

Ebla and the South: reconsidering inter-regional connections during Early Bronze IV*

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ABSTRACT

Scholarly tradition has connected the second half of the third millennium BC with the question of contacts between the northern and southern Levant suggested by the spread in the south of given elements of material culture inspired by northern prototypes. Current explanations of connectivity across the Levant during Early Bronze IV, framed within the context of formation, crisis and regeneration of early urbanism, centre on the role of nascent states in Inland Western Syria – Ebla in particular – in structuring regional agro-pastoral strategies and triggering cultural transfer to the south. This article reviews the available chronological, archaeological and textual records in order to achieve a greater definition of the chronological resolution and geographic scale of possible patterns of interactions among the northern and southern Levant during the second half of the third millennium BC that have not been considered thus far. The article will discuss whether current explanations of connectivity between the northern and southern Levant during Early Bronze IV fit the data available and will explore possible alternative scenarios.

KEYWORDS

Ebla, northern Levant, southern Levant, Early Bronze IV, connectivity, mobility, chronology

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1. Introduction

Tell Mardikh, the ancient city of Ebla, is located on the northern limestone plateau of inland Western Syria, some 60 km south-west of Aleppo, in the Idlib governorate (figs. 1-2). From 1964 to 2010, the site was excavated by the Italian Archaeological Expedition to Ebla of Sapienza University of Rome directed by Paolo Matthiae. The excavations revealed continuous occupation from Early Bronze III (hereafter EB III) to the Persian Period and later frequentation in the Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, and Crusader Periods.¹ Although, from 2011, fieldwork activities at Ebla were interrupted by the outbreak of the Syrian crisis, the team of the Ebla Project continued research on the site's history and material culture with a three-fold approach. It includes: 1) the reappraisal of stratigraphy and the associated assemblages for the Bronze and Iron Ages, 2) the introduction of a multidisciplinary research programme, and 3) the adoption of a broad spatial perspective.² The ultimate aim of this methodological approach is to frame the study of the site and its region in the different periods within the regional and inter-regional contexts.

This article briefly concentrates on Early Bronze IV (hereafter EB IV). In the last years, scholarly consensus has grown that the EB IV period should be dated to ca. 2500-1950/1920 BC in the Levant as a whole.³ Phase Mardikh IIB1 at Ebla

corresponds to the EB IVA stratum (EB IVA1, ca. 2550-2450 BC; EB IVA2, ca. 2450-2300 BC) and Mardikh IIB2 to the EB IVB stratum (ca. 2300-2000 BC). The second half of the third millennium BC is connected with the formation, crisis and regeneration of early urbanism in the Levant⁴ and with contacts between the northern and southern Levant, suggested by the appearance in the south of given elements of material culture inspired by northern prototypes, a phenomenon which is generally defined as "Syrian connection".⁵

Current interpretations of interregional connectivity across the Levant during EB IV centre on the role of nascent states in Western Inland Syria – Ebla in particular – in structuring regional agro-pastoral strategies and their impact on connections between the northern and southern Levant. In partic-

253-261; FALCONER, FALL 2016. Consensus is growing that the transition from the Early to the Middle Bronze Ages might have taken place differentially at individual sites and areas within the twentieth century BC. For the northern Levant, see FIORENTINO ET AL. 2008; 2012; MORANDI BONACOSSO 2008a, in particular p. 135, fig. 1 and pp. 136, 147; 2014, p. 414 for Western Inland Syria. For the southern Levant, see COHEN 2002, pp. 11-19, 137-138; 2012, pp. 2-4; 2017; MARCUS 2003, 2013; MAEIR 2010, pp. 127-128; FALCONER, FALL 2017. There are no dates for the EB-MB transition and the early Middle Bronze Age phase in Lebanon. When not otherwise specified, the article follows the traditional Middle Chronology. Absolute dates for the northern Levantine EB IVA at ca. 2500-2300 BC and at ca. 2300-2000 BC are still conventional, due to the broad interval of radiocarbon determinations available for EB IVA and to the paucity of radiocarbon dates for EB IVB, early Middle Bronze I (MB I) and "transitional" phases in between, where attested (see fn. 4). While a bi-partite sub-phasing of the EB IV period of Western Inland Syria is generally adopted (see, e.g., SCHWARTZ 2007, pp. 49-52; COOPER 2014, pp. 283-289), DORNEMANN (2008, pp. 81-84, figs 15:18-32, 6, 7:1-11; 2012, pp. 221-230) proposed a tripartite scheme, EB IVA-C. A tripartite sub-phasing for the last phase of the Early Bronze Age in the northern Levant was proposed also within the ARCANE Project's periodization. In the latter scheme EB IVA corresponds to phase Early Northern Levant 4 (ENL 4) and EB IVB to phases Early Northern Levant 5 and 6 (ENL 5, ENL 6); see the revised periodization table on the ARCANE Project's website: http://www.arcane.uni-tuebingen.de/EA-EM-EL_phasing_v5-4-6.pdf. See remarks in D'ANDREA 2014-2015, pp. 151-152, 2018a, pp. 232-233, 2018b and SCHWARTZ 2017, fig. 5.1 on p. 88 and pp. 91, 93.

