
A MIDDLE BRONZE AGE BURNED GATE FROM UMM EL-MARRA

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ABSTRACT:

Excavations in Northwest Area B at Umm el-Marra (Tuba?), Syria, revealed a multi-piered city gate dating to the Middle Bronze Age. The gate was inserted into the set of fortifications enclosing the site, including earthen ramparts and a city wall. A complex set of construction phases was documented, one of which included the burning of the gate. In the burned debris were the skeletons of four people killed in the debacle. Given the late MB time period of the destruction, it may be proposed that this event was associated with attacks on north Syria by the Old Kingdom Hittite rulers, as is suggested for Ebla and Alalakh.

KEYWORDS

City gate, Middle Bronze, Syria, Umm el-Marra, destruction level.

RESUMEN

Las excavaciones en el área Noroeste, Área B de Umm el-Marra (¿Tuba?), Siria, han revelado una puerta de la ciudad con varios salientes datada en la Edad del Bronce Medio. La puerta estaba insertada en el complejo de fortificaciones que cerraba el asentamiento, incluyendo los terraplenes de tierra y el muro de la ciudad. Se ha documentado un complejo entramado de fases de construcción, uno de los cuales incluye el incendio de la puerta. En la destrucción provocada por el incendio se han hallado esqueletos de cuatro personas que murieron en la debacle. Teniendo en cuenta que la destrucción tuvo lugar en el Bronce Medio tardío, podemos proponer que este evento estuvo asociado a los ataques realizados por los reyes del Reino Antiguo hitita al norte de Siria, como se sugiere también desde Ebla y Alalah.

PALABRAS CLAVE:

Puerta de la ciudad, Bronce Medio, Umm al Marra, nivel de destrucción.

I am delighted to honor my dear friend and colleague Maria Giovanna Biga with this small token of my admiration. Apart from my great appreciation of her friendship, I am also grateful, as an archaeologist of Bronze Age Syria, for her invaluable research on the world of the Ebla tablets, a world that she has shared with me in numerous conversations and discussions. Although the following paper deals with a period subsequent to that of the Palace G archives, it concerns the larger historical environment of ancient Syria that Ebla was part of.

In the 2004, 2006 and 2008 field seasons at Tell Umm el-Marra, excavations at the northwest edge of the site in Northwest Area B identified and explored a city gate that had been burned in the late Middle Bronze period (fig. 1)¹. Excavations at Umm el-Marra ceased

¹ Schwartz *et al.* 2012: 179-80. The Umm el-Marra expedition was sponsored by the Johns Hopkins University and the University of Amsterdam, with project directors Glenn Schwartz and Hans Curvers. I am grateful to the Directorate-General of Antiquities and Museums, Syria, for its support of the Umm el-Marra project. The excavations were funded by the National Science Foundation (Grants BCS-0137513 and BCS-0545610), the National Geographic Society, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Arthur and Isadora Dellheim Foundation, and the Johns Hopkins University. Lauren Austin helped to prepare the illustrations. I am grateful to Tom McClellan for commenting on a draft of this paper.



with the advent of difficulties in Syria in 2011, and plans for additional excavations at the northwest gate were thus aborted. In this paper, I offer a discussion of the gate as a complement to the evidence available from north Syrian sites such as Alalakh, Tuqan, Qatna, el-Qitar, and, most impressively, Ebla, as well as the numerous cases documented in the southern Levant².

