

Distinction and affinity. The dualism of foreign features in the MBA Levantine palatial architecture

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ABSTRACT

The Middle Bronze Age in the Near East was a period of particular commercial and political developments. Numerous polities rose in the Levant as a result of internal and external triggers. The material culture and finds from this area, which had no fixed boundaries or clear identity, reveals a continuous and vibrant interaction and exchange with the stronger surrounding cultures. This is clearly reflected in the architecture of the excavated palaces. A *mélange* of local and foreign features could be identified: Aegean frescoes, Egyptianizing wall paintings, Mesopotamian architecture and Anatolian building technique. The architecture of these palaces was used by the Levantine Elites to communicate their political power and reach to their peers. But what was the intention and motivation of the various elites to integrate selected foreign features in the architecture and decoration of their palaces? This paper seeks to answer this question by identifying the preferences and the choices of foreign styles and features. Through defining the local or regional trends, some insights are gained about the nature of the relationship between the Levantine polities and their neighbors, and the various zones of influence.

KEYWORDS

Palatial architecture, Levant, cross-cultural interaction, elite identity, peer-polity interaction

1. Introduction

The Levant, often described as a cross-road, is an area encompassing the western region of the fertile crescent, bordered by the Mediterranean Sea on one side and the vast arid expanse of the desert on the other.¹ Textual source and archaeological finds attest that during the first half of the second millennium BCE the near eastern world was strongly interconnected, with goods, people and ideas moving in a network linking the Persian Gulf, with the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, and even with the Aegean and Egypt.² The particular commercial and political developments of the region during this period, namely the Middle Bronze Age (henceforth MBA), played a crucial role in the rise of several powerful Levantine polities and the establishment of the region's local culture.

The impressive large palatial structures, found at several sites in the Levant, are but witnesses of the powers that were at play during that period. Their architecture is diverse, complex and sophisticated and has a lot to tell about the interconnections between the neighboring cultures in the region. This paper examines the architecture of these structures to identify what appears to be specific, local or regional, aspects and single out elements that reveal foreign connections. This is then considered in the light of the socio-political context of the region during the MBA, to assess – from a palatial architecture point of view – whether the Levant was truly a cross-road between the neighboring cultures, or whether it played a different role in the dynamics of the cross-regional contact and interaction.

2. Culture and cultural region

Delving into the complexity of the definition of culture and cultural region is beyond the scope of this paper. Nonetheless, it remains necessary to stress some characteristics of a culture. These can be manifested in one or all of the three fundamental layers:

observable artifacts, values and basic underlying assumptions.³ Archaeological material, and amongst them architectural remains, are a manifestation of the first, the material layer of a culture. Second, a culture is associated with a social group and each individual can belong to a number of different groups simultaneously.⁴ In this case, the studied palaces represent the elites, who belong simultaneously to their own local culture, to a larger Levantine culture, to the Levantine Elite culture as well as to the wider Near Eastern Elite culture or even beyond.⁵

A third and quite relevant point is that “culture is subject to gradual change”.⁶ Accordingly what is manifested in any of a culture's fundamental layers, provides only a “snapshot view of one particular time”.⁷ The palaces of the MBA span a period of around 450 years, their architecture reflects a development of the palatial architecture, the elite culture and the local culture, as well as the changes and fluctuations in cross-cultural interaction and influence.

The concept of cultural regions or cultural zones comes from cultural geography and means an area of relative cultural uniformity.⁸ The core-domain-sphere model proposed by Meinig proposes that each culture starts at a core and develops around its cultural center.⁹ The core is surrounded by two zones, the domain and sphere, that have a gradually diminishing

³ SPENCER-OATEY 2012, p. 3; SCHEIN 1984, pp. 3-4.

⁴ SPENCER-OATEY 2012, pp. 7-8; FERRARO 1998, p. 16.

⁵ The term Elite is used here to label the group of people that had a vastly disproportionate control over or access to resources in the region during the MBA, such as members of the ruling class or the religious leaders, and who could commission the construction of palatial structures. This follows the Weberian definition of class, in which the elites are defined relatively to their power and the resources they possess (see: RAHMAN KHAN 2012 and PAKULSKI 2012). The distinction between local, Levantine and Near Eastern follows a structure similar to the American power model proposed by WRIGHT MILLS 2000. For the purpose of this article, the local culture is that of the city/town where the palatial structure was built and its immediate network of settlements, if present. While the Levantine Elite culture represents a middle stratum consisting of the grouping of the regional/local elites from the Levant proper, the Near Eastern Elite culture is a larger grouping of the Elites of all the Near Eastern regions.

⁶ SPENCER-OATEY 2012, p. 12.

⁷ FERRARO 1998, p. 25.

⁸ WINTHROP 1991, p. 61.

⁹ MEINIG 1965, p. 213.

¹ See KILLEBREW, STEINER 2014, p. 2; SURIANO 2014, p. 9 and related bibliography.

² LARSEN 2008, p. 13.

influence of the core.¹⁰ Nonetheless, these regions or zones should be viewed not merely as compartments for the grouping of data, or areas of static uniform patterns but as “dynamic areal growth”.¹¹ Several cultural cores or cultural zones, could exist next to each other, and their zones would expand or retract obeying specific circumstances. This would eventually lead to the transfer of cultural traits.¹² As cultures, also cultural regions or zones are not “inert stuff” contained within a static boundary, but are dynamic and constantly changing.¹³

One could conclude that for a cultural crossroad to exist, this requires two cultures close to each other but not adjacent as well as an unaffected zone in the middle that allows an indirect cross cultural exchange. This zone would be outside the zones of influence of both cultures, and could still hold its own cultural traits. Frontier zones on the other hand, lay in regions where the boundaries of a culture are not very well defined and not strong enough, somewhere beyond or at the border of a culture’s sphere. These areas are distinctive for their marginality rather than their belonging. They are not fully integrated in the cultural realm, and are often transitional with rapidly changing cultural identities.

3. Cultural and political context

Before going into the details of the palatial architecture, and to examine what it has to reveal about Levantine culture in the MBA, we need to have a look at the cultural and political situation of the period.