⁴ See, recently, the overviews by COOPER 2014 and SCHWARTZ 2017.

⁵ For first uses of this definition, see: DEVER 1980, p. 52; MAZZONI 1985, p. 15; PALUMBO 1990, p. 119. See recent reappraisals of the "Syrian connection" in D'ANDREA, VACCA 2015; D'ANDREA 2018c.

¹ For a general overview, see MATTHIAE 2010; 2013a.

² For new vistas on Ebla in the Bronze and Iron Ages see, e.g., the contributions in MATTHIAE ET AL. (eds.) 2014-2015 and MATTHIAE, PINNOCK, D'ANDREA (eds.) 2018. In particular, for the Early Bronze Age, from 2010 to 2014, an interdisciplinary study focused on early state formation at the site and its region during the mid-third millennium BC – the *Ebla Chora Project* – was implemented thanks to funding from the European Research Council (ERC Advanced Grant *Ebla Chora*, FP-7\ IDEAS grant agreement no. 249394). This project launched an integrated multidisciplinary methodological approach, combining archaeology, landscape studies, archaeometry and the study of written sources; the results of the project have been published in a preliminary report (MATTHIAE, MARCHETTI [eds.] 2013).

³ For the northern Levant, see SCHWARTZ 2017, pp. 97-114, with relative bibliography, for Inland Western Syria and HÖFLMAYER ET AL. 2014; GENZ 2010, p. 206, tab. 1 and THALMANN 2013, pp. 257-259, fig. 1 and 2016, pp. 31-32, fig. 34 for northern coastal Lebanon; for the southern Levant, see REGEV ET AL. 2012, pp. 558-561; 2014, pp. 241-242,

