valley area in EB IVA may offer an important clue about the presence of the kingdom of Abarum/Abarsal in the area.

2. The second urbanization in Northern Mesopotamia

The second half of the 3rd millennium is the historical period, referred to in ancient Mesopotamian sources, that is equivalent to the end of the Early Dynastic (ED) and the beginning of the Akkad Empire in Northern Mesopotamia. The period of second urbanization not only coincides with Early Dynastic III of southern Mesopotamia, but is even specified at the beginning of it in ED IIIA (2400 BC), which coincides with the expansion of the kingdom of Ebla on the modern-day Turkish Upper Middle Euphrates. The period of second urbanization in the Middle Syro-Turkish Euphrates coincides in archaeological terms with the expansion of the caliciform culture in ceramic technology. It is also a period in which metallurgy and commercial relations based on the transit and exchange of metals flourished. In addition, specialists and artists in different areas of manual arts (ceramics, seals) emerged.

This is a phase of great urban expansion throughout northern Mesopotamia. On the other hand, it constitutes a period that, according to written documentation, coincides with the appearance of important fortified city-states in northern Syria and the Turkish Euphrates area. A possible cause due to endogenous growth (Mazzoni, 1991: 165) is one of the models suggested for the great second urbanization in northern Syria and Mesopotamia during the period. The concept of city-state is inherent to the region of the Middle and Upper Euphrates, as the writings of the time suggest (v.gr. the Ebla archives), but these also have interstate relations.

The area adjacent to the Birecik-Carchemish region is the region of the Syrian Tishrin Dam, which had at its ends two places, Carchemish and Emar, which were identified as important centers in the Preclassical History of the region. The Great Royal Road from Persian times that crossed Carchemish, Emar, among others, and reached Ebla.

Although there are no cities as large as in the hinterland, but this area of the Middle Euphrates is very fertile from an agricultural point of view. Its relationship with the Euphrates is demonstrated by being a transit region, and current annual flow imbalances of the river itself. The water route has been a key for long-distance commercial exchanges during millennia (Margueron, 1989). The construction of reservoirs on the Syrian and Turkish Euphrates at the end of the 20th century led to an increase in archaeological rescue projects in the area; but after completing the reservoirs, a threat of gradual flooding occurred since 2000. The 3rd millennium BC was one of the periods initially apparently most favored in its archaeological exposure during the rescue work. A well-coordinated river communication is assumed during the 3rd millennium in Northern Mesopotamia. Due to likely territorial frictions, a multitude of alternative paths were developed.

Today, and despite the conflicts, it is characterized by a transit zone for eastern Anatolia, and also access to the center of Anatolia, with trade routes in force today, and a cultural and social bond with the north of Syria and the Aleppo and Balikh area. It seems to be halfway between all of them. To the north there are smooth hills, a source for rocks, with a more steppe climate. It is a link region between the river and the Taurus Mountains.

For some researchers the Middle Euphrates acted as a dividing line between the different ceramic cultures during the second half of the 3rd millennium (Mazzoni, 1985a) and the places located on the left
bank belong to a culture with an eastern orientation (Mazzoni, 1985b). The image is of a great cultural regionalization, based on its ceramics. This regional diversification could seem to have been sudden in nature based on the also apparent increase in the size of the settlements during the period; but the data of urbanization and large population during the Late Chalcolithic and the beginning of the Bronze Age could well demonstrate that the area of the middle and northern Euphrates of Syria and Turkey already laid the previous foundations for urbanization and regionalization in the region.

3. Middle Euphrates. the dividing line and the kingdom of Abarum/Abarsal

Ebla was an expansionist power, but destroyed in the 23rd century BC. Mardikh IIB1 is the period of the archives (2400–2300 BC), the apparent greatest phase of splendor of the kingdom, during the 3rd millennium BC. It is said that towards the end of the 24th century BC, in the epoch immediately before the vizier Ibrium (2322–2302 BC), the city of Ebla entered into a war campaign against Abarsal. Later a treaty was signed with this city, not only a peace but also a commercial contract (Astour, 1988: 147–148). This is the oldest pact cited in a text from Ebla, and later on Abarsal and its region became a vassal state. In return, the treaty spoke of the exchange of merchants and messengers (figure 1a–c).