At the beginning of the second millennium BCE and after the collapse of the Third Dynasty of U_r, a complex pattern of small and competing Amorite states emerged in Mesopotamia.¹⁴ In the Levant, several polities rose during the MBA I possibly as a result of the military campaigns of the Mesopotamian kings.¹⁵ Yamḥad, Qaṭna, Ugarit, and Hazor in the Galilee, are identified as kingdoms in the

Mari texts.¹⁶ Amorite rulers resided in the former two.¹⁷ These cities, as well as others in the region, flourished mainly due to their strategic locations.¹⁸ Their spread follows the main trade routes: the Levantine coast from Ugarit to Ashkelon, and inland from Ḥalab (Aleppo) to Hazor.¹⁹

Eventually, Hammurabi of Babylon took control of all of the Mesopotamian floodplain and the Near East was divided into two poles: Yamḥad in the west and Babylon in the east.²⁰ Besides Yamḥad, the kingdom of Qaṭna in the northern Levant also remained unaffected by the campaigns of Babylon.²¹

The particular political situation of the MBA illustrates that Mesopotamia and western Syria were not a core and periphery, but were linked “culturally, economically, politically and ethnically”.²² Several scholars argue that the whole northern part of the fertile crescent was part of a network of “Amorite Kingdoms” united by diplomatic relations and trade.²³ In the Levant this was reflected in material culture, public architecture and burial traditions, indicating a change in the political and social trends.²⁴

To the south of the Levant, Egypt was reunited and witnessed a period of cultural achievements during the Middle Kingdom.²⁵ Asiatics, referred to as *Aamu*, came to Egypt mostly from the Northern Levant during the 12th Dynasty supposedly as economic immigrants, craftsmen and soldiers.²⁶ By the 13th Dynasty some of them rose to prominent

¹⁶ BURKE 2014a, p. 405.

¹⁷ SCHWARTZ 2013, p. 3.

¹⁸ BURKE 2014a, p. 407.

¹⁹ BURKE 2014a, pp. 406-407.

²⁰ ANDRÉ-SALVINI 2008, pp. 18-19; LARSEN 2008, p. 14; SCHWARTZ 2013, p. 7.

²¹ LARSEN 2008, p. 14; KLENGEL 2000, p. 247.

²² SCHWARTZ 2013, p. 2; STEIN 2002; DURAND 1992.

²³ See amongst others BURKE 2014a, pp. 404-406; 2014b; KLENGEL 1992, p. 43; SCHWARTZ 2013.

²⁴ BURKE 2014a, pp. 408-410; PINNOCK 2009, p. 79.

²⁵ GAKKENDER 2000, pp. 183, 149-150; VAN DE MIEROOP 2011, pp. 97, 100.

²⁶ BIETAK 2008, p. 110; VAN DE MIEROOP 2011, p. 118; GAKKENDER 2000, p. 169; BOURRIAU 2000, p. 187. An inscription from the 12th dynasty records a campaign by sea in the time of Amenemhat II to the Lebanese coast which returned with a booty including 1554 Asiatics (BOURRIAU 2000, p. 187).

¹⁰ MEINIG 1965, pp. 213-216.

¹¹ MEINIG 1965, p. 195.

¹² WINTHROP 1991, p. 82.

¹³ RODSETH, PARKER 2005, p. 8.

¹⁴ LARSEN 2008, pp. 13-14; SCHWARTZ 2013, p. 3.

¹⁵ BURKE 2014a, pp. 405-406.

positions and they eventually established their own domain in lower Egypt and founded their capital in Avaris.²⁷ This is the so-called Hyksos period.²⁸

It is still difficult to define the intensity of the involvement of the Middle Kingdom in the Levant.²⁹ Yet, the contact and propagation of Egyptian culture can be inferred from texts and the discovery of numerous objects throughout the region, amongst others from Ebla, Qatna, Ugarit, Byblos, Beirut and Hazor.³⁰ During the reign of the Hyksos, objects found at Byblos, Ebla and Jericho bore the names of Egyptian rulers.³¹ In the southern Levant, which saw the fortification of its cities, cultural relations with Egypt are apparent in the material culture.³²

The political circumstances in the Near East during the MBA, the movement of things, people and ideas played a crucial role in the rise of the MBA Levant and the establishment of its local culture. Complex shifting dynamic started at first on a limited scale and reached its zenith in the second half of this period when large city-states flourished across the region. Impressive fortified settlements have been uncovered in numerous archaeological projects. The large palaces and temples are witnesses of the powers that were at play during that period.

4. The Levantine palatial structures

In the Levant 15 sites yielded the remains of some 22 MBA palatial structures (fig. 1). They span the whole period and are not necessarily contemporary with each other. The state of preservation, excavation and publication of these structures is quite varied (fig. 2). It should be noted, that this work takes into consideration all the structures that have been labelled by their excavators as palaces. Although, this term is sometimes applied indiscriminately to any monumental structure which does not seem to be cultic or religious, or which is not residential given its dimensions, or given the complexity of its plan, or quality of its building material and technique, or richness of its furnishing.³³

Moreover, the evidence of interaction that can be drawn from the palatial architecture pertains only to the cultural and economic identities of the local ruling authority; kings, governors and local princes.³⁴ The evidence of cultural interaction is then strictly related to the elite or royal culture or identity. The questions about the wider cultures, their identities and interactions should not be answered with the evidence acquired from the palatial architecture.

With that in mind, the detailed analysis of the building material and techniques of the palatial structures, as well as of their planimetric and spatial characteristics, reveals both a wide range of diversity as well as some elements of homogeneity, and regional trends.

For the foundations and walls, which are the bulk of the preserved evidence, a general overview reveals that the most common material for the former is stone and for the latter is mudbrick. The only two exceptions with mudbrick foundations are the palaces of Qatna and Tell el-Burak. Nevertheless, despite the apparent uniformity in material choice and broad building technique, the details reveal such a diversity that it seems that each palace had its own unique building technique (fig. 3). This diversity is most probably an indication of local building technique and construction knowledge, revealing that local builders with their local knowhow and

²⁷ BIETAK 2008, p. 110; GAKKENDER 2000, p. 169; BOURRIAU 2000, pp. 185, 188; VAN DE MIEROOP 2011, p. 118.

