

SYRIA AND THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE IRON AGE

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ABSTRACT

Recent archaeological activity in Syria has produced new documents which can be used in fixing the chronology of the Iron Age. The emergence of the Iron Age can be dated to the last quarter of the 12th century after a crisis period (first quarter of the 12th cent.) and a subsequent squatter reoccupation (second and third quarter of the 12th century). Iron Age IA,B,C covering the end of the 12th, the 11th and 10th centuries, can be defined mainly on the base of the sequence of occupation of Tell Afis.

Considerations of a historical and archaeological nature point to the beginning of the 9th century as a reliable turning point from Iron I to Iron II. Iron IIA and B, documented by several rebuilding activities in most sites, cover the 9th and 8th centuries dominated by the increasing territorial competition of the local kingdoms confronted with Assyrian expansion. The end of Iron Age IIB is marked by more or less severe destructions occurring in the last quarter of the 8th cent. which are often followed by an extensive replanning during Iron III, in the 7th-mid 6th centuries, a period characterized by cultural homogenization and Assyrian acculturation.

KEY-WORDS

Cronology, Syria, Iron Age, Excavations, Tell Afis.

Recent archaeological finds in Syria from a number of excavations and salvage operations have notably increased the evidence for the Iron Age, adding well stratified materials to the large corpus of documents from old excavations. The archaeological sequences of a few diagnostic sites may now be compared in order to construct a periodization and relative chronology of the Iron Age in northern Levant¹.

1. IRON AGE I

Iron Age I is to date documented by a few coastal, Euphratean and inland sites of northern Syria. On the coast it is mainly Ras Ibn Hani, Tell Kazel and Ras el Bassit which furnish evidence of occupation after the end of the Late Bronze Age². On the Euphrates there is evidence of Iron I occupation in Jurn Kabir IV-III and Tell Qadahiye in the right bank of the Qal'at Najm area, dated tentatively to 11th-10th centuries³ and Tell Shuyukh Fawqani, on the left bank, possibly fortresses and centers within the sphere of Karkemish. In inland Syria, the excavations in Tell Afis have furnished a sequence of strata, which can be compared with the Hama sequence; in the habitation district of Area E, three architectural phases with associated materials and a few subphases, provide the basic frame on which to construct a Syrian Iron Age IA,B,C periodization⁴; in Area G, the occupation in the domestic quarter and the main street was also of a similar lengthy duration⁵. Other sources consisting of textual data,

¹ The first section of this article is a revised version of the paper presented at the workshop "Chronology of the Levant in the Iron Age" at the 3rd ICAANE conference held in Paris, 15th-19th April 2002. On the assessment of Iron Age Syrian chronology on a multi-faceted perspective, including material culture, visual art and historical data, see Mazzoni 2000a.

² For an overall consideration of the documentation see Caubet 1992: 123-131.

³ Eidem, Pütt 1999: 194-196.

⁴ Venturi 2000.

⁵ Cecchini 1998.

dynastic linkages, monumental sculpture and friezes from the main Luwian and Aramaean citadels of this period, consequently made it possible to fit the archaeological sequence into a historical framework and date it within the 11th and 10th centuries⁶.

One of the main results of research on this phase concerns the crucial period of the end of the Late Bronze Age and the emergence of the Iron Age⁷. Taking for granted that this passage might have not been simultaneous and that, consequently, regional and chronological scales have to be adopted, recent archaeological evidence provides an indication of three orders of situations and phases: 1- a crisis occurring in the first quarter of the 12th century, documented by destructions (Emar) with traces of plundering (Ugarit, Tell Kazel) or evacuation (Ras Ibn Hani: Palais Sud, Nord, Ras Bassit, Afis) or abandonment without destruction (Ras Ibn Hani: Building B); 2- a transitional and occasional squatter reoccupation among the ruins (Ugarit, Afis, Tell Kazel), which probably lasted not longer than two/three decades, between the second and third quarter of the 12th century; 3- a successive phase marked by replanning activities which, according to the local regional situations, might have been more or less substantial. This third phase, to be dated in the last quarter of the 12th century, marks the start of Iron Age I in Syria.