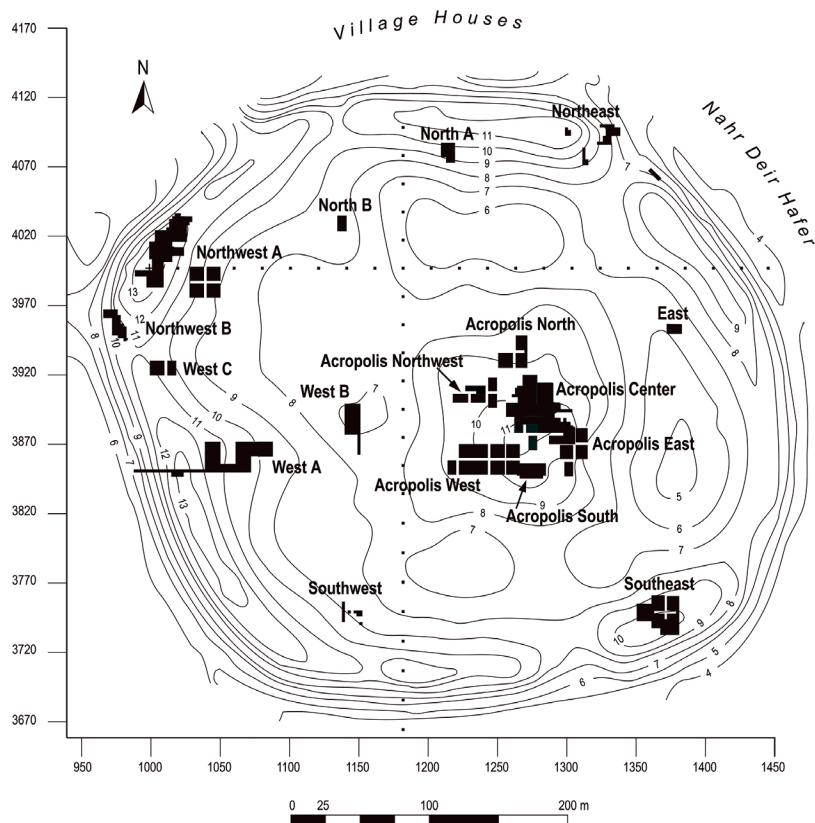


Fig. 1. Umm el-Marra. The highest point on the site (the cross to the immediate west of the Northwest Area A excavations), is assigned an arbitrary elevation of 14.00 m. Excavation areas of U.S.-Dutch team shown in black.

Gates were an important part of the urban landscape in the Bronze Age Near East, providing access to and from the community and serving as a liminal space charged with sacred meaning. Therefore, a study of their layouts and history of use can play an important part in the understanding of ancient communities, their organization, and the activities that transpired within (and without) them. Textual evidence indicates that city gates served a variety of roles, including elements of defensive systems³, marketplaces, loci for juridical

² Woolley 1955; Herzog 1986; Baffi 2014; Matthiae 2020.

³ Herzog 1986.

activities, sacred and ritual spaces, and places for public gatherings⁴. The challenge for archaeologists is to identify and elucidate such functions. In the case of the Umm el-Marra Northwest Gate, as with many others, the defensive aspect of the gate can be plausibly inferred from its architecture, but additional activities taking place are more difficult to discern in the absence of relevant features or artifacts. Here I offer a review of the available evidence and details on the sequence of architectural changes.

1. Umm el-Marra

The site of Umm el-Marra is located roughly halfway between Aleppo and the Euphrates valley, in the heart of the Jabbul plain. Occupied in the Early, Middle, and Late Bronze Ages, the walled mound measures ca. 20 hectares and was the largest Bronze Age site in the region. The ancient name of Umm el-Marra has not been conclusively demonstrated, but a good case can be made for Dub of the Ebla texts and Tuba of 2nd millennium sources⁵, capitals of minor kingdoms dominated by Ebla in the third millennium and Aleppo in the second. Sparser occupation at Umm el-Marra is also apparent in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman periods.

The Middle Bronze Age occupation at Umm el-Marra (Umm el-Marra Period III) commenced ca. 1900 BC (later MB I) after a period of site abandonment of ca. two to three centuries that followed the Early Bronze IVB occupation (Umm el-Marra Period IV)⁶. It is likely that Umm el-Marra was dominated in this period by Amorite authorities and, in the Middle Bronze II era, by the kingdom of Yamhad with its capital at Aleppo⁷.

Middle Bronze Age Umm el-Marra consisted of a central acropolis of relatively modest elevation surrounded by a lower town (fig. 1). Encircling the entire 20 hectare site were two earth and pebble ramparts or glacis constructions built against an Early Bronze Age earthen rampart on its exterior face. In the Northwest Area A, there is evidence of two freestanding enclosure walls built in sequence on top of the combination of EB and MB fortifications; the earlier wall was only attested by a stone construction, while the late MB II example was composed of mudbricks above a stone substructure⁸. The enclosing architecture was punctuated by several gates, two of which have been excavated. The Northwest Gate is discussed here, while the Northeast Gate was excavated by the Belgian team working at Umm el-Marra directed by Roland Tefnin in the 1980's. Inside the town fortifications, excavations documented small-scale architecture on the lower town.

On the acropolis, a circular wall demarcated the central area, in the middle of which was a stone circular platform 40 meters in diameter designated Monument 1, built above the ruins of an Early Bronze Age elite mortuary complex⁹. Outside the enclosed central area, the acropolis had small-scale architecture interpretable as the locus of domestic activities and/or craft production.

2. The Northwest Gate and its Sequence

The Northwest Gate was located in Northwest Area B, trench 972/3960, on the northwest edge of the site (fig. 1). Since the gate was oriented in the direction of Aleppo, it could be styled the "Aleppo gate" of Umm el-Marra.

⁴ May 2014.

⁵ Schwartz *et al.* 2006: 603, n. 3; Schwartz 2010; Schwartz 2018: 23-4; Schwartz in press.

⁶ Schwartz and Miller 2007.

⁷ In a recent study of the Amorite phenomenon, Burke (2020) suggests that Umm el-Marra was in the homeland of that group. See Nichols and Weber 2006 for further discussion of the Amorite issue.

⁸ Schwartz *et al.* 2003: 342-4 and n. 71.

⁹ Schwartz 2013.

In the excavated area, we observed a complex sequence of constructions and modifications, with six phases delineated.