²⁸ BIETAK 2008, p. 110 dates it to between 1640 and 1550 BCE. VAN DE MIEROOP 2011, pp. 127-128, prefers a longer time span of 150 years from ca. 1700 to 1550 BCE. For an up-to-date analysis on the rise of the Hyksos see MOURAD 2015.

²⁹ AHRENS 2015, p. 143; SCHNEIDER 2008, p. 61.

³⁰ SCHNEIDER 2008, p. 61; KLENGEL 1992, p. 40; MUMFORD 2014, p. 73; AHRENS 2015, pp. 143-144.

³¹ MUMFORD 2014, pp. 73-74. AHRENS 2015, pp. 143-145, notes that some of the Middle Kingdom Egyptian objects found in the Levant may have been dispatched later, during the Second Intermediate Period, plundered from the tombs. Hence they cannot be always used as chronological markers or signals of political/diplomatic connections.

³² BURKE 2014a, p. 410.

³³ See DE MIROSCHEJJI 2015 amongst others.

³⁴ AKAR 2006, p. 48; WINTER 1993, p. 29.



FIGURE 1
Location map of the palatial structures in the Levant and surrounding regions

techniques were certainly involved in the construction process.

Interestingly, preferences and peculiarity in material choices can be noted. For instance, basalt was found exclusively in the palaces of the northern Levant. Also some traits can be traced when it comes to the employment of building material. The usage of wood for wall paneling and reinforcement seems to have been restricted to Alalah, Qatna and Tell Kabri. Orthostats as wall cladding, were found in most of the palaces of the northern Levant, but only at Tell Kabri in the southern Levant. The usage of stone slabs as doorway jambs and stone socles seems to have also been a trait of the Northern Levant.

Similarly, when it comes to the layout one can isolate distinctive regional styles, and abundant local variations. For instance the palaces of Ebla de-

spite their apparent diversity show some common characteristics as noted by Matthiae.³⁵ These are a central location of the audience suite, the location of the food preparation sector at the northern back side of the structure, the orthogonal orientation of peripheral rooms, and a semi-peripheral circulation. On the other hand, in other sites the peripheral rooms seem to be oriented parallel to the outer walls, as can be noted for the palaces of Alalah, Qatna and Tell el-Burak (see fig. 2). A peripheral circulation as noted in Ebla, could also have been the case in Tell el-Burak and the Eastern Palace of Qatna. On the other hand, the Royal Palace of Qatna shows, as much as detectable, a more distributive pattern with corridors or courts.

³⁵ MATTHIAE 2010, p. 258.