Area E at Tell Afis provides important documentation for the short transitional phase of resettlement over the burnt debris of the Late Bronze II Residency, destroyed by fire (level 10), consisting of floors, waste-pits, refusal areas and tannûrs (level 9b). The pottery and particularly the presence of one LHIIC:1b *skyphos* firmly date this phase to the second half of the 12th cent.B.C⁸. The characteristics of the occupation leave no doubts as to the nature of the resettlement as a poor, apparently occasional recovery, thus leading to identification of the inhabitants of the site as the dwellers of this phase⁹. The Residency no longer existed and was not replaced; only the entrance hall was probably reused and fire and waste installations were built in a few rooms. The east-west passage leading to the entrance of the Residency and the Pillared-Building, recently brought to light to the south, also bore traces of scattered reoccupation on the burnt layer which sealed the Late Bronze II floors¹⁰.

In Ras Ibn Hani, the new occupation of Iron I consisted of two levels, an earlier one lying directly over the ruins of the Late Bronze II Palace and a later one, containing monochrome ware¹¹. In Tell Kazel, traces of "squatting" in the Late Bronze Residence of Area II¹² could be dated by the presence of a hand-made burnished Barbarian ware goblet to the end of the 12th century. In Ras Bassit, "various constructions were erected immediately on top of the ruins of the Bronze Age settlement"¹³.

It is again Area E at Tell Afis which provides architecture and well deposited contexts belonging to the initial phase of the period (Iron IA); levels 9a-8 document consistent replanning and change in the functional destination of the area and the emergence of new traditions in architecture and material culture. A habitation district was built by levelling the two metre thick earlier deposit, with houses in well-dressed stone and brick masonry and open spaces containing silos and waste-pits. The pottery

⁶ Mazzoni 2000a: 31-41; 2000b.

⁷ See now Mazzoni in press.

⁸ Venturi 1998: 128-131; Bonatz 1998: 217-218, Figs. 1, 1.3, 5.1; Venturi 2000: 522, Fig. 6.

⁹ Venturi 2000: 535-536.

¹⁰ Venturi 2002.

¹¹ See Badre 1984.

¹² Badre 1998: 77-78, Fig. 5a-b; Capet, Gubel 2000: 436, Figs. 6-7.

¹³ Caubet 1992: 127; Courbin 1990: 505-506.

assemblage¹⁴ consists of the common buff-orange ware with vegetal temper, the monochrome ware painted blackish with geometric and, rarely, zoomorphic motifs. Imported wares are fairly abundant and consist of the deep bell shaped bowls of LHIIC:1c, Cypriote LCIIIB ware and Proto White Painted, decorated with geometric motifs and wavy lines; they indicate a date between the middle of the 12th and the middle of the 11th cent. B.C.

A second architectural phase (Iron Age I B) is distinguished by a general replanning of this district in levels 7abc-6 with a regular plan of rectilinear streets separating units of houses with inner courtyards furnished with domestic and industrial installations for weaving, storage and probably dyeing. Ground silos and square bins carefully plastered and built, unfired clay loom weights, mortars and pestles were ubiquitous. To the north, stood a small shrine *in antis*, originally 10 m long, provided with a front entrance to the west, a side entrance to the north and an ashlar *podium* on the long, southern wall. Plan and general dimensions are comparable with the somewhat smaller Shrine 1 Building in Sarepta¹⁵, which also had a side entrance in its earlier phase, and with the level 3 temple of Area IV at Tell Kazel, 13 m long x 7 m wide, dating to Iron I¹⁶ and the later G3 period temple at Tell Sukas, which, like Afis, had the short front side narrower than the rear one¹⁷. In Area G, East zone, levels 6-4b of a domestic unit might belong to this phase, 4b being a burnt deposit with traces of destruction by fire sealing the level 5 structures¹⁸. In level 6, installations and unfired loom weights document an increase in weaving activities¹⁹. The ceramic assemblage of this phase consists of forms and common and painted wares continuing the Iron IA tradition²⁰. The presence of Proto White Painted and White Painted I, dating this phase roughly to the 2nd half of the 11th century, indicates trade contacts with Cyprus, which were developing at that time throughout the whole Levant²¹.