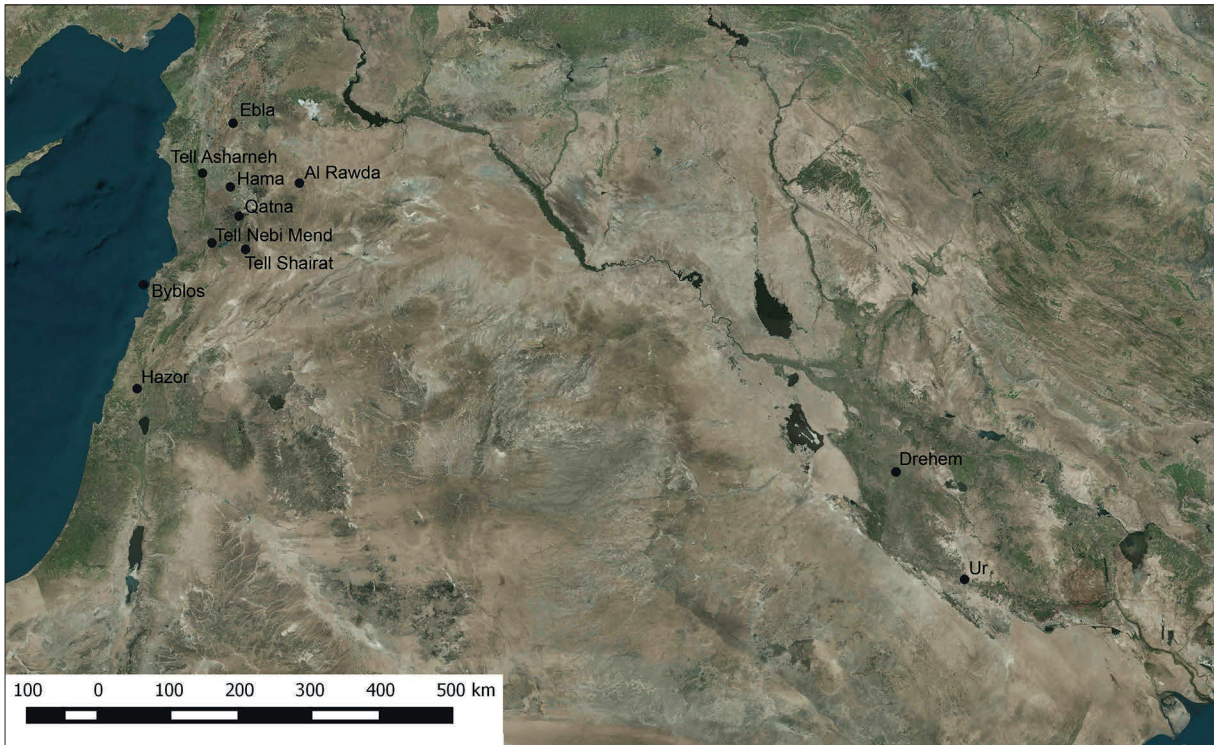


FIGURE 1
Map of sites mentioned in the text (map by Eloisa Casadei; map source: www.bing.com / ©Microsoft corporation Earthstar Geophysics SIO)

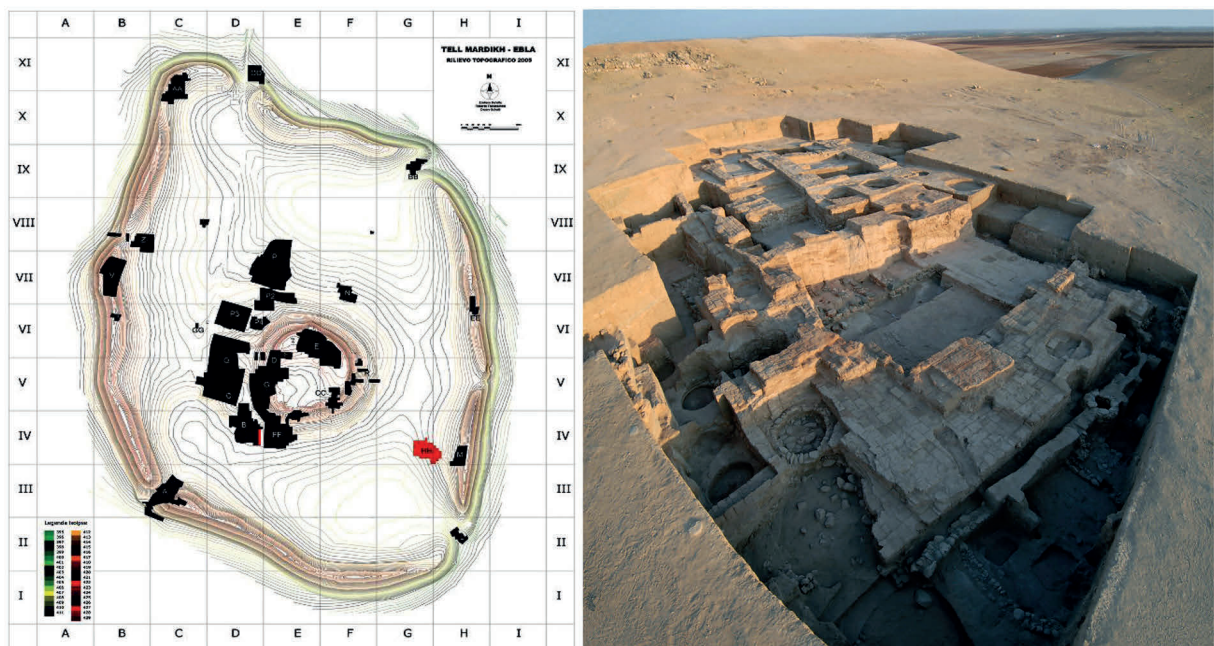


FIGURE 2
Topographical map of Tell Mardikh/Ebla, with Area HH highlighted in red (left) and general view of Area HH looking south-east (right), with the EB IVB temples in the background and houses in the foreground, respectively overrunning and abutting the no-longer used EB IVA temple (© Missione Archeologica Italiana in Siria)

ular, it is believed that cultural transfer from north to south might have been prompted by large-scale animal herding activities controlled by Ebla in this period and extending to the Syrian steppe and presumably involving the EB IV communities of the southern Levant.⁶ However, as recently pointed out by M. Bonechi, the definition of the “Ebla southern horizon” features among “thorny geo-political problems” to tackle.⁷