This Abarsal city has been searched by Italian researchers north of Carchemish (Catagnoti and Bonechi, 1990). Of the archaeological Carchemish of the EBA we only know about the cist tombs, as well as the mention in the texts of Ebla. We have the particular case of Til Barsip that grew rapidly during the EB III, and was destroyed afterward in EB IV, and was identified as Abarsal according to some scholars (Astour, 2002). Tell Ahmar/Til Barsip, placed 20 km south of Karkemish, was an important trade nexus. Another identification by Archi has suggested that Tell Chuera was Abarsal (Archi, 1989: 15–19 and 2021; Bonechi, 1993: 8–10). However, Tell Chuera was abandoned around the 24th century BC (Meyer, 2010), which may be a handicap in the face of this identification from an archaeological point of view. Recently, a new proposal was Tell Bazi-Banat, a site of 40 ha between Emar and Carchemish (Winters, 2018: 157, 165).

The northern border of Hammam-Chuera-Harran is on the Turkish Euphrates, but the Karababa sites have related material, with a different material bulk (Thissen, 1989: 206). Hammam’s second burnt level is framed in the EB IV (Thissen, 1989: 197). There were commercial contacts between Ebla and Harran according to the texts (Archi, 1980: 3 ff.; Thiessen, 1989: 307).

Indeed, in ancient Mesopotamia, several cities shared similar names. Place given identifications occur in both the north and the south, which is why there are cities that can be called the same way in ancient Mesopotamia, such as “Ur of the North”, or “Ur of the South”. According to this logic, there may be two Abarsal, or there may be two Urshu, among other ancient cities.

In Akkadian the word Abar/Eber refers to a place that is “on the other side, beyond […]”. In Persian times, the Achaemenids located northern Syria and the west bank of the Euphrates (the farthest from their point of view) as Abar-Nâri, “beyond the river”. Abâru means “lead” (or related to metal). “ú-sal” in Sumerian is “A low, fertile area along a watercourse”. “Ura” is a particle that in Sumerian is related to water. The particle sal could well be “the place” in a local Semitic dialect; “kisal” means “courtyard” but better “the royal courtyard”.

4. Akkad and the city of Urshu on the right bank of the Middle Euphrates

At the end of this phase of urban expansion, around 2300 BC (Sallaberger and Schräkm, 2015: 302, table 10.1), is when the irruption and conquests of King Sargon or Naram-Sin of Akkad occurred in the territories north of the Euphrates and even his penetration into Anatolia, a phenomenon that was seen decades ago by some researchers as mere propaganda, without concrete facts on the archaeological level (Michalowski, 1985). Southern Mesopotamia of
that period was unified, and yet in northern Syria and southeastern Turkey arose a series of kingdoms that were not yet controlled under the power of Akkad (figure 2a-b).

There were violent destructions at the end of the 3rd millennium. It is a rare occurrence in the ancient history of northern Mesopotamia and has attempted to be linked to a series of important environmental changes that occurred around the 23rd century BC, with an increase in arid conditions and other series of ecological phenomena that included enormous floods and volcanic eruptions. Such phenomenology coincided in time with the collapse of the Akkadian Empire. According to H. Weiss et al. (2003) the entire Jezireh was abandoned for 300 years, between 2200 and 1900 BC.

In that regard, we have the case of Titriš Höyük, which is located in the Tavuk Çay, a tributary of the Euphrates in Turkey. During its flourishing period, Titriš Höyük consisted of a wall, which presaged the

**Figure 1.** A. The kingdom of Ebla during the reign of Igríš-ḫalab. Orange-shaded areas, allied states. Grey-shaded areas, independent or hostile polities (Edwards, 2019: 311 fig. 15). B. Ebla, aerial photo. C. Ebla, plan of the site (Barlemi 2015, Wikimedia)

**Figura 1.** A. El reino de Ebla durante el reinado de Igríš-ḫalab. En naranja, estados aliados. En gris, regiones independientes o enemigas (Edwards, 2019: 311 fig. 15). B. Foto aérea de Ebla. C. Ebla, plano del sitio (Barlemi 2015, Wikimedia)
existence of external threats. But at the local levels of the late Early Bronze Age, which we could date as earliest around the 24th century and as most recent before the end of the 22nd century, there is evidence of a violent conflict; the excavators of the site prefer to place it in the most recent phase of this occupation (Matney et al., 2012). A group of close to twenty male young adults, including three women, two children and a newborn, were found during archaeological excavations, with their bones disarticulated and placed under the floor of a house, in a whitewashed structure, B98.97 (Algaze et al., 2001: 69-70); Skulls, with traces of trauma, were arranged surrounding a pile of long bones. The evidence of this “burial” at Tritic Höyük contrasts with the usual family crypts under houses of the period in the city. The researchers who conducted the analysis believe that those buried at B98.97 are the product of a massacre during the time (Erdal, 2010).