In the Hama relative chronology²² the cremation burial of period I, paralleling the initial resettlement of the F2 citadel, has been dated to the period between the mid-12th and the mid-11th cent. B.C., thus encompassing Iron Age IA-B of Tell Afis. However, the bulk of the materials, when compared with the Afis assemblage, indicate more the lower than the higher term of this duration and suggest a full Iron Age IB, 11th cent. date²³.

The levels 4-3 temple at Tell Kazel, Area IV, might belong to this period and to the same pottery horizon with prevailing painted pottery, both monochrome and coastal bichrome, and forms, such as kraters and pilgrim flasks; the presence of carinated bowls in level 3 of the cella might, however, constitute a somewhat more recent trait to be

¹⁴ Venturi 2000: 513-528; see Figs. 7-10.

¹⁵ Pritchard 1975: 13-15, Figs. 2, 33-34; Matthiae 1992: 133-134, Fig. 6.

¹⁶ Badre 1999-2000: 192-195, Fig. 45.

¹⁷ Riis 1970: 54-59; Bonatz 1993: 132-134, fig. 6: 4.

¹⁸ Cecchini 1998: 274.

¹⁹ Degli Esposti 1995: 268, Fig. 24.

²⁰ Venturi 2000: 519, 523-524, Figs. 11-12; Degli Esposti 1995: 269-270, Fig. 26; Cecchini 1998: 275-277, Fig. 14.

²¹ Cypriot imports increase in Phoenicia and Palestine during the 11th cent. B.C.: Bikai 1978: 57; Gilboa 1989: 204-218; Mazar 1994: 39-54.

²² Riis, Buhl 1990: 16-26.

²³ The Painted ware, such as the jars with the "ibex and the palm" motif of period I (Riis 1948: 47-48, Fig. 24) can be better compared with the 9b-8 Afis jars: Venturi 1998: 129, Fig. 4: 7. Noteworthy is the absence of Proto-White Painted, White Painted I and Mycenaean IIC:1b in the documentation of Hama, which might indicate, if not occasional or linked to regionality or special function of the deposit, an even later date.

compared with the later assemblage of Afis E levels 5-3. The northern complex of level 4 consists of poor domestic installations which replace the northern complex of level 5, while the cella of level 3 constitutes an even larger structure than that of level 5²⁴.

In Trench 1 at Tell 'Ain Dara, the sequence represented by levels 2-5 probably belongs to a local Iron IA-B horizon with the diagnostic painted pottery and provides evidence of continuity of occupation during this phase, confirming the long life-span of the temple on the acropolis²⁵.

Severe destructions apparently put an end to the settlement of this phase at Tell Afis, Hama and Tell Kazel giving way to further changes in planning and functions of the architecture. In Afis, a more than 50 cm thick layer of destruction sealed the buildings of level 7, which was levelled in the intermediary level 6 for the preparation of the level 5 walls and floors. Similarly, Hama F2 was sealed by a consistent destruction²⁶. The Area IV temple of level 3 at Tell Kazel was covered by a 40-50 cm destruction layer of ashes and level 2 provides evidence of a change in the functional destination of the area, which was occupied only by silos²⁷. In Afis, a change in planning and functions of the unit in Area E occurred; the shrine of levels 7-6 was destroyed and not rebuilt, or at least not in the same place.

The competition for power of the emerging Aramean chiefdoms might have been a serious reason for local instability; we know that Hadad-ezer, king of the state of Aram-Zobah, extended his power to the plains of Homs and fought a battle against David, his third, near Hama²⁸. However, Hittite principalities firmly maintained territorial control of the area west of the Euphrates and could even expand towards the eastern bank, as the inscriptions of Masuwari, later Aramized in Til Barsib, and Arslan Tash/Hatata indicate²⁹.

In Tell Afis, the Area E complex underwent some replanning in levels 5-3 (Iron IC); to the north, there was no evidence of a shrine but an open area; to the south and east, the habitation quarter was rebuilt. In Area G, East Zone, the domestic unit underwent reconstruction and restoration in levels 3-2. The pottery assemblage of this final Iron I horizon is characterized by evolutive trends towards the adoption of fast and mass production techniques: decline of painted wares, increase and standardization of common, storage and cooking wares, decrease of Cypriot imports³⁰. In the forms, open bowls with different profiles become more numerous, closed jars show a variety of rims, while storage jar rims become less angular³¹. In Tell Kazel, the level 3 temple of Area IV might be attributed to this phase on the basis of the pottery assemblage, even though, as said above, the destruction that brought about its end seems to be consistent with an earlier date.