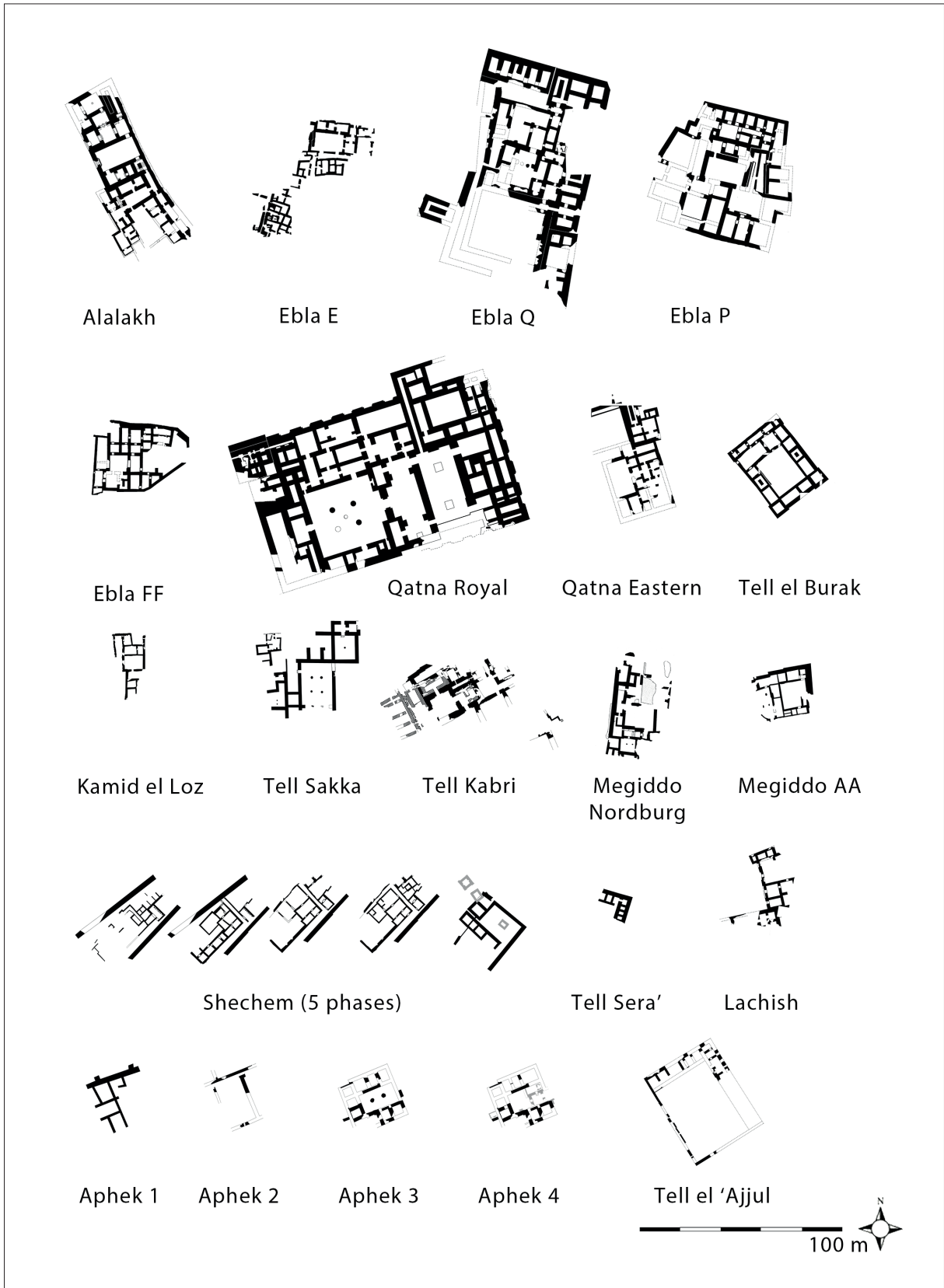


FIGURE 2
Plans of the Levantine palaces to the same scale

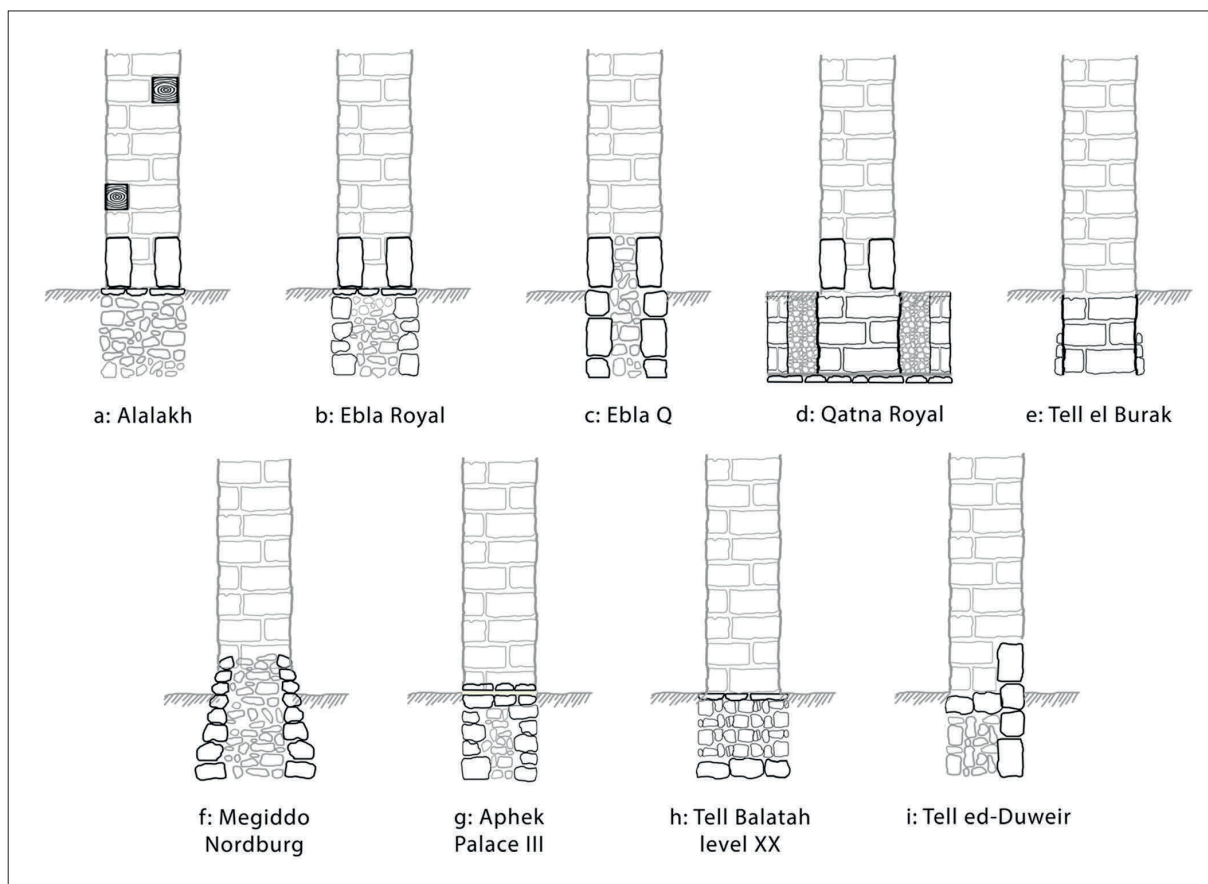


FIGURE 3
Details of the building technique of the walls of the palatial structure as per the descriptions in the respective publications

When the full extent of the structures were almost uncovered, a general elongated form is noted in the Levantine palaces, as is the case in the Northern Levant of the Palace of Alalakh, the western Palace of Ebla, the two palaces of Qaṭna and the Palace of Tell el-Burak, and in the southern Levant of the *Nordburg* of Megiddo and the Palace of Tell el ‘Ajjūl. Some features are on the other hand completely local such as the grid layout and protruding corners of the structure of Tell el-Burak, the niched outer walls of the Royal Palace of Qaṭna, the triple recessed doorways of the Palace of Alalakh, the geometrically arranged brick in the walls of the northeastern sector of the Western Palace of Ebla.

An interesting aspect is the resemblance between the central representative units and the ty-

pology of the reception suite as a recurrent feature, albeit some minor differences.³⁶ A particular layout is seen in the palace of Alalakh and in the Western Palace Q of Ebla (fig. 4: a, b). It has a longitudinal north-south development and a tripartite articulation with two side wings, the central wing has a larger front hall and a narrow and long back room. This arrangement is also repeated, but in a simpler form in the southern Levantine Palace of Tell Kabri (fig. 4: c), and with a different orientation in the Eastern Palace of Qaṭna (fig. 4: d) and the southern palace of Ebla (fig. 4: e). In these three cases the tri-

³⁶ MATTHIAE 2013a; MARCHETTI 2006; PFÄLZNER 2007; IAMONI 2015. MATTHIAE 2013b further examines the formation of the north Levantine (Old Syrian) reception units and their layout.