2. 1. Phase 6 (Period III, Middle Bronze Age):

The earliest documented phase is represented by stone architectural segments sampled in limited exposures. These include the curved stone feature shown on fig. 3, center, and the stone structure on fig. 6, lower right¹⁰. Whether these formed part of an early phase of the Northwest Gate is uncertain but possible. Ceramics were primarily Middle Bronze in date, but occasional Early Bronze sherds were also noted.

2. 2. Phase 5 (Period III, Middle Bronze Age) – A Piered Gate (figs. 2-3):

In phase 5, a chambered gate with at least two sets of facing piers was constructed, having a passageway of ca. three meters between the piers (area 500). The architecture of phase 5 bears no obvious relationship to that of phase 6. In the passageway between the piers in area 500 was an earthen floor.

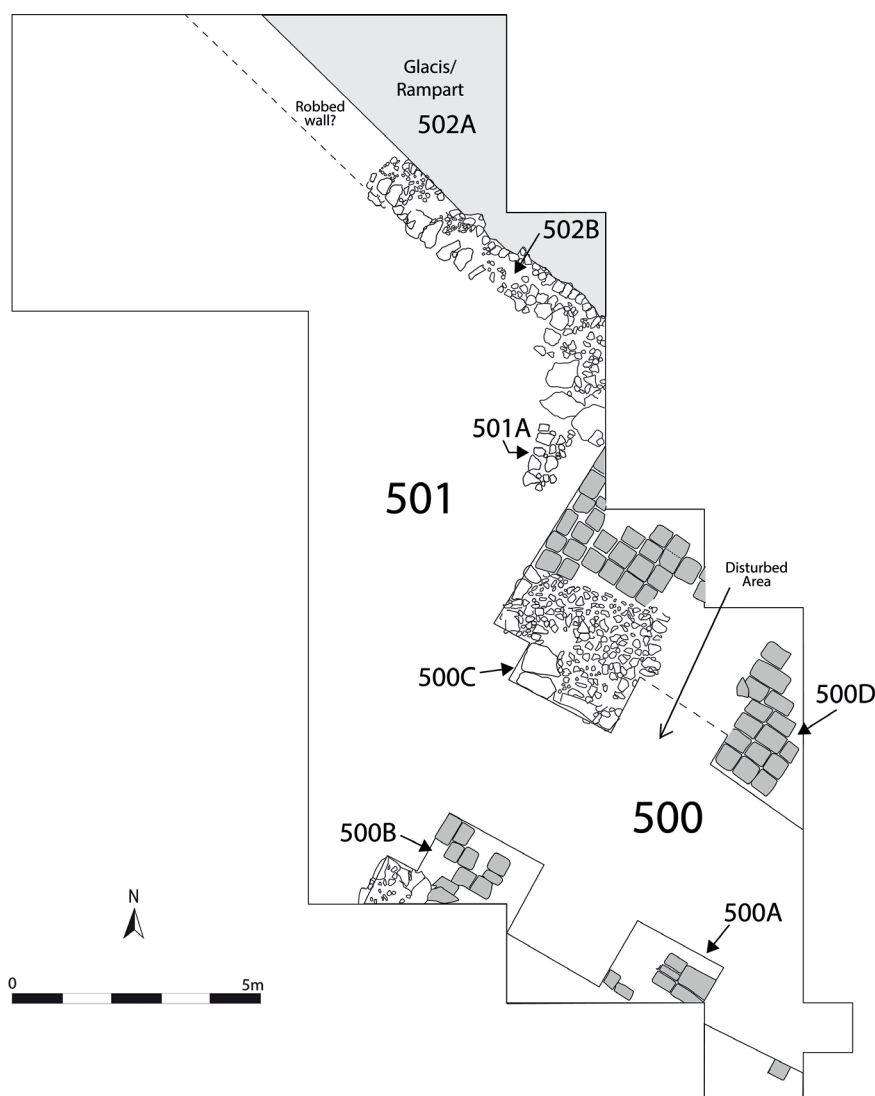


Fig. 2. Northwest Gate, phase 5. Individual mudbricks shown as dark gray, glacis/rampart light gray.

¹⁰ The curved feature was below the phase 5 passage 500 between piers 500A and 500D, while the other stone segment was below and immediately west of phase 5 pier 500B (see fig. 2).



Fig. 3. Northwest Gate, looking southwest, showing phase 5 south piers 500A (left) and 500B. Addition 500F of phase 4 in left foreground; 500E has been removed.

The gate was inserted into the set of fortifications that circumvallated the site in the MB period. In the northwest part of Northwest Area B, glacis/rampart 502A (fig. 2), mainly composed of earth and white pebbles, may be equivalent to the “white glacis” identified in the West Area A excavations¹¹. Presumably, the gate was connected to its northeast and southwest with the city wall built on top of the glacis/ramparts noted above¹².