²⁴ Badre 1999-2000: 192.

²⁵ Stone, Zimansky 1999: 30, Fig. 27: 1-12. Three phases have been reconstructed for the temple: 'Abu 'Assaf 1990: 20.

²⁶ Fugmann 1958: 139, 149.

²⁷ Badre 1999-2000: 194, Fig. 47.

²⁸ Klengel 1992: 207.

²⁹ Hawkins 2000: 224-226: see the inscription of Hamiyata citing the foundation of the city of Haruha: 230-231, no. III.2, Borowski 3, Pl. 93; Arslan Tash: 246-248, no. III.10, Pls. 103-105.

³⁰ Venturi 2000: 519-522, 524, 528, Fig. 13; Cecchini 1998: 277, Fig. 15.

³¹ Mazzoni 1998: 167-168, Figs. 19-23; Cecchini 1998: 277, Fig. 14: 16-20 for the bowls; see also Figs. 14-15.

2. IRON AGE II

There are two main basic problems in constructing the periodization for this phase, which was characterized throughout the Levant by a process of increased urbanization. There are a number of sites providing fresh evidence; documentation, however, apparently concentrates towards the final part of the phase, immediately before the Assyrian annexation in the west and central regions, or during the Assyrian occupation in the east. Pottery for this later period is well phased in a variety of local assemblages, but beginning not earlier than the middle of the 8th cent. B.C.³². The earlier part is, instead, less well documented, partially because the later monumental restorations and urban replanning make difficult or preclude investigation of the earlier levels.

A second problem is posed by the trend towards steady continuity in both occupation and material culture. In architecture, there was a tendency to dense planning of domestic districts with continuous micro-rebuildings of the structures. As far as pottery is concerned, lingering traits prevail in the assemblages of the period and only a few and subtle changes can be recognized as diagnostic markers for the definition of chronological or spatial horizons.³³ The intensification of production, possibly in response to a larger demand, might have stimulated increased specialization, diffusion of industrial kiln areas, adoption of fast working processes resulting in mass-production and standardization; the consequent effect were a marked decrease in regionalization and an unprecedented homogeneity of fabrics over the whole country³⁴.

A major difficulty lays in defining the starting point for the period: there are, in fact, no definite terms, events in the historical sources or documents in the archaeological evidence for firmly anchoring the beginning of Iron Age II in Syria. There are, moreover, a few elements which could suggest a 9th century B.C. date, probably the beginning of this century, as a reliable turning point for a tangible transformation of Syrian culture.

It is generally agreed that the burnished Red Slip ware constitutes the diagnostic marker of Iron Age II; however its spread in Syria was probably not the result of a simultaneous process and cannot alone provide a reliable term for the beginning of this phase. Absolute dates usually given to its emergence are not grounded, in fact, on external data, such as epigraphic associations or historical documents, but only on reciprocal comparisons which result too often in circular argumentation³⁵. In Ras el-Bassit, the presence of the Red Slip ware in the Assemblage A from level 3 was attributed to the third quarter of the 9th cent., on the basis of association with imported Greek pottery, such as a pendant semicircle-vase, of probable Lefkandi provenance³⁶. The dating of this import to the third fourth of the 9th cent. resulted from the argument of its typological association with a vase from Lefkandi and the comparison of both the Ras el Bassit and Lefkandi items with a similar but more archaic type from Tyre X-1, dated to 850 B.C.³⁷. In Tell Qarqour a rather extended bracket between 10th and 8th cent. is given to the local Iron II phase on the basis of the pottery assemblage characterized by both plain and Red Slip ware; also, in Area B, a transitional Iron I-IIA phase was

³² Lehmann 2001: 89-92; Jamieson 2000: 264-269.

³³ See Lebeau 1983: 34-45; Lehmann 1996: 57-61; 90; Oggiano 1997: 187-213.

³⁴ See Mazzoni 1999: 147-148.

³⁵ As correctly noted by Bikai 1987: 68.

³⁶ Braemer 1986: 222-223; Courbin 1986: 190, Fig. 16.