After a comparison of the mitochondrial DNA sequences from the usual burials and those from the existence of external threats. But at the local levels of the late Early Bronze Age, which we could date as earliest around the 24th century and as most recent before the end of the 22nd century, there is evidence of a violent conflict; the excavators of the site prefer to place it in the most recent phase of this occupation (Matney et al., 2012). A group of close to twenty male young adults, including three women, two children and a newborn, were found during archaeological excavations, with their bones disarticulated and placed under the floor of a house, in a whitewashed structure, B98.97 (Algaze et al., 2001: 69-70); Skulls, with traces of trauma, were arranged surrounding a pile of long bones. The evidence of this “burial” at Tritic Höyük contrasts with the usual family crypts under houses of the period in the city. The researchers who conducted the analysis believe that those buried at B98.97 are the product of a massacre during the time (Erdal, 2010).

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For this study on EB IV A we will concentrate our attention on materials from the Tilbes and Tilvez/Meteler höyük, for having offered period-associated architecture, in addition to good primary stratigraphic contexts and seals concerning the Mid-Late 3rd millennium BC. To date, at Surtepe Höyük it is only clear that there were EB IV pits. According to the public servants from the Birecik Ministry of Agriculture, they say that the best arable land in the region has always been around Surtepe and Tilvez.

The main evidence for an occupation of the EB IV A at Tilbes Höyük came from three excavation areas: A2A6, AE 1-5 and E4aE3E8. There is no prolonged hiatus of occupation between Tilbes’ EB III and EB IV A, especially at A2A6, but a reorganization of the architecture is evident at E4aE3E8. As we remarked in previous studies on the EB I and EB II sanctuaries, the filling of the buildings seemed deliberate and with a ritual pattern in those structures sealed during the first half of the third millennium (Gil Fuensanta, Mederos and Muminov, 2019: 56-58, fig. 4-5). It is true, however, that during the excavations carried out in late July 1999 on the Tilbes Höyük “Burned Building” of EB III date, some heavy stone balls or fragments of the same appeared (for example inventory 9564/9906 of locus 8586). The appearance of anchors on a lime-plastered podium, from EB IV A, close to the old burned sanctuary of EB III and precursors, is an important piece of information that further supports the theory that Tilbes Höyük played at least one function as a local-regional sanctuary for much of the 3rd millennium BC (figure 4a-b).

This excavation area, together with E4aE3E8, presents the highest concentration of broken terracotta female figurines. But in Tilbes we almost always find the heads of the figurines, a detail absent in other places downstream (Surtepe, Qara Quzaq). A statuette top that appeared in sector W of A2A6 presents some stylistic relationship with heads found in the destruction level of the Royal Palace G of Ebla (Peyronel, 2013: fig. 4.2.1). On the other hand, it is interesting that such figurines appear in the Birecik Valley from the EB IV, since until then all the iconography of representations that we had in Tilbes Höyük was limited to clay horns (Gil Fuensanta,
Figure 3. A. View of the höyük of Tilbes, 1997 Season. B. Tilbes Höyük, General view of Squares E4AE3E8 and E4BE7E2E10. C. Topography of Tilbes Höyük, 1999 Season, with Squares E4AE3E8, E4BE7E2 E10 and A2A6

Mederos and Muminov, 2019: 60, fig. 8a-b), associated with the area of the sanctuaries. Since the EB I-III phases in E4aE3E8 excavation area and its surroundings (AE1-5), the anthropomorphization of representations increased. The burial of figurines in Tilbes had to obey to other reasons than being a mere entombment place, due to the large number of living spaces. Possibly these burials were due to a matter of local deference (figure 5a-b).

A2A6 during EB IV yielded a multi-roomed structure, which appeared in use a long time, and with reconstructions over such a long period. The walls of A2A6 in EB IV were elaborated with local stone, in addition to a complementary use of mudbrick and mudhif in the edifice area. There are walls exceeding a width of meter and 50 cm in some sectors. At a later date, in late classical antiquity, the höyük of Tilbes was eroded by floods of the river, destroying part of Mederos and Muminov, 2019: 60, fig. 8a-b), associated with the area of the sanctuaries. Since the EB I-III phases in E4aE3E8 excavation area and its surroundings (AE1-5), the anthropomorphization of representations increased. The burial of figurines in Tilbes had to obey to other reasons than being a mere entombment place, due to the large number of living spaces. Possibly these burials were due to a matter of local deference (figure 5a-b).