Each pier of the gate consisted of a relatively tall stone substructure surmounted by a superstructure of red and gray mudbricks¹³. In most cases, the substructure was constructed of undressed limestone blocks and boulders with stone chips and cobbles inserted between. The stone substructures of piers 500B and 500C are one or more courses shorter than the stone substructures of the adjoining architecture to their southwest and northeast, respectively (cf. fig. 3, upper right). Evidence of terracing is apparent, with the inner piers built on a higher elevation than the outer (see fig. 3). It is likely that the piers were meant to support a roof or higher stories spanning the gate passageway as well as to control access to and from the community¹⁴.

A rectangular limestone orthostat and two segments of basalt orthostats were included in the upper part of the stone substructure of the southwest face of pier 500C (fig. 4). Such an alternation of basalt and limestone is attested in the northeast gate at Umm el-Marra excavated by the Belgian team (see below), as well as at Ebla¹⁵. Noting the absence of basalt elsewhere in the Northwest Gate architecture, Adelheid Otto and Berthold Einwag suggested that the two basalt elements might have been pieces of a single stele or betyl,

¹¹ Schwartz *et al.* 2000: 426-29.

¹² See Ben Tor 1991: 175, fig. 611, 2 for a diagram of a similar kind of fortification.

¹³ A frequent mudbrick size was 40 x 40 x 10-12 cm.

¹⁴ McClellan 2019: 24.

¹⁵ Tefnin 1983-4; Matthiae 2020: fig. 10.5.

perhaps recycled from their original use outside an Early Bronze Age gate¹⁶. Late Bronze Age texts from Emar refer to the *zukru* procession leading out of the “Gate of the Betyl” to an area of betyls or standing stones¹⁷.



Fig. 4. Pier 500C southwest face with orthostats.

Although no orthostats were in evidence, the stones of the pier 500B substructure were relatively large compared to those of the inner pier 500A (fig. 3). Thus, it can be observed that the two outermost piers had more impressive and larger-scale stone architecture than the inner ones.

The plan of the gate in the recess between piers 500C and 500D can only be tentatively reconstructed due to architectural changes made in phase 4 that seriously damaged the phase 5 remains.

Since only the western portion of the gate was excavated, the plan of the gate to the east is unknown. Notable is the fact that the wall extending southeast of pier 500A is longer than those of the recesses between piers 500C and 500D (ca. 2 meters) or 500B and 500A (ca. 2.2 meters); the wall east of pier 500A was at least three meters long, given the absence of a pier in the southeast part of the excavated area. This could signify that a longer recess extended southeast from piers 500A and 500D toward an unexcavated set of piers, as at Akko¹⁸. Alternatively, it is possible that the gate was not the common six-pier type but a four-pier gate with two sets of facing piers, as at al-Qitar (Lower West Gate) and sites in the southern Levant like Tell el-Far‘ah (North), Shechem (east gate), and Ashdod¹⁹. If so, the architecture continuing to the southeast might have included a bent-axis approach, as at Megiddo XIII and the al-Qitar Lower West Gate²⁰.

¹⁶ I am grateful to Adelheid Otto and Berthold Einwag for this suggestion.

¹⁷ Michel 2014.

¹⁸ Herzog 1986: 42-3.

¹⁹ Herzog 1986: 47-8, 53; Burke 2008: 70-1; McClellan 2019: 20, fig. 3.1.

²⁰ Herzog 1986: 38; McClellan 2019: 20, fig. 3.1.

Given the phase 4 discovery of charred wooden beams in the burned debris inside the gate passage (area 500, see below), it is possible that the gate had a flat wooden roof. Alternatively, the wooden beams may have derived from a balcony or other upper structure, and the gate itself may have had a vaulted brick roof, as attested at sites such as Tel Dan and Ashkelon²¹. Since human victims found in the phase 4 destruction debris fell from above, it is possible that the gate had a second story, but the people could have also fallen from the roof or from a balcony.

No evidence of door sockets in situ was noted, which might mean that there were no wooden doors. On the other hand, if the L-shaped stone object found in the phase 4 destruction debris in the gate passage is correctly understood as a door bolt (see fig. 8 below), then the existence of wooden doors would be supported²².

Glacis/rampart 502A was attested in the northwest part of the excavated area, with 502B its probable retaining wall. Although the extant wall only consisted of stone boulders and cobbles, a large segment of collapsed brown mudbricks sloping down to the northeast is likely to have originated from the superstructure of wall 502B. Patterns in soil color and consistency to the northwest of wall 502B indicate that the wall had originally continued in that direction but was robbed of its stones.

2. 3. Phase 4 (Period III, Middle Bronze Age) – Piered Gate Discontinued and Burned (figs. 5-6)

In phase 4, the piered gate no longer served as a main entrance to the settlement, and access was restricted and narrowed at several points. A new gate was likely to have been built, perhaps to the southwest of the excavated area where large-scale stone architecture was visible at the mound surface.