This paper moves from a short outline of Ebla’s developmental trajectory during EB IV, reconsidered thanks to the discoveries made in the 2004-2008 excavations that shed light on EB IVB at the site, which, until then, was less known and understood than EB IVA. Subsequently, the article summarizes and discusses current interpretations of connectivity between the northern and southern Levant in EB IV centred on Ebla’s leading role in the “Early Bronze Age agro-pastoral economy”. Textual and archaeological data are considered in order to re-examine north-south synchronisms during EB IV, also in the light of revised regional periodization schemes for the Levant. This way, on the one hand, it will be possible to identify blind spots in current scholarly knowledge from the points of view of archaeology and textual data. On the other hand, it will be possible to re-examine the suggested north-south interactions at higher chronological and geographical resolutions than considered before.

As is discussed below, three factors affect our understanding of regional developments and inter-regional interactions in the Levant by phase through the EB IV period. They are: 1) the lack of long stratigraphic sequences for some areas, in particular southern Lebanon and the northernmost areas of the southern Levant; 2) the low resolution of ceramic chronologies for some regions of Syria and the southern Levant; and 3) the lack of direct written sources from the Levant from ca. 2300 to ca. 1900 BC. With these caveats in the background, the author will attempt to reconsider the available evidence and propose alternative regional scenari-

os, changing through different EB IV phases. This way it will be possible to shed light on differences in the socio-political and socio-economic structures during various EB IV phases.

2. Ebla in the Early Bronze IV period

Since the discovery of the cuneiform texts dating to the twenty-fourth century BC in Ebla’s Palace G,⁸ EB IVA has been the focus of the research on the third millennium BC Ebla. As is well known from the texts from Ebla itself and other sites in Syria and Mesopotamia, in that period Ebla was a major regional entity.⁹ Differently, until a decade ago, the EB III and EB IVB periods, respectively preceding and following EB IVA, were less documented than the latter period in terms of stratigraphy, horizontal exposure, and written sources at both the site and the region levels.¹⁰ Direct textual sources dating from EB III and EB IVB from Western Inland Syria are lacking.¹¹ From the archaeological point of view, until a few years ago Hama was virtually the only site with long stratigraphic and ceramic sequences published.¹² Therefore, the reconstruction of these segments in the occupational life of Ebla was a major achievement of the Ebla team during the last ten years, throwing light also on regional developments during the Early Bronze III-IV sequence.¹³

It is now clear that the EB III stratum (ca. 2750-2550 BC), Phase Mardikh IIA, represents a forma-

⁸ For a general introduction, see, recently, MATTHIAE 2008.

⁹ ARCHI 2015a; SALLABERGER, SCHRAKAMP 2015.

¹⁰ For earlier studies on the EB III period at Ebla, see MAZZONI 1991; MATTHIAE 1993; 2010, pp. 40-47, figs. 17-18. For earlier synthesis on the EB IVB evidence at Ebla, see DOLCE 1999, 2002, 2007, 2009.

¹¹ ARCHI 2015b.

¹² See ASCALONE, D’ANDREA 2013, with bibliography and discussion.

¹³ For a general overview, see MATTHIAE 2006a, 452-481; 2007, pp. 489-512, 520-525; 2009a, pp. 752-791; 2013a; PINNOCK in press. For EB III and EB IVA1 see also, recently, VACCA 2014-2015, 2015; 2018; for EB IVA2, which was already quite well known before, see the recent contributions in MARCHETTI 2013; MATTHIAE 2013a, 2013b; MAZZONI 2013a; MARCHETTI, VACCA 2018. For EB IVB, see also, recently, MATTHIAE in press and D’ANDREA 2014-2015, 2015, 2016a, 2018a, 2018b.