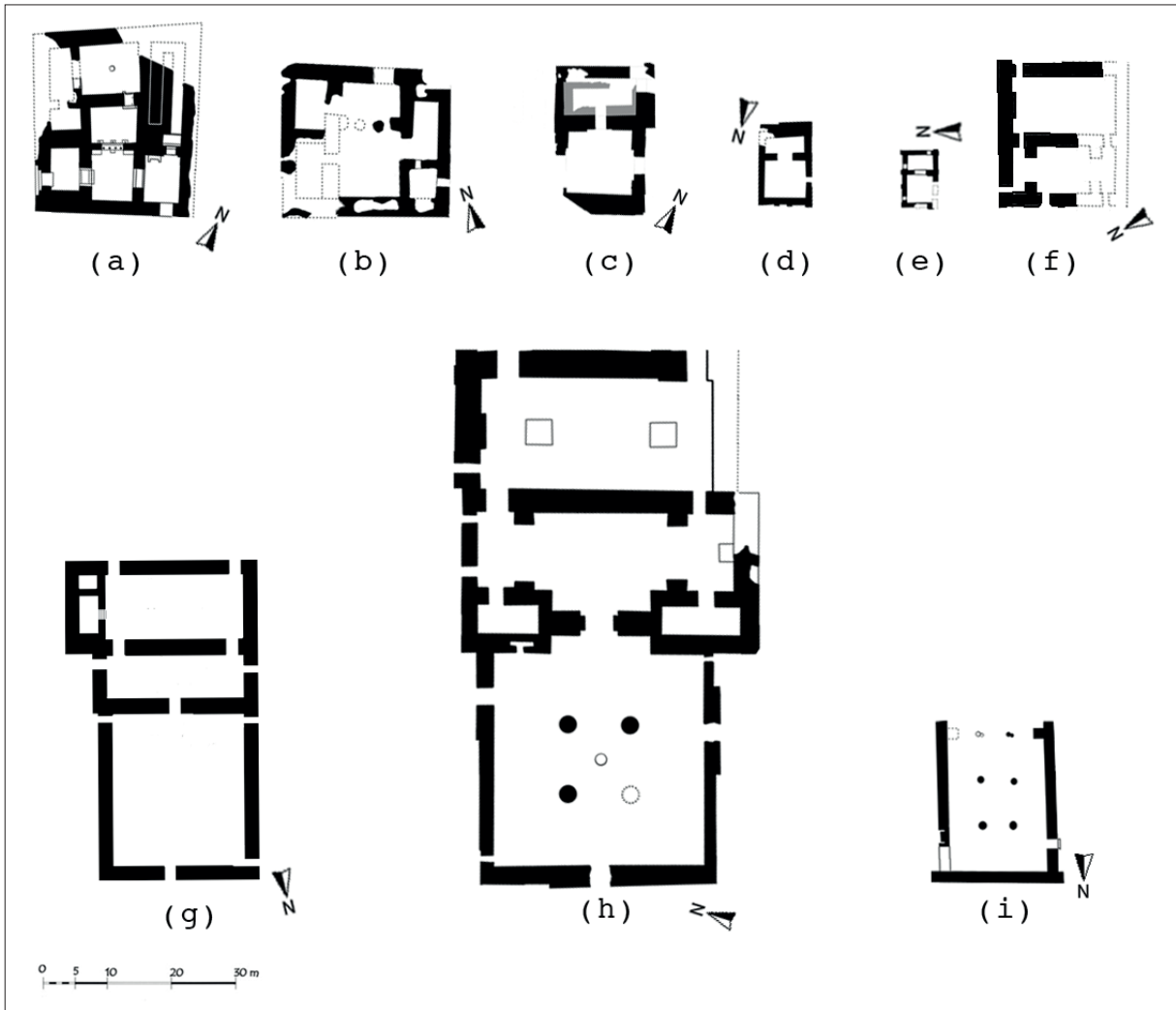


FIGURE 4
Plans of the reception suites to the same scale

partite division is lacking.³⁷ The palaces where this layout was found are in the Northern Levant, as well as Tell Kabri, repeating the same pattern identified for the presence of orthostats, stone slabs and wooden reinforcement, these combined indicate a regional trend.

Looking at the bigger picture, if we compare the general layout and the architecture of the palaces of the Levant with those found in neighboring Mesopotamia, Egypt, Crete and Anatolia, it is not very easy to identify any clear sign of direct influence.

³⁷ For more details, see KALLAS 2017, pp. 92-94.

5. Mesopotamian Influence

Mesopotamian palaces were excavated at Aššur, Ešnunna, Mari, Larsa, Tell al-Rimah, Uruk, Adab, Tell Leilān, and last but not least Tell Bi'a (fig. 1).³⁸ When completely uncovered they were revealed to be quite axial in plan with a regular shaped outer limit. The most important feature of this architectural tradition are the huge courtyards, which to some extent managed the circulation between the

³⁸ See RISTVET, WEISS 2010 for Tell Leilān; STROMMINGER, MIGLUS 2007, for Tell Bi'a; and MARGUERON 1982 for the other palaces.

various palace sectors. At the core of the structure is usually, on one side of the court, the elongated throne room with a vestibule and a retiring room.³⁹

The striking resemblance between the three-hall central representative unit of the Royal Palace in Qaṭna and that of the last phase of the Palace of Mari was noted by Pfälzner (fig. 4: g, h).⁴⁰ The layout consisted of a square front hall or court followed by two longitudinal halls. The reason for the rulers of Qaṭna to build a suite similar to the one of Mari, but on a much larger scale, has been interpreted by Pfälzner as a sign of a desire of the rulers of Qaṭna to emulate, and even outshine with sheer monumentality the rulers of Mari. By outrivaling the architecture of Mari, the rulers of Qaṭna could visually communicate through architecture their political power and their growing role in the region.⁴¹ This layout can also be seen, although only partially excavated in the smaller palace of Tell Sakka (fig. 4: i).⁴²

The similarities between the reception suites of the Royal Palace of Qaṭna, Tell Sakka and the Royal Palace of Mari should come as no surprise if we consider that they were all part of the so-called network of “Amorite Kingdoms”. Significantly, the reception suite of the Royal Palace of Mari is, as illustrated by Margueron, a final development of a tradition that can be traced in the palace of Mari itself as well as in the other palaces of Mesopotamia,⁴³ while on the other hand in Qaṭna and Tell Sakka it appears as a finished module.