Numerous modifications were made to the area, many of which isolated or restricted access to the phase 5 piered gate. Outside the gate, two substantial walls and minor segments were added. Immediately west of the gate was wall 501C, four mudbricks wide and composed solely of red and gray bricks, without a stone substructure. In the northwest part of the excavated area, the four meter-wide wall 503A had a stone substructure below a superstructure of red and gray mudbricks with thick gray horizontal mortar lines. Room 503, flanked by walls 501C and 503A, had a stone slab pavement to its west, while room 504 in the northwest corner of the trench had an earthen floor. In area 501, the stone feature 501B, perhaps a storage bin or basin, was added perpendicular to pier 500C.

Abundant changes were also implemented in the area of the chambered gate. Here, the width of the passage between the outer piers 500B and 500C was reduced by the addition of two short stone walls 500G and 500H constructed above the floor of phase 5. After their installation, vehicular traffic was precluded²³, and only one or two pedestrians would have been able to pass through the piers at any one time.

Two architectural segments filled the recess between the northern piers 500C and 500D. The segment 500E directly east of pier 500C, attested by a stone substructure and mudbrick superstructure, was “tilted” to the northwest and was not parallel to pier 500C. East of segment 500E was the thin wall 500F, composed of stones with a mudbrick superstructure one brick wide. Like feature 500E, this structure was not parallel to the piers of the chambered gate but was oriented more north-south.

²¹ Gregori 1986.

²² As McClellan (2019: 27) notes, an absence of doors would have made it difficult to block the gate passage in time of siege.

²³ Bunimovitz and Lederman 2013: 9. According to Burke 2008: 71, gates with passages over 2.5 meter wide could accommodate wheeled traffic.

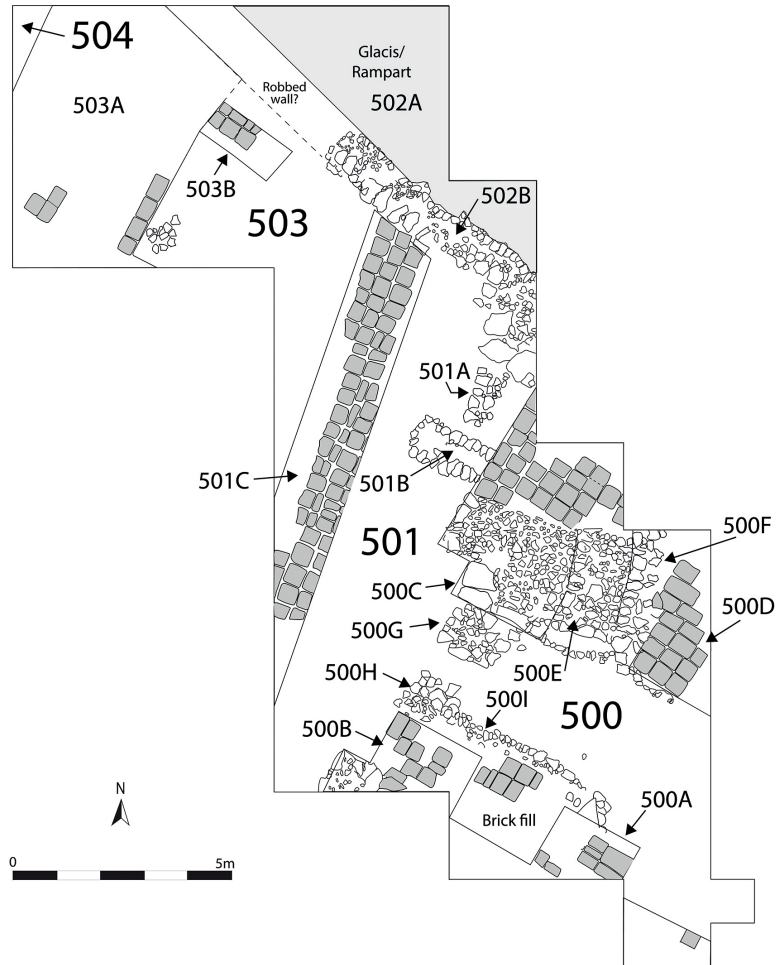


Fig. 5. Northwest Gate, phase 4. Individual mudbricks shown as dark gray, glacis/rampart light gray.



Fig. 6. Northwest Gate, phase 4, looking southeast.

On the south side of the chambered gate, the recess between piers 500A and 500B was filled in with bricks, and a curving feature (500I) of five courses of cobbles was added against the face of piers 500A and 500B and the brick fill between. Clearly the intention was to fill in the recesses between the piers, but this project was done in a diversity of ways.

The entire excavated area experienced a major conflagration at the conclusion of phase 4. In the fire, the bricks of the pier 500C superstructure were burned black²⁴, while mud plaster and bricks on the west edge of wall 501C were burned to a yellow color. The phase 5 floor of passage 500, still extant in phase 4, was also burned (fig. 3, below north arrow and to left). In the area between piers 500A and 500D and to the east, ashy debris included numerous burned collapsed bricks and occasional segments of wooden beams. The latter might have derived from the roof of the gate structure or, if the roof was vaulted, from wooden constructions like balconies²⁵. Segments of burned wooden beams were also observed in the debris west of wall 501C in area 503.