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it, and leaving this building near the Western boundary of the settlement (figure 6a-c).

There was a development of rural temples in Syria of the 3rd millennium, but they were short-lived (see Tell Raqa‘i). In this case, the existence in Tilbes for more than a millennium would imply a centralized locality, forming part of a larger administrative center in which that site would be a likely place of passage for the period. There were podiums in Tilbes, near the older EB sanctuaries position. Also clay figurines were found nearby, in areas to the west and north of the previous sanctuaries area. They could be a phenomenon indicative of popular religious practices and legitimation of grain stores based on cult activities (Schwartz, 2000: 179).

The EB IV shows continuity of use in the buildings, but there is an apparent gap in use (a fill?) between the EB III and the EB IVA in this area of A2A6. However, this hiatus is not contemplated in E4A3E8, where previous buildings are reused as foundations. These EB IV buildings located on the southern slope of the mound had partly disturbed the burned EB III building (Gil Fuensanta et al., 2002: 136; Gil Fuensanta, Mederos

Figure 6. A-B. Tilbes Höyük, 1997 Season, Square A2A6, large “Multi-roomed” building, with two ovens, EB IVA Phase. C. Tilbes Höyük, 1997 Season, Square E4A3E8, Alley and large building, EB IVA Phase.

Both sectors of the excavation have a large presence of constructions, throughout the EB IV, a period that does not seem to be affected by the disruption in the settlement observed in the nearby sites of Surtepe and Meteler-Tilvez. The occupation in the höyük of Tilbes was continued throughout the final moments of the 3rd millennium. Besides a presumed particular ritual function linked to the site, also during that period of occupation, the buildings were located at a higher level compared to the river bank in Tilvez/Meteler.

6. EB IVA Burials

There is not a large amount of evidence about adult burial cists in A2A6 and E4aE3E8 during the EB IVA phase, but pot children entombments do appear, as well as burials of infants or unborn children without grave goods. LaUAM analyzes reveal a ritualized funeral practice, and especially in those burials coming from the area that was occupied in the past by the “Burned Building” of EB III date. There are ceramics and figurines in A2A6 that demonstrate some type of ritual or ceremonial significance. They remind us of the abundant appearance of Late EB terracotta figurines from other regions (Meijer, 1995: fig. 3) (figure 7a-b).

The excavated Tilbes tombs never show trauma on the human remains in any period of those excavated, and therefore even less so in the burials assigned to the middle/late fraction of the 3rd millennium BC. During the EB there are no elements that reveal the presence of figures linked to martial activities (v.gr. absence of spears in the tombs of the different phases of the 3rd millennium). On the other hand, the höyük of Tilvez/Meteler did not show typical entombments, but rather the product of a severe beating on an adult individual, of unknown sex, in operation 1. That individual had three antemortem fractures in the right arm that did not cause the death (García Millán, 2019: 103, 106, 105 fig. 5), with also a longitudinal (unusual, and unnatural) femoral fracture perimortem, close to the time of death. He/she was not crushed by any wall. Falling walls have never caused...
fractures or the death of this person. This person had mobility problems before an alleged beating he/she received (remains of blood pooling on bones) and could have been hunchback or handicapped in life (García Millán, pers. comm.) (figure 7c–d).

7. Tilbes EB IVA Ceramics

The ceramic shapes and the context of their appearance in the Euphrates sites have been considered as markers that facilitate chronological relationships for this period (Porter, 1999: 312). It is believed that the corrugated beaker appears to replace painting and burnishing in the Euphrates (Porter, 1999: 315). According to scholars on the region, this area of Carchemish-Birecik has the specific features of a distinctive ceramic province during the 3rd millennium BC (Engin, 2007).
Regarding the Birecik Valley, it seems that we are in a region of predominance of plain simple ware. But in Tilbes Höyük, during the long sequence of the EB IV (phases A and B), there was a presence of a large number of chaff faced storage vessels which coexisted with the plain simple storage jars.

As for the EB IVA ceramics, a very marked standardization of shapes and pastes is produced in the höyük of Tilbes, in the style of other places of the valley or in northern Mesopotamia, where predominate open bowls with band rims, corrugated goblets and vessels with rims, displaying colors that vary between light red and light yellow according to Munsell’s book of color. We see the presence in the same excavation area of plenty of small wares, along with large jugs. There were yielded fragments of gray Syrian bottles and corrugated cups, the so-called “Hama” goblets, typical of the EB IV. The pottery is largely grit tempered and wheel made; the jugs do not appear to have been all hand-made, and some were manufactured with the use of a slow-wheel. The caliciform ware is characterized by the use of high temperatures during the pottery cooking (figure 8).