Another Levantine palatial structure that also shows some Mesopotamian affinities is the one of Tell el Burak. This peculiar structure was erected together with the hill on which it rises.⁴⁴ It stands in contrast to all its Levantine counterparts with its ax-

ial layout and symmetry. Sader and Kamlah noted a similarity between its rectilinear plan with projecting corner towers, and that of Tell Bi’a /Tuttul and the small Eastern Palace of Mari.⁴⁵

Furthermore, the mudbrick foundation systems of the palaces of Qaṭna and of Tell el-Burak seem out of place in the Levant. The royal Palace of Qaṭna had quite peculiar foundations, in which the almost exclusive use of mudbrick and the fact they were wider than the walls is reminiscent of the Mesopotamian technique. The same can be argued for the palace of Tell el-Burak, although in this case the artificial hill remains an exception. The excavators of Tell el-Burak concluded that the structure may have had the Mesopotamian palaces as a model, regarding both the choice of building material and the plan.⁴⁶

6. Egyptian Influence

Unfortunately, not much is known when it comes to the palatial architecture of Egypt during this period, and hence very few conclusions could be drawn. Palaces were found at the site of Tell Basta, Tell el-Dab’a, ‘Ezbet Helmi, and two at Deir el Ballas (fig. 1).⁴⁷ Even when compared amongst each other the architecture of the Egyptian palaces does not show much in common. Furthermore, the available publications – with a few exceptions – do not go into the details of their architecture and building technique.

In general, and despite the meager evidence, it could be noted that the royal palaces of Egypt are quite axial in overall layout with a well-defined hierarchy.⁴⁸ These structures were architecturally and spatially distinct from the rest of the urban space.⁴⁹ This is not the case for Levantine palaces, where symmetry was only rarely identified in the overall palace plans and where the palaces were integrated in the urban texture.

³⁹ MARGUERON 1982, p. 533, fig. 366.

⁴⁰ PFÄLZNER 2007, pp. 33, 38. It was in fact MATTHIAE 2013b (originally 2002), pp. 344-345, who first drew attention to this similarity even before the palace of Qaṭna was completely excavated.

⁴¹ PFÄLZNER 2007, p. 33.

⁴² Only the square front hall was excavated and the throne room could be suspected to have been to its south via the doorway marked by the pair of double columns. MARCHETTI 2006, pp. 284, 288.

⁴³ See MARGUERON 2007, pp. 82-83, 88-93.

⁴⁴ KAMLAH, SADER 2010a, p. 98.

⁴⁵ KAMLAH, SADER 2010b, p. 135.

⁴⁶ KAMLAH, SADER 2010b, p. 140.

⁴⁷ BIETAK, LANGE 2014; BIETAK, MATH, MÜLLER 2012/2013; BIETAK 2007a; LACOVARA 2006, 2013.

⁴⁸ LACOVARA 2006, p. 192; 1997, p. 40.

⁴⁹ LACOVARA 1997, p. 41.

A similarity was between the so-called casemate structures of ‘Ezbet Helmi and Deir el Ballas on the one side and the construction technique of the Tell el Burak structure and the western half of the Royal Palace of Qaṭna on the other.⁵⁰ In the Levantine cases, mudbrick cells were built and filled with rubble, packed or simply dumbled, until the desired height of the palace floor was reached.⁵¹ In the lack of accurate descriptions and photographs of the building techniques of the Egyptian structures, the available evidence points to a possible similarity. Furthermore, the palace of Tell el Burak was built atop a hill, albeit artificial, as was the “South Palace” of Deir el Ballas and the one at the northern end of the same site, further emphasizing a similar function as an observation post, a function not completely excluded by its excavators.⁵²

The strongest link with Egypt is however not in the layout or building technique but in the palace decoration. Wall paintings were found in the structure of Tell el-Burak.⁵³ Several elements of these wall paintings show Egyptian connections, such as the hunting scene.⁵⁴ Sader identified for the latter and a row of human figures clear parallels at the Middle Egyptian tomb of Beni Hassan.⁵⁵ However, it seems from the technique and the mixing of Near Eastern stylistic elements that the paintings were not carried out by Egyptian artists.⁵⁶ The Tell el-Burak wall paintings seem to have been the earliest example of fresco-technique, even predating the Minoan ones.⁵⁷ Despite some similarities in some elements with later Minoan wall paintings, in the lack of contemporary ones from Crete no clear connection can be established.

The fragments of the wall paintings from Tell Sakka seem to have been arranged based on a Near

Eastern thematic scheme, but clearly show Egyptian execution and arrangement elements.⁵⁸ For instance, the Amorite looking human figures with an Egyptian stylized head dress and the colors of the women’s garments.⁵⁹ Yet Bietak pointed out that this Egyptianizing head dress was not depicted correctly, its parallels can be better found on Old Syrian seals together with other Egyptian motifs.⁶⁰

Despite the temptation to see a strong evidence of Egyptian influence in both these cases, stylistic and technical observations seem to point out to a local art production with strong Egyptianizing inspiration, this is not surprising considering the strong connection between the Levant and Egypt during this period.⁶¹

7. Minoan Influence

In Crete three palaces were found and dated to the Minoan period, these are in Knossos, Malia and Phaistos (fig. 1).⁶² The debate is still ongoing about the function of these building and some scholars prefer to call them, at least for the earlier periods, courtyard buildings.⁶³ They are believed to have been built at the beginning of the Bronze Age (Early Minoan Period) and remained in use until the Late Minoan Period (LM).⁶⁴ Unfortunately, in all these cases the study focused on the later remains and not much is known about how they looked like or their building techniques of the Middle Minoan (MM), what is certain nonetheless is a continuity in the usage of the central courts.⁶⁵ The architectural language of these palaces, the location of the large courts, the placement of the magazines, and

⁵⁰ For Deir el Ballas see: LACOVARA 2006, pp. 188-189. For ‘Ezbet Helmi see: BIETAK 2007a, pp. 752-753, 768.