Four human skeletons were found sprawled in the upper burned brick collapse in the area 500 passageway of the chambered gate. Given their elevation, they must have fallen from the roof, a balcony, or a second story during the catastrophe and were crushed by the falling bricks. Two individuals were oriented approximately east-west adjacent and parallel to one another in the area south of features 500E and 500F (fig. 7). The northern skeleton, with its head to the east, was a female adolescent wearing a small, simple gold earring and was also found with two shell beads. Immediately to the south was an adult male with his head to the west, without associated objects.



Fig. 7. Two skeletons in phase 4 upper debris, looking west.

²⁴ One mudbrick course was preserved from Pier 500C, which was removed in order to reveal the stone substructure beneath (fig. 5).

²⁵ Gregori 1986: 92. Unfortunately, the wooden segments did not contain enough rings for effective dendrochronological dating.

In the area south of pier 500D and east of pier 500A were two individuals. One protruded from the east edge of the excavation and was not studied, while the other, identified by Christopher Brinker as a 16-17 year old male, was found against the wall face southeast of pier 500A. The latter skeleton was in a crouching position with the arms against the chest, suggesting that the individual was bent over as he was falling from above.

Despite the heavy burning, relatively few artifacts were found in situ in phase 4. Recovered from the burned debris northwest of pier 500A was a large L-shaped gray stone object, perhaps the bolt for closing a wooden door, as discussed above (Umm 04 S-074) (fig. 8).



Fig. 8. Gray stone L-shaped object (bolt?).
Umm 04 S-074. Phase 4, upper debris area 500 between 500E and 500I.

Complete or near-complete ceramic vessels derived from two locations. Discovered in the east part of Room 503 in burned debris ca. 70-140 cm above the floor were a large “pilgrim flask” (fig. 9, 4) and two jugs (fig. 9, 5-6), ostensibly having fallen from the roof or an upper story. Two goblets (fig. 9, 1-2) found in burned debris between piers 500A and 500D and a large krater uncovered near the human skeleton against the wall face southeast of pier 500A (fig. 9, 7) were also likely to have fallen from above. Apart from the complete vessels, notable sherds found in the phase 4 destruction debris included gray burnished bowls with inverted rims²⁶, Cooking Ware jars with collared rims²⁷, and a sherd with painted concentric rings probably deriving from a painted pilgrim flask²⁸.

²⁶ Cf. Schwartz *et al.* 2003: fig. 29, 1 for a similar example.

²⁷ Cf. Schwartz *et al.* 2003: fig. 29, 10 for a similar example.

²⁸ Cf. Morgan and Richardson 2020: figs. 2-3.