A good part of the ceramic bulk from the EB IV, in its phase A, as obtained in A2A6, fits into the general picture of the pottery distribution during the Mid-Late Third millennium of the Middle Euphrates, the so-called Plain simple ware, and with the caliciform culture, whose first expansion may be in part due to the rise of the kingdom of Ebla during the period in question (Mazzoni, 1985a–b). There are subtle changes in its distribution in the A2A6 excavation area over such a long period, which suggests some type of different use or supply. The ceramic materials found during the 1997 campaign in E4aE3E8 in the building remains from EB IVA and B support what was obtained later with the dig on sector A2A6.

There is also a mass production of ceramics both in the areas of E4aE3E8 and A2A6, evident by the large number of partially preserved ceramic vessels and fragments, deposited in the large structure of A2A6 or near the old area occupied by the previous sanctuaries of the EB I–III.

The pottery of A2A6 is mostly of two types. There stands out a good amount of ceramics from the caliciform tradition, with its open bowls and bowls, but...
This is demonstrated by Umm el Marra, Jerablus Tahtani, Tell Ahmar, Tell Banat or Tell Bi’a among others. In the hinterland of the right bank of the Euphrates they appear in the Tilbeshar IIIIC phase, the end of which is dated to around 2300 BC (Kepinski, 2007: 154 ff., fig. 10.5).

It is conspicuous, in other places in the Carchemish-Birecik region, that the “Hama beaker” in plain simple ware is usually associated with burials (Porter, 1999: 314). It is true that its appearance in Tilbes Höyük’s E4aE3E8 during the EB IV follows this pattern since there was in close relation with burials nearby.

Several of the fragments of band painted small jars have reminiscences in other places of the region (Porter, 1999: fig. 4). But in Tilbes Höyük these types are not very abundant in A2A6. Red banded burnished jars appear on both the west and left banks of the Euphrates (Thissen, 1989: 205). And which probably belong to a northern tradition (Mazzoni, 1985a), perhaps with Tell Hadidi as a producing center (Thissen, 1989: 205).

There was a presence of metallic ware in Tilvez and Tilbes Höyük, as well as in the pits and surface of Surtepe. Metallic pottery appears during the ED of Mesopotamia in phase II, but not north of the Birecik Valley. The parallels with Tell Hammam et Turkmann VI west dates extend to the end of the 3rd millennium BC (Curvers, 1989: 107), that is, EB IV. On this kind of ware, the decorations are almost absent, with the exception of the small band painted jars (Curvers, 1989: 112, pl. 10.6273). In the last levels there was no present metallic ware (Thissen, 1989: 197). Even they were present at Kazane Höyük (Wattenmaker, 1998), not far from the old town of modern Urfa, finding ourselves in the region of influence of Mesopotamia, as demonstrated by the sounding in Harran (Prag, 1970). It responds to the concept of dimorphic society (Bunnens, 1999: 165), urban populations and pastoralists living on the same sites.

8. Tilvez Höyük-Meteler’s evidence on EB IVA

We chose to concentrate our first digging activities before the completion of the dam in the northern side of the mound of Tilvez Höyük, located in
the current abandoned town of Eşki Meteler; this choice was due to the fact that it was the area of the place with the least modern constructions during the 20th century. After the year 2000, when the reservoir was completed, we devoted more time to survey and excavate in the höyük, which led us to determine the presence of an Early Bronze I settlement in the south-central part of Tilvez. On the other hand, there is a continuity of EB IV type sherdage between Surtepe and Tilvez, both located close to each other. However, the ceramics of Meteler or Surtepe and Tilbes do not equal, despite the matching metallurgy (H. Özbal, pers. comm.); we suggest it is due to different functions of each place. And even the Tilbes Höyük periods are not reflected in the stratigraphy of the other two sites, which despite their size, have a much greater temporal limitation (Figure 10a-b).

It was not discovered in any of the archaeological excavations or surveys on Tilvez Höyük a
This city already had its Royal Palace in existence (Vacca, 2016: 272, 279), but not yet reached its influence on the Birecik Valley area (figure 11a-b).