⁶ WILKINSON ET AL. 2014, pp. 90-92; GREENBERG 2017, pp. 46-48; SCHLOEN 2017. For an earlier elaboration of this hypothesis, see BUNIMOVITZ, GREENBERG 2004, pp. 27-28; 2006, pp. 28-29.

⁷ BONECHI 2016.

tive stage of urbanization at Ebla, characterized by the appearance of non-residential structures with areas and features devoted to communal storage of crops.¹⁴ It seems likely that this phase saw the emergence of institutionalized elites, and represented a regional manifestation of the urbanizing trend that, roughly at the same time, was taking place in the neighbouring regional areas, from the southern Levant¹⁵ to the Middle Euphrates Valley to the Jazirah.¹⁶ According to the reconstruction recently proposed by A. Vacca, this trend continued during the initial EB IVA phase, EB IVA1 (ca. 2550-2450 BC), and, eventually, gave way to the formation of an early state controlled by Ebla during the following phase, EB IVA2 (ca. 2450-2300 BC). The latter phase only is documented also by the texts found in Palace G.¹⁷

The geographic scope of the kingdom of Ebla during EB IVA based on textual evidence has been investigated deeply and it has been suggested that the site controlled a territory extending from near Carchemish on the Euphrates in the northeast to the region south of Hama on the southwest.¹⁸ However, defining the exact borders of the area over which Ebla exerted its direct political control or hegemony is difficult,¹⁹ and, according to a “minimalist” point of view, the Ebla kingdom did not include Hama.²⁰ On the other hand, it is well known that political turmoil and imperialism from the mid-twenty-fourth century BC would bring Ebla’s flourishing state to an end, due to a fierce destruction, most probably occurring in the interval between 2367 and 2293 cal. BC according to radiometric determinations in the 2-sigma range.²¹

As said above, until a few years ago, EB IVB developments in inland Western Syria were generally

obscure. At Ebla, Phase Mardikh IIB2, the EB IVB stratum following the destruction of the city of the age of the Archives, was little known. From 2004 to 2007 the Italian Archaeological Expedition to Ebla excavated a long EB IVB stratigraphic sequence in Area HH (fig. 2), in the Lower Town south-east, as part of a longer sequence spanning from EB IVA to MB II.²² This operation allowed Ebla’s developmental trajectory during this period to be reconstructed. In a few words, summarizing from previous works,²³ the destruction of the EB IVA city opened a phase of decline (EB IVB1), when termination rituals were performed in the Temple of the Rock, which had been a major sanctuary within the EB IVA city. Retaining walls were constructed to prevent this no-longer-used building to collapse, and dwellings were built to the north and west of it. This phase was followed by a stage of progressive reorganization and reconstruction (EB IVB2), as suggested by levelling activities and constructional fills. The late EB IVB phase (EB IVB3) saw a new development, represented by the construction of temples on the Acropolis (Temple D3) and the Lower Town (Temples HH4 and HH5) and a palace in the Lower Town north (the Archaic Palace). Although it seems that, during EB IVB, Ebla might have not been a regional centre like in EB IVA, it is probable that the Syrian centre re-established inter-regional contacts during a late EB IVB phase (EB IVB3). In fact, as well known, cuneiform texts retrieved at Drehem, ancient Puzrish-Dagan, in Southern Mesopotamia, and dating from the reigns of three kings of the Third Dynasty of Ur (Ur III) – Shu Suen, Amar Suen, and Shulgi – register the presence of “men from Ebla” (lú-eb-la^{ki}) at the Ur III court.²⁴ It is likely that the contacts at an official level between Ur and Ebla documented by the Ur III texts took place during a late EB IVB phase,²⁵

¹⁴ VACCA 2014-2015, pp. 18-24, figs. 2-4; 2015, pp. 5-7, 15-16, figs 2-3; MORANDI BONACOSI 2008a, p. 67.

¹⁵ WILKINSON ET AL. 2014, pp. 85-86 and see, recently, VACCA, D’ANDREA in press.

¹⁶ VACCA 2015.

¹⁷ VACCA 2015, 2018.

¹⁸ ARCHI 2015a, fig. 1; BIGA 2013. See also COOPER 2010.