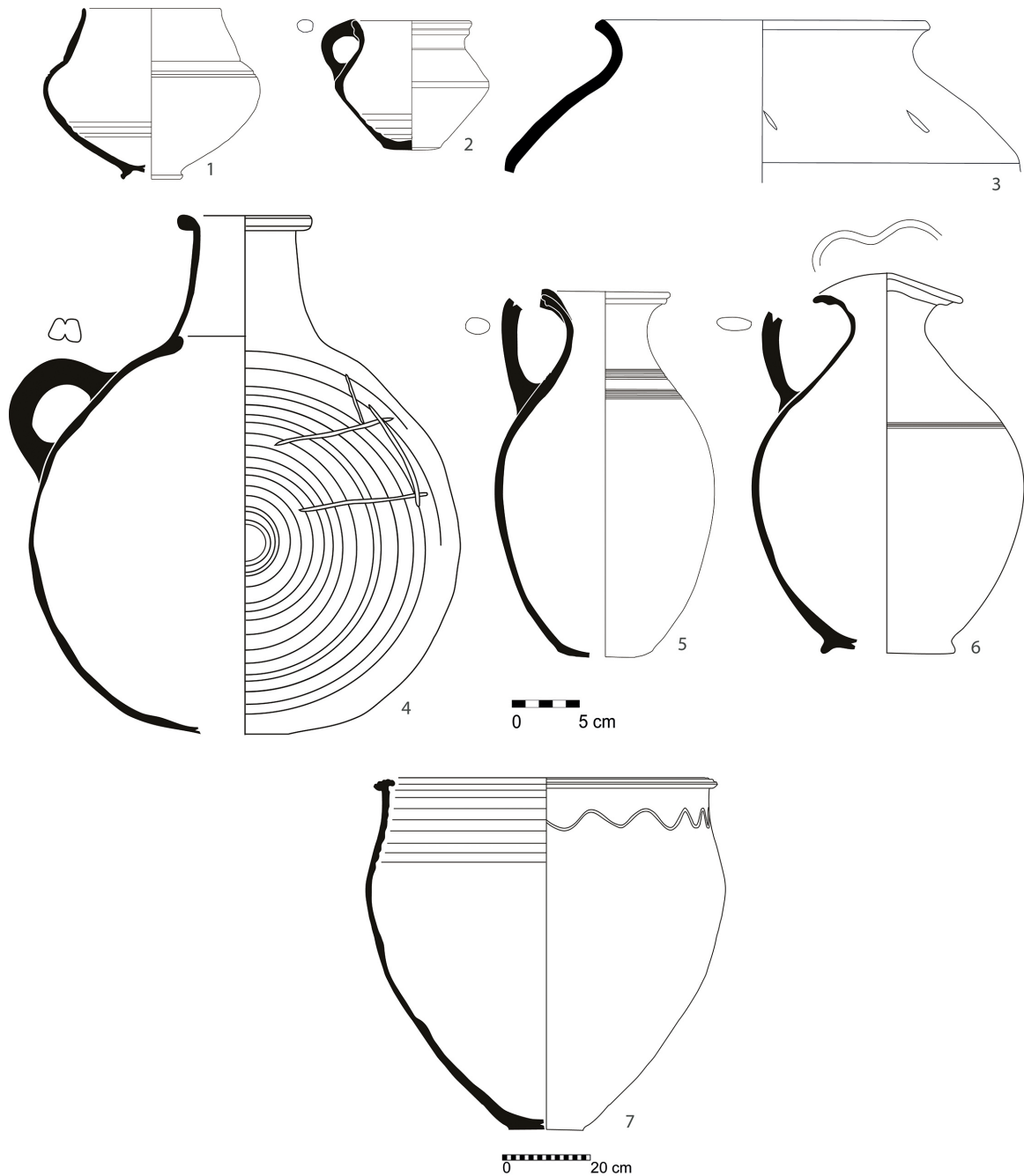


Fig. 9. Pottery from the Phase 4 Destruction. 1. Umm 08 980/3950-110. P-50. Light brown, fine sand. Ca. 40 cm above floor between piers 500A and 500D; 2. Umm 08 980/3950-107. P-42. Reddish-brown, medium white sand/lime. Rim broken, only one handle preserved. Upper debris between piers 500A and 500D; 3. Umm 06 978/3948-105. Brown, fine white sand. Incised marks on exterior. Cooking Ware. Below the two skeletons south of 500E and 500F, above floor; 4. Umm 06 972/3960-102/103. Umm 10 P-15. Exterior light yellow, interior/core light brown, fine sand. With incised symbol on exterior. Concentric circles only on one side. Numerous round depressions on interior, each ca. 6 mm diameter. Upper debris, east part of Room 503; 5. Umm 06 972/3960-103. Umm 08 P-45. Light brown, fine micaceous sand. Rim incomplete but trefoil shape indicated. Upper debris, east part of Room 503; 6. Umm 06 972/3960-102. Exterior/interior light yellow, core light brown, fine sand. Upper debris, east part of Room 503; 7. Umm 08 980/3948-102, 105. Umm 10 P-64. Light brownish-yellow, fine sand. Rim top with five ridges. Vicinity of human bones against wall face east of pier 500A, upper debris above floor.

The pottery found in the destruction debris allows for the phase 4 conflagration to be dated to the late MB II period. Pilgrim flasks can be dated to the 17th century BC and are interpreted as vessels to transport wine from southeastern Anatolia (e.g. Zincirli Höyük) to other regions in Syro-Mesopotamia (Morgan and Richardson 2020). The pilgrim flask from the gate area has numerous dimples on the inside of the vessel wall, a feature also found on a large jar found among the late MB II complete vessels left intact in the Northwest Area A at Umm el-Marra²⁹. Another ceramic parallel to MB Zincirli is in the shape of the trefoil jar on fig. 9, 6³⁰. The goblet with inverted upper body (fig. 9, 1) is probably a variant of the “shoulder goblets” of the later MB³¹, while the handled goblet or juglet (fig. 9, 2) is a version of the biconical goblets common throughout the Syrian MB³².

Two radiocarbon dates from the late MB II occupation in the Northwest Area A derive from the late 17th and 16th centuries, and it is likely that the phase 4 destruction dates to the same time frame³³. It is tempting to associate this late MB II burning at Umm el-Marra³⁴ with the Hittite onslaughts on the Yamhad kingdom that occurred during the reigns of Hattusili I and Mursili I. Similar attacks have been inferred from the archaeological record at Alalakh, Ebla, and Zincirli. Of course, a fiery disaster need not imply a military attack, and the case in favor of such an interpretation would be strengthened by skeletal remains with evidence of trauma or weapons of war in situ, neither of which have been identified. However, lethal injuries can be confined to the soft tissue and leave no trace on bone, while metal weapons were typically recycled³⁵.

2. 4. Phase 3 (Period III, Middle Bronze Age) – Brick In-filling

After the fire, the area above the burned floor between wall 501C and piers 500B and 500C – as well as the area between piers 500B and 500C - was filled in with at least seven courses of brown mudbricks. Presumably these were intended as the foundation for a new (gate?) construction, but no further evidence of its existence was detected³⁶.