The EB destroyed buildings (and not because of fire) observed in Tilvez Höyük do not evidence ante quem EB IVA ceramics, such as bowls with tripods or champagne cups or horizontal reserved slip, proper of the “Burned Building” of Tilbes EB III, or that of phase II of Gre Virike, further

single fragment that attested the presence of material previous to Mardikh IIB1 phase types, that is the earlier caliciform tradition of Ebla, what falls into its EB III-EB IVA1 phase (Vacca, 2016: fig. 7), therefore the presence of the cultural influence of the Ebla ceramic tradition appears to be since the Mardikh IIB1 phase, which corresponds to our EB IVA of the Birecik valley; a demonstration that the written sources of the period can have a semblance of authenticity, given that on such EB III period of Tell Mardikh/Ebla, this city already had its Royal Palace in existence (Vacca, 2016: 272, 279), but not yet reached its influence on the Birecik Valley area (figure 11a-b).

The EB destroyed buildings (and not because of fire) observed in Tilvez Höyük do not evidence ante quem EB IVA ceramics, such as bowls with tripods or champagne cups or horizontal reserved slip, proper of the “Burned Building” of Tilbes EB III, or that of phase II of Gre Virike, further...
The corrugated bowls of Kurban Höyük IV belong to the same convention of caliciform and plain simple ware, but not all types from Tilbes or Tilvez are specifically presented (Algaze, 1990: pl. 53), demonstrating that Karababa and the Birecik Valley belong to two different ceramic zones during the EB IVA.

A few very rare fragments of polished red ceramic were found, but they are diverse after the burnished chaff-faced typical of the EB IV cooking pots typical of the Birecik valley area. They remind us more in connection with the central-western tradition of Anatolia from the 3rd millennium BC. In Kurban Höyük period V, a chaff tempered jug of this type, with triangular handle, was already present and which the excavators saw in accordance with the previous and later tradition of cooking pot ware in the area (Algaze, 1990: vol. 1, 288–289; vol. 2, pl. 52c)

There is a large presence of small containers, jugs or bottles in Tilvez. Regarding it, Tilvez Höyük differs in relation with other places of the valley (Engin, 2007: 273), including Tilbes Höyük, where there was a more varied ceramic bulk for such phase. There were not Hama Beakers in Tilvez. We did not find any fragments of burnished cooking pot ware after the excavated contexts of Tilvez between the years 1998–2000. Fragments of burnished wide plates and trays were found, but only in a sector of the excavation far from the open operation areas of the höyük, in the burials discovered during the dam construction. These are the only examples of handmade pottery found in the EB IV of the site. All the plain simple ware of the place was produced on wheel and fired at high temperatures in ovens.

9. An impression of a cylinder seal in the Ebla-palace style at Tilvez/Meteler and the city of Abarum/Abarsal

According to our colleague P. Charvát, the first state to have been interested in securing a secure foothold in the vicinity of Tilbes was the early Syrian kingdom of Ebla during the Royal Palace-G phase, EB IVA, c. 2450–2350 BC (Mattiae, 1997: 1;

In the same place as the aforementioned cylindrical seal impression described, there were associated caliciform culture small goblets from the late Early Bronze Age IVA, as a Syrian bottle (Massa, 2016: 231–232, 491 fig. 7.45; Massa and Palmisano, 2018: 75–76 fig. 8; Alp, 2018: 75 fig. 3), closer to examples from Tell Chuera (Kühne, 1976: fig. 72) or Ur (Kühne 1976: fig. C9) than the Anatolian vessels (Alp, 2018: 73, table 1) (figure 14a–d).

This specimen resembles the Type 1 described and associated with EME 4/EJZ3 (Sconzo, 2014: 224), according to the chronology in use by ARCANE (Early Mesopotamian and Early Jezireh), and which matches what is proposed here for the period of employ of Tilvez Höyük. We emphasize that the appearance of these bottles in a similar context of Shyukh Tahtani that was interpreted as a storage room or “perfume room” (Sconzo, 2014: 221, note 31). In that case we would be facing a type of dispersion in these places on the northern left bank of Birecik, at the beginning of the second half of the 3rd millennium BC.

We do not know how long the Ebla rule lasted over Tilvez Höyük and its area, but we think that at least two generations were served by three viziers, Arrulum, Ibiyum and his son, Ibbi-Zikir. There is an apparent participation of Ibiyum in the campaign over the Abarsal area, and subsequent “passage to the orbit of Ebla” by it and the last years of Arrulum’s period of influence occurred. After this, there was a “hiatus” in Tilvez Höyük. On the other hand, the seal of Tilvez Höyük would be inscribed by its style in the Royal Palace G of Ebla (2400–2350 BC), possibly during the period in office of Ibiyum, which could be inscribed in EB IVA.