³⁷ Courbin 1982: 193-204; see 202.

identified characterized by the presence of red-burnished ware together with painted bichrome and monochrome wares and a dividing line tentatively fixed around 1000 B.C.³⁸. Red wash and hand burnished Red Slip appear in levels 16-14 of Area I at Tell Kazel³⁹ in a transitional Iron I-II phase, apparently pre-9th century. At Tell 'Arqa, Red Slip appears in the three assemblages of level 10 which extends over six levels (10A-F) and is dated to the 8th and 7th centuries on the basis of the comparison with the Ras el Bassit assemblage⁴⁰.

Phoenicia is credited to be the homeland of the burnished Red Slip ware and we distinguish an earlier Bichrome from a later Red Slip horizon, with a transitional phase during which both classes were produced⁴¹. Moving south along the coast, Red Slip ware not only increases in presence and improves in the quality of the slip and lustrous burnishing, but emerges apparently earlier in the local assemblages, between the beginning and mid-10th cent., following the higher term of Sarepta⁴² or the initial-mid-9th cent., following the lower term of Tyre⁴³. In Beirut, Red Slip ware appears in the third and latest layer of the destruction level which covered Glacis II, in association with Cypriot ware belonging to Cypro-Achaic I period; the previous layer, which was burnt, contained no Red Slip and no imported Cypriot materials and is attributed to the final phase of Iron I⁴⁴. The main bulk of the documentation, related to the deposit covering the Glacis and a later casemate unit, belongs instead to a mature Iron Age II period, dated between mid-8th and mid-7th cent. B.C.

A basic problem arises in fixing the date of the diffusion of the Red Slip fabric and the change from a basically Bichrome to a basically Red Slip horizon; we have in fact to distinguish carefully between the process of emergence and initial introduction and the process of diffusion and ultimate predominance of the Red Slip in the local horizons. The first process can probably be assigned to the period of the Bichrome horizon; Red Slip in Cyprus appears in the course of the 11th cent. in the cemeteries of Kaloriziki and Kouklia (Palaepahos)-*Skales*⁴⁵. The Kouklia horizon spans Tyre XIII-X, which also witnessed some sporadic presence of Red Slip ware (see footnote 41). During the mid-10th/mid-9th cent. Phoenician Red Slip was also present in Galilee⁴⁶,

³⁸ Dornemann 2000: 471-473, 477, 481.

³⁹ Gubel 1999-2000: 134, Fig. 6.d; i-j.

⁴⁰ Thalmann 1978: 80-85; 88-89; Thalmann 1983: 217-221.

⁴¹ In the sequence of Tyre, the Phoenician Bichrome ware has been considered diagnostic for the Strata XIII-X and IX-VI horizons, and the Phoenician Red Slip for the Strata V-I horizon: Bikai 1978: 67. Bikai 1987: 48-49 for the transitional features.

⁴² At Sarepta Red Slip appears with a few sherds in Strata F-E of Area II-Y, increasing in D2 (1025/1000-950) and D1 (950-850/825): Anderson 1988: 352, 398-407, 529, Table 25; Khalifeh 1988: 160. In Tell Keisan one Red Slip bowl is mentioned in level 7, dated to the beginning of the 9th cent.: Briend-Humbert 1980: 187-196, Pl. 53: 12.

⁴³ P. Bikai's Fine ware plate 8, hand burnished and heavy red slipped, is apparently the only variant of her Fine Ware plates, paralleling the Samaria ware, which appears in Strata XIII-X (characterized by Bichrome Ware); in Tyre XIII it shows a more purplish colour and thicker slip: Bikai 1978: 29; 57; 58: Table 14. It becomes more frequent in Tyre IX-VI. For the date of Tyre XIII-X and IX-VI: 66-57. For a chronological reassessment of these phases at the light of the Phoenician materials from Cyprus: Bikai 1987: 68-69.

⁴⁴ Badre 1998: 79; Badre 2000: 943.

⁴⁵ Bikai 1987; Bikai 1994. A 10th century presence of Phoenician elements in Cyprus would also be indicated by the mention of an intervention of Hiram against Kition to suppress a rebellion: Klengel 1992: 203.