¹⁹ BIGA 2013, p. 266.

²⁰ BONECHI 2016, p. 59.

²¹ CALCAGNILE, QUARTA and D’ELIA 2013.

²² MATTHIAE 2006a, pp. 452-481; 2007, pp. 485-512.

²³ The proposed reconstruction follows MATTHIAE 2007; 2010; in press, reprised by D’ANDREA 2014-2015, pp. 132-150; 2016a, 201-203, fig. 2; 2018a, pp. 222-224, 229-234, figs 2-4, tab. 1; 2018b.

²⁴ OWEN 1992, pp. 117-122.

²⁵ MATTHIAE 2006b, p. 92; 2010, p. 204; PINNOCK 2004, p. 91; 2009, p. 71. D’ANDREA 2014-2015, p. 132; 2018a, p. 230. A different synchronism, centring on contemporaneity of the Ur III period with Middle Bronze Age I at

when Ebla showed clear signs of reorganization and growth as well as of the presence of an elite or ruling institution of some sort.²⁶ Matthiae proposed that the EB IVB settlement was destroyed at the end of this phase²⁷ and that the destruction was followed by a short phase (EB IVB4) characterized by a terminal EB IVB ceramic horizon uncovered in Area HH. This has been interpreted as a short-lived squatters' re-occupation of the site at the very end of EB IVB and before the reconstruction of the Middle Bronze Age city.²⁸

3. The "Early Bronze Age Agro-Pastoral Economy"

In a recent paper, T. Wilkinson and colleagues have reaffirmed the role of nascent states in Syria and Upper Mesopotamia in structuring the "Early Bronze Age agro-pastoral economy" in the Fertile Crescent, including the "zone of uncertainty", a broad geographical "belt" of "drier agropastoral zones" across northern and central Syria where crop cultivation

Ebla, has been proposed based on suggested ceramic parallels between late Early Bronze Age assemblages from sites in the Jazirah and Ebla's Middle Bronze Age assemblages (SCHMIDT 2012, 2013, 2014; PFÄLZNER 2017, in particular pp. 172-177, figs 7.8-7.11, tab. 7.2). The present author discussed in several previous works that the pottery evidence of late EB IVB assemblages from Ebla may contradict this proposal (D'ANDREA 2014-2015, pp. 153-154, fn. 8; 2016a, fn. 5; 2018b, pp. 229-233; 2018c; 2019a, pp. 273-276). The discussion of this topic is beyond the scope of this paper; the aim of this short digression is just to re-affirm that it is reasonable that the late EB IVB phase at Ebla might have been contemporary, completely or partially, with the Ur III period in Mesopotamia (see, in particular, D'ANDREA 2016b, 218-220; 2018a, pp. 232-233; 2019a, pp. 274-276).

²⁶ On this aspect, see the considerations by DOLCE 2007 and MAZZONI, FELLI 2007, pp. 209, 219.

²⁷ Matthiae initially based this hypothesis on the observation that the soil layers heaped in the Middle Bronze Age ramparts in some sectors were in large part constituted by ash layers containing EB IVB pottery (MATTHIAE 1989a, p. 132; 2010, p. 205; 2006b = 2013c, p. 249, fn. 14; 2009b, pp. 184-185, fn. 61 = 2013d, pp. 72-73, fn. 61). Subsequently, Matthiae reported that possible traces of a destruction were identified in Area HH (MATTHIAE 2006a, pp. 474-475; 2009b, pp. 184-188 = 2013d, pp. 72-76). Differently, Mazzoni maintains that Ebla was not destroyed at the end of EB IV (MAZZONI, FELLI 2007, p. 209; MAZZONI 2013b, pp. 47, 50).