2. 5. Phase 2 (Period II, Late Bronze Age) – Intrusive Activity

A long one-meter wide trench or pit containing Late Bronze Age sherds cut through segments 500E and 500F and pier 500D. The feature was oriented northwest-southeast like the architecture of the phase 5 pired gate. This constituted the only evidence of LB presence in the area.

2. 6. Phase 1

Vestiges of architecture characterized by large stone boulders and cobbles were extant at the present-day mound surface or just below it. Given the unclear context, the date of this phase cannot be ascertained.

3. Northeast Gate

Relevant to our discussion are the results of excavations at the Umm el-Marra northeast city gate (“Euphrates Gate”) conducted by the Belgian expedition directed by

²⁹ Schwartz *et al.* 2003: fig. 30, 8.

³⁰ Morgan and Soldi 2021: fig. 25, 2.

³¹ Cf. Fugmann 1958: fig. 127, 2D211, 2D214 (Hama H); Curvers and Schwartz 1997: fig. 23, 10 (Umm el-Marra MB); Pinnock 2005: plate 19 (Ebla Northern Palace).

³² Cf. Fugmann 1957: fig. 110, 3A896, 3B926; Curvers and Schwartz 1997: fig. 23, 7-8 (Umm el-Marra MB); Pinnock 2005: plate 14, 11-15 (Ebla Northern Palace).

³³ Webster and Schwartz in press.

³⁴ Note also evidence of late MB burning in the Acropolis Center and, perhaps, in the Northeast Gate (as below).

³⁵ Paz 2011.

³⁶ Brick sizes observed included 40 x 40, 40 x 20, 34 x 33, and 33 x 16 cm (height ca. 10-12 cm).

Roland Tefnin in the 1980's in Area SF³⁷. Area SF was located immediately south and southeast of the Northeast Excavation Area illustrated on fig. 1. Three phases were identified. The earliest had two piers composed of large limestone blocks facing each other across a pebble-paved passageway and was tentatively dated to the Early Bronze Age. Following this was a (six?)-piered gate dated to the Middle Bronze Age, the piers being faced with square orthostats underneath a brick superstructure. As with the Northwest Gate, the width of the passageway between the piers was ca. three meters, and a common brick size was 40 x 40 cm.

The latest phase, of uncertain date, involved the addition of two facing piers with alternating basalt and limestone square orthostats. Cylindrical holes drilled into the top of the orthostats are likely to have accommodated wooden beams, and Tefnin proposes that the beams supported a mudbrick vaulted entrance. While not mentioned in the publications, some evidence indicates that the architecture of this phase was burned³⁸. Since the Northeast and Northwest Gates have a similar construction sequence of a multi-piered gate succeeded by later modifications, one may suggest that the latter two phases in the Belgian excavations are both datable to the Middle Bronze period.

4. Conclusions

The evidence from the Northwest Gate at Umm el-Marra provides an addition to the corpus of Middle Bronze piered gates from the Levant. If the impression given by the excavated segment is correct, the gate consisted of a solid structure without internal chambers and would belong the category of "gate without towers" recognized by Herzog³⁹. No evidence of towers or guard rooms were noted, although such features may have existed in the unexcavated areas. This type is well-attested in Syria at sites like Qatna, Tuqan, and Ebla.

Comparing the dimensions of the Umm el-Marra Northwest Gate to other MB Levantine gates, we can observe that the three-meter width of the passageway between the peers is similar to many others. The thickness of the piers (ca. 2.0-2.2 meters) is comparable to those of four-pier gates but is smaller than that of the average six-pier gate, which might support the gate's identification as a four-pier example.⁴⁰ The large orthostats in pier 500C (ca. 50 x 80 cm) are diminutive compared to those at the Ebla Southwest Gate, measuring 1.8 meters in height, and others elsewhere in the Levant.⁴¹ Smaller dimensions attested at Umm el-Marra might reflect the subordinate status of the town in MB, the nature of available resources, or specific choices made by its inhabitants. Indeed, it is possible that the Northwest Gate was smaller and less impressive than the Northeast Gate, which employed orthostats more liberally and probably exhibited a greater monumentality.

The results from the Northwest Gate are also relevant to the end of the Middle Bronze Age in Syria. As at Ebla, Alalakh, and Zincirli, the late MB destruction at Umm el-Marra may be plausibly connected to Hittite aggression. At the same time, the phase 3 reconstruction efforts after the phase 4 destruction indicate that the conflagration and its associated attack did not deal a final blow to large-scale operations at the site. However, these post-destruction operations were apparently short-lived or abortive.

³⁷ Tefnin 1983-4; Masureel n.d.

³⁸ Stanislas Masureel, personal communication, 2006. I am grateful to Stanislas Masureel for discussing the northeast gate with me and providing a copy of his report.

³⁹ Herzog 1997: 120; see also Gregori 1986: 85.

⁴⁰ Gregori 1986: table 1; Herzog 1986: 64, 67; Burke 2008: 69-70, tables 9-10.

⁴¹ Herzog 1986: 68; Matthiae 2020: 311.

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