⁴⁶ Gal 1992: 177-182, Fig. 9. Lower Galilee and specifically the Akko plain was under the control of Tyre in the 10th cent.: Lehmann 2001: 90-95. In Iron Age I, during the 11th cent., Bichrome ware and Tyrian pithoi were diffused in this region: Mazar 1994: 45.

which in fact gravitated politically towards Phoenicia and Tyre. In Palestine, the evidence of the emergence and adoption of this ware in the local horizons is one of the arguments in the debate between the high and low chronologies which contend between an early 10th or an early 9th century for the beginning of Iron II. Following the high chronology, the emergence of this ware might be assigned to the end of the 12th cent. and its adoption to the 11th-10th cent.⁴⁷; or one century later, following the low chronology⁴⁸.

To conclude, introduction or adoption of the Red Slip ware does not provide an unequivocal document for tracking down the divide between Iron I-II. In order to create a sound relative chronological sequence we have, instead, to rely on different considerations based on both archaeological evidence and historical sources. We have first to bear in mind that there were no abrupt changes in the material culture, nor were there violent events defining this passage in the archaeological evidence; cultural change was not only a gradual process but might also have been characterized by regional chronological variants.

The presence of transitional traits in the ceramic assemblages of a few sites documenting continuity of occupation from Iron I to Iron II indicates a gradual and possibly long-term process of transformation. The assemblage from levels 16-14 at Tell Kazel Area I⁴⁹, showing hand burnishing Red Slip and red wash, document a gradual introduction of this finishing in local wares. Pottery from the upper levels 2-1 of Area E at Tell Afis show intermediary features which apparently follow trends emerged in the levels 5-3 assemblage: decadence of painted ware, increase in common orange ware, presence of burnished ware and Cypriot importations, simplification of profiles of table and storage vessels⁵⁰. In Area G East Zone, the documentation from domestic units points more clearly to a process of gradual and inner transformation from Iron IC to Iron IIA; here too in levels 3-2, a number of transitional traits can be defined, which follow trends that appeared in the assemblage of the immediately preceding phase⁵¹. A transitional Iron I-II phase has also been argued for in Tell Qarqour Area B2 and D6-7, where the materials show a notable degree of continuity from Iron I to Iron II. A similar situation has also been noted at Tell 'Ain Dara⁵².

The archaeological documentation does not record a break or any violent destructions sealing the last or most recent Iron I levels, at least to the west of the Euphrates. Hama F1 bore no signs of destruction; where the remains of this phase were exposed, they consisted of foundations or architectural features included in the foundations or substructures of the later E1 buildings⁵³. In Afis, in both Areas G and E the evidence of occupational change is not associated to burnt layers; in Area G, a street was used through Iron Age I and II⁵⁴. In Tell Kazel, there is continuity in Area I, while

⁴⁷ Mazar 1998: 368-378 and related bibliography. Ben-Tor, Ben-Ami 1998: 13-29 for the assemblage from Strata X-IX documenting an early Iron II horizon and 29-37 for a 10th date; Ben-Tor 2000.

⁴⁸ Finkelstein 1996, 1999, 2000: 240-244.

⁴⁹ Gubel 1999-2000: 133-134, Fig. 6.

⁵⁰ - Mazzone 1998a: 169.

⁵¹ Cecchini 1998: 275-277.

⁵² Dornemann 2000: 481; Stone, Zimanski 1999: 39-43, Phases XIX-XVII. Phase XVII containing Red Slip, Painted Ware and imports such as a Bichrome Cypro-Geometric ware has been dated not earlier than 1050 BC; it might be of a final Iron I date, possibly IC. In phases XV and XIV, instead, see: 43, the presence of two Cypro-Geometric I barrel jars (Fig. 80) and a carinated bowl (Fig. 74: 3) similar to one in Afis G, East Zone (Cecchini 1998: 276, Fig. 14: level 5) might support an IC attribution.

⁵³ Fugmann 1958: 138-140; 143-145.

⁵⁴ Pucci 2000: 27-28.

the temple of Area IV was destroyed by fire in Iron I and abandoned in Iron II, pointing to some local disruption, probably during Iron I; the change in the destination of the area might also indicate some gap, the length of which cannot, however, be calculated.