⁵¹ For Tell el-Burak see: KAMLAH, SADER 2010b, pp. 99-100. For the Royal Palace of Qaṭna see: DOHMANN-PFÄLZNER, PFÄLZNER 2011, pp. 29-31.

⁵² See: KAMLAH, SADER 2010b, pp. 135, 137, 139; 2010a, p. 111; LACOVARA 2013, p. 1967; 2006, pp. 189, 192.

⁵³ SADER 2009, p. 177.

⁵⁴ BERTSCH 2019, pp. 399-400.

⁵⁵ SADER 2011, pp. 80-81; 2015, pp. 120-121.

⁵⁶ BERTSCH 2019, p. 399.

⁵⁷ BERTSCH 2019, p. 399.

⁵⁸ DOUMAS 2008, pp. 128-129.

⁵⁹ TARAQJI 1999, p. 39; DOUMAS 2008, pp. 128-129.

⁶⁰ BIETAK 2007b, pp. 278-279; BERTSCH 2019, p. 400.

⁶¹ BERTSCH 2019, p. 400.

⁶² See amongst others: WHITELAW in press, p. 1; SCHOEP 2007, p. 213.

⁶³ See amongst others: SCHOEP 2012; TOMKINS 2012; WHITELAW in press. For an overview of the terminology used to describe these structures see SCHOEP 2006.

⁶⁴ See PELON 1987; DRIESSEN 2007; SCHOEP 2007, 2012; TOMKINS 2012.

⁶⁵ DRIESSEN 2007; PELON 1987, pp. 195-197.

the circulation, if assumed to be a development of the MM one, does not show so much similarities with the Levantine palaces. Given the scanty information available in the publication, it is difficult to reconstruct a plan of the palaces during the MM period or to form a clear idea about their building technique and layouts.

As for Egypt, the link with the Minoan tradition is also found in the wall paintings in the Levant. At Alalakh the imitation of orthostats covered the walls in one room of the reception suite, and motifs of griffin's wing and a bull's horn amongst others were found in another part of the structure.⁶⁶ Woolley saw a resemblance in coloring, technique and style of the wall paintings with those of Knossos, in Crete.⁶⁷ This was further supported by Niemeier and Niemeier after reexamining the evidence.⁶⁸ Other scholars tend to associate the motifs and colors with the Syro-Levantine, Syro-Mesopotamian or even Egyptian traditions.⁶⁹ This evidence should be nonetheless considered with caution given the fragmentary nature of the frescoes and their incomplete publication, mostly by Woolley, in black and white.⁷⁰

The fragments of miniature wall frescoes found at Tell Kabri in the filling of the threshold of the throne room, and their similarity to Theran themes and motifs also indicated an Aegean influence.⁷¹ The checkered floor was likened to painted stone imitation common in Minoan art.⁷² The origin of this tradition, as well as of the imitation of orthostats on the walls found in Alalakh, had been a matter of debate. While some scholars sought its beginning in Mesopotamia, others prefer a Levantine or Cretan origin, where orthostats were used in the structures.⁷³ Furthermore, the recent discovery at Tell Kabri of more fragments belonging to another wall

painting, also find similarities in Crete, in the Cyclades as well as in later Greek mainland examples.⁷⁴

It should be noted that the available evidence about the MM wall paintings in Crete is quite scarce. In fact, very few representational wall decorations in Crete can be stratigraphically dated before the MM IIIB/ LM IA transition.⁷⁵ A major complication in chronologically arranging the order of these frescoes lies in the problems of the chronologies of all these regions and the uncertainties about the dates of the frescoes in most of the palatial structure.⁷⁶ Despite their fragmentary nature, the wall paintings of the palaces of Alalakh and Tell Kabri are clearly applied in a true fresco technique and show more affinity to the Aegean tradition than they do the Near Eastern one.⁷⁷ Feldman notes that the motifs and styles of these frescoes seem to be more related with the wider spectrum of Aegean art clearly indicating their origin.⁷⁸

8. Anatolian Influence

Palaces dated to the first half of the MBA, or the Assyrian Colony period, were found in south central Anatolia at Kültepe and Achemhöyük, and two palaces dated to the second half of the MBA were found in southeastern Anatolia at Tilmen Höyük and Kinet Höyük (fig. 1).⁷⁹

The walls of the large palatial complexes of Kültepe and Achemhöyük are the earliest remarkable examples of the timber frame and mud brick architecture.⁸⁰ In the palaces of the Levant, the usage of timber in the construction of the walls is much less

⁷⁴ CLINE, YASUR-LANDAU, GOSHEN 2011, pp. 250-254.

⁷⁵ A fragment comes from Knossos and is dated anywhere between MM IIIA and LM IB (late 18th to early 16th century BCE), see NIEMEIER W.-D., NIEMEIER B. 1998, footnote 24; MACDONALD 2012, p. 532. Other fragments of Protopalatial decoration were found in the palace of Phaistos, MILITELLO 2012, pp. 249-250.

⁷⁶ NIEMEIER W.-D., NIEMEIER B. 1998, p. 75.

⁷⁷ FELDMAN 2007, pp. 42-43.

⁷⁸ FELDMAN 2007, p. 44.

⁷⁹ ÖZGÜÇ 1999; ÖZGÜÇ 2003; MARCHETTI 2006; MARCHETTI ET AL. 2011; AKAR 2006.

⁸⁰ MIELKE 2009, pp. 100-101; NAUMANN 1971, pp. 91-108.

⁶⁶ WOOLLEY 1955, pp. 92, 100, 102-103; 1948, p. 14.

⁶⁷ WOOLLEY 1955, pp. 92, 100.

⁶⁸ NIEMEIER W.-D., NIEMEIER B. 1998, pp. 82-85.

⁶⁹ See FARINELLI 2015.

⁷⁰ NIEMEIER 1992, pp. 191-192; NIEMEIER W.-D., NIEMEIER B. 1998, pp. 70-71.

⁷¹ NIEMEIER 1995, pp. 6-11; NIEMEIER W.-D., NIEMEIER B. 1998, pp. 76-78; CLINE, YASUR-LANDAU, GOSHEN 2011, pp. 250-254.