²⁸ MATTHIAE 2010, p. 205; in press. See also D'ANDREA 2018b.

is risky because rainfall is not constant.²⁹ They have maintained that exploitation of such areas on a large-scale through the differentiation of subsistence strategies is possible only under given circumstances, such as the existence of political entities stable enough to absorb the risks of potential crop failures.³⁰ During the EB IVA period, Ebla was an aggrandizing state, and textile production was one of the pillars of its socio-economic organization, requiring large quantities of wool, as deduced from the EB IVA texts found in Palace G.³¹ Therefore, Wilkinson *et Al.* proposed that the exploitation of the Syrian steppe in EB IV might have been connected with large-scale sheep rearing controlled by Ebla. Referring to Milano's estimate of circa 670,000 sheep flocks directly controlled by the Palace based on the texts,³² Wilkinson and colleagues calculated a necessary grazing area of ca. 31,500 km², that would correspond to "a circle of radius 100 km" from Ebla, reaching as far as the steppe region around al-Rawda.³³

Moving from revised inter-regional synchronisms that shifted the start of EB IV in the southern Levant from 2300 BC to 2500 BC,³⁴ and aligned this non-urban period in the south to the apogee of early urbanism in the north, they suggested that the southern Levantine communities were attracted by the nascent market of large-scale herding activities controlled by Ebla.³⁵ They proposed that the EB IV non-urban southern Levantine communities might have been involved in those activities at least peripherally, for example supplying young animals, breeding stock, or human labour through new EB IV routes running from Palmyra through the Homs region up to Damascus, the Hawran and the southern Levant.³⁶ This phenomenon would have eventually prompted the transmission of cultural and technological information from the north to the south.³⁷

²⁹ WILKINSON ET AL. 2014, pp. 45, 53-54, fig. 3.

³⁰ WILKINSON ET AL. 2014, pp. 55-57.

³¹ See, for example, BIGA 2010.

³² MILANO 1995.

³³ WILKINSON ET AL. 2014, pp. 55.

³⁴ See REGEV ET AL. 2012, pp. 558-561; 2014, pp. 241-242, 253-261.

³⁵ WILKINSON ET AL. 2014, pp. 91-92.

³⁶ WILKINSON ET AL. 2014, pp. 91-92.

³⁷ WILKINSON ET AL. 2014, pp. 91-92.

The latter hypothesis is, basically, a recent version of Bunimovitz and Greenberg's proposal – published in the early 2000s and elaborated, at that time, in the framework of traditional chronologies for the southern Levantine EB IV³⁸ – now re-adapted to the recent higher EB IV absolute chronology and the ensuing inter-regional synchronisms (see above).

The interpretive construct proposed by Bunimovitz and Greenberg centres on the presence of “semi-nomadic pastoralists perhaps straddling the interface between Canaan and the urban centres of central Syria” as an explanation for the coexistence of elements derived from the local EB III tradition and features adopted from the EB IV Syrian sphere within the ceramic repertoire of the southern Levant.³⁹ This is, essentially, a core-periphery model to explain north-south interactions in the Levant during EB IV, recent versions of which, again elaborated within the framework of the new radiometric chronology for the southern Levantine EB IV and consequent synchronisms with the north, centre on agency. In fact, it has been recently proposed that, at the transition between EB III and EB IV, the southern Levantine communities deliberately chose to turn to pastoralism as an adaptive strategy to tackle progressive decline of urbanism turning themselves towards northern networks and, consequently, adopting new sets of symbols and practices.⁴⁰

The present author has examined extensively in previous and forthcoming works the reasons why, compared to traditional synchronisms, the new higher chronology for the southern Levantine Early Bronze III and IV may allow us to better understand the development of parallel and yet different trajectories in the northern and southern Levant during most of the third millennium BC.⁴¹ In a few words, the chronological realignment of EB III in the northern and southern Levant suggests that the two regions were part of a similar, contempo-

rary trend of incipient urbanization during the second quarter of the third millennium BC.⁴² Two regional developmental paths separated from ca. 2500 BC, with the formation of archaic states evolving from EB III urbanism in the northern Levant, and a multi-factorial crisis of the EB III urbanism in the southern Levant.⁴³ The reasons for this dissimilarity may lay in the different ecological basis of the two areas, in particular the absence in the southern Levant of a territory to expand agro-pastoral strategies in order to avoid inter-site conflicts for water resources and land and to face possible risks of failure of local economic strategies.⁴⁴ Such impossibility to develop back-up economic strategies, possibly paired with localized climatic changes, documented by proxy data,⁴⁵ might have made the first urban experiment in the southern Levant premature, unstable and, ultimately, fragile.