It is more on a combination of data from different sources, historical and archaeological (political emergence and urbanization of the Aramaean kingdoms, Assyrian military expansion, intensification of sea trade in the Eastern Mediterranean, economic increase and cultural growth of the Phoenician cities)⁵⁵ that we can fix a date between the beginning and the mid-9th century as a possible turning point from Iron I to Iron II.

Tentatively, I have proposed an Iron IIA and B periodization which comprises the two centuries from the 9th to the full 8th; the rebuilding activities and even new foundations of this period, often, but not only, connected with an Aramaean facies (Afis/Hazrek; Tell Halaf/Guzana; Hamath; Tell Ahmar/Til Barsib; Zincirli/Sam'al) and the dense package of levels alternating destructions and rebuildings in most sites apparently fit well with a political scenario dominated by the increasing territorial competition of the local kingdoms confronting Assyrian expansion.

A greater number of settlements furnish well stratified contexts belonging to Iron II, mainly Iron IIB. In Coastal Syria Tell Kazel, Tell Tweini, Tell Syanu and Ras el Bassit are now the diagnostic sites for this period, while Tell Sukas and 'Amrith with the area of Tartous and its cemetery provide documents for the later part of Iron Age, namely Iron Age III, Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian periods extending over the Persian Achaemenid Period. The evidence from Tell Kazel Area I, the "jar building," documents continuity of occupation and progress in pottery production. A deposit of crushed sherds gives indications of the presence of an industrial area for pottery production during the 9th and 8th centuries B.C.⁵⁶ The "Big House" at Tell Tweini with its collection of cups and storage jars, possibly for ritual symposia⁵⁷, also provides evidence of new cultural and social trends.

Evidence for central inner Syria is now furnished by the excavations, from South to North, of Qatna, Hama, Tell Mardikh, Tell Touqan, Tell Deinit, Tell Mastuma, Tell Afis, Tell Qarqour, 'Ain Dara. Hama was characterized in phase E by a thorough replanning of the ceremonial unit, consisting of several buildings of the bit-hilani type, opening onto a central square or open court. Two phases were identified, E2 and E1, but only E1 was extensively documented by the remains of the unit which were sealed by a severe destruction dated to the time of the conquest of the city by Sargon II in 720 B.C. Now, the presence of the lions decorating the gates of Buildings II and III, attributed on stylistical grounds to the mid-9th cent.⁵⁸, provides a safe upper term for the building of the complex; while the older lions of Gate I, probably of 10th cent. date, are the only monumental remains of the older city. The materials recovered in the destruction level of the E1 buildings constitute a fairly composite corpus of objects and pottery of different datings, spanning the 9th and 8th centuries, as is better documented by the

⁵⁵ Mazzoni 2000a for an evaluation of different sources.

⁵⁶ Gubel 1999-2000: 124-127; noteworthy are here the transitional Iron I-II forms: Fig. 6.

⁵⁷ Vansteenhuyse K., paper delivered at the ICAANE 2002.

⁵⁸ Riis 1948: 197-199; Riis, Buhl 1990: 35-38, groups C,D; group D shows the rendering of the hind-quarter muscles with a flame as in the reliefs and ivories of Tell Halaf, which is apparently diagnostic of a 9th cent. datation.

storage jars⁵⁹. Table ware is characterized by the presence of the Red Slip ware, a little painted ware and common ware with a variety of forms of a prevailing 8th cent. date⁶⁰.

At Afis, a more substantial replanning of the town can be dated in a mature Red Slip horizon; if the historical sources on the emergence of Hazrek and the autonomy of Lu'ash are to be credited, and if Afis is Hazrek, we can fix this process towards the end of the 9th century. To the full Iron IIB one has to attribute the intensification of the occupation in the lower city (Area D, B) and the construction of the urban walls, which were erected, as the excavations in Area B indicate, by levelling the houses of the older Iron II settlement and following roughly the alignment of the MB I walls. Extensive replanning transformed the eastern part of the acropolis, where a 15 by 15,50 m open courtyard was created by excavating and enlarging a possibly smaller depression bordered by the Iron I domestic units⁶¹; the sunken court was surrounded by more than 8 metre high walls without openings or doors; its size and labour costs argue for some official or public function.