⁷² NIEMEIER 1992, pp. 198-199; NIEMEIER W.-D., NIEMEIER B. 1998, p. 73.

⁷³ NIEMEIER W.-D., NIEMEIER B. 1998, p. 74.

common than in Anatolia, nonetheless few examples were noted. These are in the Palace of Alalah, where indications for horizontal as well as vertical wooden beams were noted, in the Western Palace Q of Ebla and vertical posts in the Royal Palace of Qaṭna.⁸¹ Although the examples of the Levant are negligible in comparison with those of Anatolia, their concentration in the Northern Levant certainly indicates a regional tendency.

In the royal palace of Qaṭna it was noted that the northern and eastern outer walls were adorned with a sequence of double-recess buttresses (*Nischengliederung*).⁸² While this remains a unique case in the Levant, a comparable example could be seen in the Late Palace of Kültepe.⁸³ Differences can certainly be noted, namely the absence of the double recess and the smaller dimensions of the buttresses in the Anatolian example, nonetheless the fortified appearance of the outer wall of both these palaces was similar.

On the other hand, the palatial architecture of Tilmen Höyük and Kinet Höyük seems to be more linked with the north Syrian tradition instead of the Anatolian one. The closest parallels to the structure of Kinet Höyük were not found in the Anatolian palaces, but in the Northern Levant, in the Western Palace of Ebla, the North West Building of Umm el Marra and the Palace of Level VII at Alalah.⁸⁴ It was also noted by Akar that in the social and political context of the period, Kinet Höyük probably served as a subservient state to the Kingdom of Yamḥad.⁸⁵

As for the small palace A at Tilmen Höyük, the layout of its reception suite resembles those of the North Syrian palaces, namely Alalah and the Western palace Q of Ebla (fig. 4: f).⁸⁶ The structure is not particularly large in comparison with other Old Syr-

ian palaces but it has all the essential elements of this type of architecture.⁸⁷ According to Matthiae, the shared features may have been the result of the dominance of Yamḥad.⁸⁸ It does not seem to be a result of some intercity influence, but the employment of a shared building technique and construction knowledge mediated by the capital.⁸⁹ The exchange network seems to have also involved architects and craftsmen.⁹⁰

9. Conclusion

By looking at the architecture of the palaces of the MBA Levant and what it has to reveal about the culture of the ruling elites in the various kingdoms and polities, it becomes clear that the region was not all one. It is also difficult to argue for a similar line of progress for both the northern and southern Levant. The palaces of the northern Levant with their complex plans, seem to be a product of a regional elite culture, and differ from their southern counterparts. The northern palaces show common traits such as the usage of basalt, stone socles at the bottom of walls, wooden reinforcement of walls, and orthostats as wall cladding. These featured combined indicate a regional trend.

Based on the similarities, shared features and differences, it can be inferred that the northern Levant and its sphere of influence was a cultural zone by itself, its northern part showing affinities in building technique with Anatolia and its eastern part affinities with Mesopotamia. The zone of influence of this culture extend north until Tilmen Höyük and Kinet Höyük and south until Tell Kabri and maybe Hazor, about which palace unfortunately not much is known. It has been suggested by Matthiae that major urban centers, including Ebla and Qaṭna, contributed to the definition and spread of a main monumental architecture style “that distinguished the urban image of cities in Syro-Palestine”.

⁸¹ WOOLLEY 1955, pp. 100-103; MATTHIAE 1980, p. 7, endnote 38; DOHMANN-PFÄLZNER, PFÄLZNER 2006, p. 80; NOVÁK, PFÄLZNER 2005.

⁸² DOHMANN-PFÄLZNER, PFÄLZNER 2007, p. 151; BARRO 2003, p. 85.

⁸³ ÖZGÜÇ 1999, p. 79.

⁸⁴ AKAR 2006, pp. 48-64.

⁸⁵ AKAR 2006, pp. 68-69.

⁸⁶ MATTHIAE 1983, p. 541; 2013a, pp. 340-342; MARCHETTI 2006, pp. 278-278.

⁸⁷ MARCHETTI ET AL. 2011, p. 30.

⁸⁸ MATTHIAE 1982a, p. 55; 1985, TAV. 68.

⁸⁹ MATTHIAE 1982b, p. 313.

⁹⁰ This exchange of specialists is attested in an inscription from Mari (MATTHIAE 1982b, p. 313).

The marks of this influence could be seen in basic elements of architectural and urbanistic unity in several settlements from the northern to the southern Levant.⁹¹ Similarities with the southern Levantine palatial architecture are the most difficult to identify.⁹² This study shows that the southern Levant, south of Tell Kabri and Hazor, seems to be a frontier zone between the powers in the north and Egypt, not showing any clear affinities or any identifiable elite identity in palatial architecture. Furthermore, the evidence also indicates that a belt zone crossing Tell el-Burak, Tell Sakka, and Tell Kabri, where a mix of Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Cretan and north Levantine traditions can be found, was a cross road zone allowing the intertwining of all cultures.

The Levantine elite identity, as seen from the palaces, shows a great degree of affinity with the Amorites that ruled Mesopotamia, nonetheless it sets itself aside by showing similarities but preserving some differentiation.⁹³ In the process of emulating the Amorites of Mesopotamia the Levantine elites are paying homage and being inherently respectful to their rivals, however by exceeding them -such as in monumentality in the palace of Qaṭna- they are also asserting their role, capacity and distinction.⁹⁴ Nonetheless, the usage of a local layout for the reception suites and foreign elements in the decoration discloses the elites' desire to create a local Levantine identity and display their reach to the extravagant exotic.⁹⁵

⁹¹ MATTHIAE 1984, p. 20.

⁹² MATTHIAE 2002, footnote 70.

⁹³ BURKE 2014b, p. 367, argues that the Amorite identity did not necessarily mean the Amorite ethnicity. The identification of oneself as Amorite is an intentional association with the legacy it was thought to provide.

⁹⁴ On emulation see: MAYERNIK 2016, pp. 1-14, 31-48.

⁹⁵ On elite distinction see: DALOZ 2007; TARDE 1903.

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