10. Conclusions

At the present time, we cannot specify that there was an intermediate or transition phase between EB III and EB IVA in these deposits north of the
Figure 14. A. Syrian and Anatolian bottles during the EBA (Massa and Palmisano, 2018: 76 fig. 8). B. Syrian bottles, distribution
Birecik Valley. There are two moments of disruption in the north of the Birecik subregion in the Mid-Late EBA. One of them at the end of the EB III, which is specified in the ritual closure of the burned sanctuary of Tilbes Höyük (Gil Fuensanta, Mederos and Muminov, 2019: 58-61 fig. 7a-b), and which does not offer human remains of killed people in the conflagration. And what if it corresponds to a subsequent development and change of orientation in buildings both in Tilvez/Meteler and in Tilbes? Perhaps the ritual burning of the EB III sanctuary at the end of 25 century BC is due to the apparition on Tilbes of a more centralized religion connected with the political sphere of the kingdom of Ebla. Ceramics in the “goblet” Ebla tradition, were abundant in Tilbes EB IVA, and they give a clue in this regard, in addition to the disappearance of the religious element of the “fertility horn” so abundant in Tilbes Höyük, at least since the EB Ib. However, the idea of fertile rebirth is maintained in Tilbes Höyük, and in the burials of unborn infants of EB IVA-IVB and MB I-II, in the area near the ancient sanctuary. This period could correspond with an increase in the population of Surtepe-Tilvez Höyük/Meteler. It could be linked to the presence of Ebla in the political-administrative scheme of the area, with the advent of the Palazzo G of Ebla (Mardikh IIB1).

However, a second “conflagration” (disruption?) period, which we place in local EB IVA, coincides with the destruction in Tilvez/Meteler. On the floor of an EB IVA building, the remains, skull and long bones, of a (male?) individual who suffered from some pathology that caused bodily deformities were found scattered; however, such person was likely cruelly beaten and had bled to death (García Millán, pers. comm.). We know such fate thanks to the remains analyzed at LaFUAM (UAM Forensic Laboratory). And that we date during the Palazzo G of Ebla therefore, thus it happens sometime circa 2300 BC (and after 2350 BC). We put this in relation to similar events that occurred not only in Ebla, but also with those of the nearby Titriş Höyük, upriver in the Bozova subregion (Urfa), where the human remains of part of the population are also desecrated, as well as Hammam et Turkmann, and other sites. Can we see the hand of Sargon or Naram Sin of Akkad in the events that led to the destruction of the EB IVA levels in Tilvez Höyük?

However, this period does not represent a population hiatus in Tilbes Höyük during the EBA IVB, although it does involve reorganization of some buildings, but not abandonment of others. Neither Surtepe nor Tilvez seem to have dealt with EB IVB in this period. Perhaps Tilbes Höyük persistence in use is connected with a ritual function. There are elements of administration in Tilbes Höyük, but those are more “spectacular” (in the sense of linked to an administrative center) and continued in their different periods of occupation at Surtepe. The area of the left bank north of the modern city of Birecik is very rich in agricultural resources, as well as a natural passage, through the narrowness of the Euphrates just where the höyük of Tilbes rised. It would explain the increase in population in certain periods coinciding with the historical stages of greatest urban expansion, which also coincide with cycles of important external centralizing powers.

The aggressive beating of an inhabitant of Tilvez/Meteler during the EB IVA, together with the large appearance of burials from the EB IV period in its vicinity, as well as the use of the bastions in the northern sector of Surtepe in the EB IV, based on monumentality and defense, reveals great hostility menacing these two places, which does not match the apparent ritual (and peaceful) character of the Early Bronze occupation in Tilbes Höyük, supported by the absence of violence or destruction there.

According to a few scholars, the Middle Euphrates acted as a dividing line between the different ceramic cultures or political spheres during the second half of the 3rd millennium (Mazzoni, 1985a) and the places located on the left bank belong to a culture with an eastern orientation (Mazzoni, 1985b).

The case of the northern left bank on the Birecik valley is similar to that of Titriş Höyük where there were two likely and different ethnic groups; at the Birecik Valley, perhaps lived populations of the North Mesopotamian type, but apparently not related to each other. The Birecik area is characterized as a meeting point of Euphrates and Anatolian cultural traditions during the second half of the 3rd millennium. At
that destroyed or represented a hiatus of occupation at some point during the EB IV for other sites of the Birecik valley, presumably the phase EB IVB, which appears absent on those (Surtepe and Tilvez).