Tell Mastuma⁶² in Iron IIB was occupied by a village probably relying on industrial olive production with well-planned and densely clustered houses. The ceramic assemblage of Level I-2 shows clear connections with the Afis Iron IIB assemblage. Similarly, in Tell Mardikh and Tell Tuqan which both furnish evidence of consistent occupation, the local assemblage can be assigned to this same regional Iron IIB horizon⁶³. At Tell Qarqour, in Area B2, 11 occupational phases have been recovered; in Area A, the city Gateway belongs to this period⁶⁴. At 'Ain Dara 12 occupational phases (XII-I) can be attributed to an Iron II horizon⁶⁵.

The upper Euphrates area witnessed both an increase of occupation and an intensification of building activities. In the region of Karkemish and Til Barsip, there is evidence of a number of sites, a few of which had administrative functions and were furnished with residential buildings of the Hilani type: Tell Shioukh Fawqani (Area F,G,H) which the local epigraphic sources identify with Burmarina⁶⁶ Tell Khamis⁶⁷, Tell Qadahiye, Jurn Kabir II (Buildings I, II)⁶⁸, Tell Sheikh Hassan (Gebäude A, Schicht 3)⁶⁹.

In Western Jezireh, known until recently only by the site of Khadatu/Arslan Tash, a survey could bring to light a concentration of settlements in two main areas, the plain of Saruj, with Tell Hajib as a main centre, near Arslan Tash, and the area of Qaramuh and its tributaries⁷⁰. The published materials belong to a fully Assyrianized 8th

⁵⁹ Riis, Buhl 1990: 128, 137-138, nos 415-423, Figs. 61-62.

⁶⁰ Riis, Buhl 1990: 128-136. P.J. Riis correctly noted the possibility that older materials from E2 and even F1 were preserved in the E1 destruction level: Ibidem: 20, 23. And Riis 1948: 196, listing the materials found in the complex of E, possibly of earlier date, concluded that the complex may have been built during the second part of period II and in period III of the Cemetery stratigraphy.

⁶¹ Cecchini 1998: 295-296; 2000: 19-22.

⁶² Wakita et alii 1995; Wada 1994; Wakita, Wada, Nishiyama 2000.

⁶³ Mazzoni 1992.

⁶⁴ Dornemann 2000: 459-473, 479.

⁶⁵ Stone, Zimansky 1999: 25-27, 43-55. Phases XV-XIV show transitional traits which might indicate a late Iron IC or early Iron IIA date, see above footnote 52.

⁶⁶ Bachelot 1999: 148-150, 151-152; Fales 1999: 625-635

⁶⁷ Matilla Séiquer 1999: 218-219, Fig. 3.

⁶⁸ Eidem, Pütt 1999: 194-196, Fig. 4.

⁶⁹ Boese 1995: 210-211, Figs. 4,7; 235, Figs. 3-4.

⁷⁰ Einwag 1999; notice that Arslan Tash is considered as "eine kurzlebige neuassyrische Gründung", p. 323. For the pottery, see Figs. 9-10.

and 7th cent. horizon, paralleling the Tell Ahmar assemblage⁷¹; this region had, in fact, long been under the control of the Assyrians and the cultural influence of the centres of Kar Shalmanashar and Khadatu.

The end of Iron Age IIB can be linked on historical grounds to the Assyrian military conquest and the loss of autonomy of the local kingdoms. Since the process was neither simultaneous nor the same in intensity or character, the archaeological evidence is not unequivocal and includes the final destruction which seals the buildings of Hamath E, as well as cases of uninterrupted occupation more often characterized by an Assyrian facies obscuring the pre-Assyrian one. Iron III witnessed a further process of urbanization, stimulated by the new organization of the territory in Assyrian provinces, a process of cultural homogenization and Assyrian acculturation. Although if the passage from Iron IIB to III can be fixed in relation to events and precise dates, and major occupational breaks, the picture was, however, yet again not generalized and a number of cases can be singled out where Assyrian military intrusion was less effective or did not occur or where no substantial breaks are archaeologically documented. However, after the conquest, the way towards more marked cultural homogenization between the many components populating the region was open. We can thus establish a probably flexible border-line between Iron Age II and III at the end of the 8th century.

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⁷¹ See Jamieson 2000: this assemblage belongs to Iron III.

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