On the other hand, the higher elevation, like a castle, of Tilbes Höyük, saved the site of the floods at the EB IVB, because the drastic periodic rise in the water level of the Euphrates, which also explains the lack of fossilization in the materials from those contexts at this site.

The interstate treaty between Ebla and Abaram/Abarsal may indicate the political and economic situation of Tilbes up to about the first half of the 23rd century BC (Astour, 1988: 147-148). Abarsal has to open her harbor to Ebla, put at her disposal means of riverine transport (boats), provide Eblaean messengers and officers with food, and remain loyal to the sovereign kingdom. Abarsal also has to give shelter to the traveling merchants of Ebla. Its residents were also obliged to pay taxes, notably one ox and one ram along with one mina and two shekels of silver annually (figure 15a).

For our colleague Petr Charvát, this phase of Tilbes Höyük as a possible part of the realms of Ebla or as component of a local polity whose centers were tributary ended with the extinction of the administrative functions of the Syrian capital, conquered and devastated by the invading army of Sargon, 2324-2285 BC (Sallaberger and Schrakamp, 2015: 302 table 10.1), 2360-2290 BC (Matthiae and Marchetti, 2013: 460; Boneti and Bonechi, 2020: 39), before Naram Sin (Archi and Biga, 2003: 30; Edwards, 2019: 135), Naram Sin of Agade (Frayne, 1993: 132-135, E2.1.4.24: 136, E2.1.4.27, and 166-167, E2.1.4.2005) or some later ruler. Research also argues for a terminal date of the earlier Ebla kingdom at around 2250 BC (Matthiae, 1980: 53-54; Mazzoni 1999: 608-611; Reade, 2001: 12-13; Archi and Biga, 2003: 12).

The authors of this study see such above exposed evidence to consider a presumed location of the ancient kingdom of Abaram/Abarsal on the left bank of the Birecik valley, Middle Turkish Euphrates. At that time, the site of Ab(a)rum, likely to have been situated not far from Tilbes, is referred to in the Ebla documents and also known from later texts. It belonged to the northernmost parts of the realms
economic establishments, directed and managed by officials bearing the lugal title (Pomponio, 1984; Archi, 1987: 40‑42; Archi, 1993: 467), formed an integral part of the royal holdings of Eblaite kings (Astour, 1988: 148; Mazzoni, 1999: 614‑615). The seal‑impressed vessels functioned as emblems of the state, used to transport goods headed to Ebla (Mazzoni, 1992 and 2003; Matthews, 1996; Flen‑

c contra, Graff, 2012) (figure 15b).

Figure 15. A. The treaty of Ebla with Abarsal, TM.75.G.2420=ARET XIII 5, Archive L.2769, Ebla Royal Palace G. B. The kingdom of Ebla during the reign of Isar-damu and Ibrum as first vizier. Orange‑shaded areas, allied states. Grey‑shaded areas, independent or hostile polities (Edwards, 2019: 313 fig. 17). C. Phases of expansion of the Akkad Empire (Milano, 2012)


of the Ebla kings (Astour, 1988: 154, map). The find of a storage‑jar fragment bearing an impression of a cylinder seal in the Ebla‑palace style at Tilvez/Meteler bears out this association (Charvát and Gil Fuensanta, 2001: no. 3). The seal of Tilvez Höyük would be inscribed by its style in the Royal Palace G of Ebla (2400‑2350 BC), possibly during the vizier Ibrum in the reign of Isar‑damu, which could be inscribed in EB IVA. We know that such economic establishments, directed and managed by officials bearing the lugal title (Pomponio, 1984; Archi, 1987: 40‑42; Archi, 1993: 467), formed an integral part of the royal holdings of Eblaite kings (Astour, 1988: 148; Mazzoni, 1999: 614‑615). The seal‑impressed vessels functioned as emblems of the state, used to transport goods headed to Ebla (Mazzoni, 1992 and 2003; Matthews, 1996; Flen‑der, 2000; contra, Graff, 2012) (figure 15b).
The texts always speak of “external violence” when they do not give the impression of moderate violence and we tend to believe that the attacks came from outside, according to written sources. At Tilvez Höyük there seems to be a gap in settlement after EB IVa and that is, just somewhere around 2250 BC when Naram Sin’s or another king’s troops conquered Ebla (Gil Fuensanta, Charvat and Bucak, 2001: 4). The extinction of the colonial center no doubt had repercussions in its former domain as well, the northernmost parts of the realms of the Ebla kings, on the left bank of the Birecik valley, Middle Turkish Euphrates (figure 15c).

Bibliography


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