The crisis of Early Bronze Age urbanism in the southern Levant would inaugurate five or six centuries of non-urban life in this region, during Early Bronze IV. The research of the past three decades demonstrated that this phase was not a long, stagnant phase of generalized collapse, but a dynamic progression leading to reorganization and new growth and therefore a demonstration of the region's resilience to crisis and ability to develop adaptive strategies.⁴⁶ Actually, a longer duration of the EB IV period in the south, chronologically realigned to the northern Levantine EB IV during the second half of the third millennium BC (and possibly extending in the first decades of the second millennium BC) may fit well such long trajectory from crisis to reorganization to growth that we have just mentioned.

On the other hand, the new chronology has complicated the picture. In fact, at present, it is still difficult to bridge the proposed absolute dates spanning

³⁸ BUNIMOVITZ and GREENBERG 2004, 2006.

³⁹ BUNIMOVITZ and GREENBERG 2004, pp. 27-28; 2006, pp. 28-29; WILKINSON ET AL. 2014, p. 92.

⁴⁰ GREENBERG 2017, in particular pp. 40-48 and SCHLOEN 2017, in particular pp. 61-69, but see the remarks by HÖFLMAYER 2017, pp. 9, 12 and the discussion in D'ANDREA in press a.

⁴¹ D'ANDREA in press a, in press b; VACCA, D'ANDREA in press.

⁴² D'ANDREA in press a; VACCA, D'ANDREA in press.

⁴³ D'ANDREA in press a; VACCA, D'ANDREA in press.

⁴⁴ WILKINSON ET AL. 2014, p. 92; D'ANDREA in press a.

⁴⁵ FINKELSTEIN, LANGGUT 2014, p. 222, fig. 1; LANGGUT ET AL. 2015, p. 226; LANGGUT, ADAMS, FINKELSTEIN 2016, pp. 128-130.

⁴⁶ See, e.g., PALUMBO 2008; RICHARD, LONG 2010; D'ANDREA 2014a, Vol. 1, in particular pp. 223-235, 265-278, with references.

five or six centuries and the available stratified data from the southern Levant, and, as said in the Introduction, this is influenced negatively by the lack of long stratigraphic sequences and low-resolution ceramic chronologies for some areas. In other words, summarizing from the author's previous works,⁴⁷ it seems difficult, at present, to identify the entire EB IV sequence at many sites and regional areas or to ascribe phases and assemblages at certain sites to a given EB IV sub-phase (e.g., simplifying, "early", "central", and "late"). These apparent "gaps" in the sequences of given regional areas, if not due to documentary biases, might be explained in terms of changes in patterns of settlement. These factors influence also current understanding of connections between the northern and southern Levant during the EB IV period, and compel us to re-discuss current interpretive constructs for these phenomena. As is analysed below, interactions among different regional areas within the Levant seem to have been more nuanced than suggested previously and, above all, chronologically and geographically differentiated.

4. Textual and Archaeological Data

In the following analysis, we review the EB IV textual and archaeological data available from the Levant documenting inter-regional connectivity, and compare these records with current interpretations of contacts between the northern and southern Levant.

EB IVA, the time of the Archives, was the period when the geographic scope of Ebla's economic activities during the third millennium BC was at its peak, reaching as far as Anatolia, the Euphrates River Valley and Upper Mesopotamia to the north and at least Central and Southern Mesopotamia to the east.⁴⁸ As for the texts, the western and southern geographic horizons of Ebla are known to a significantly lesser extent than the northern and eastern ones.⁴⁹ As pointed out by Bonechi, since in all likeli-

hood Ebla had contacts with Egypt in EB IVA,⁵⁰ the Palace G elites should have been aware of geographical and socio-political entities located in-between Ebla and the very distant south.⁵¹ However, it is difficult to track evidence of such contacts between Ebla and these regions either in the texts or in the archaeological evidence.

Some scholars have proposed the identification of the geographic name Dulu with Byblos,⁵² but others consider this problematic, and, therefore, it is not-unanimously accepted.⁵³ Some places in the Orontes Valley are mentioned in the Ebla texts, like Hama and Tunip – the latter to be identified with either Tell Asharneh or a site nearby. It was suggested that the territory in the Syrian steppe to the east and south of Hama bordered by the "Very Long Wall" identified by Geyer⁵⁴ might be considered as the territory of Ib'al,⁵⁵ a confederation of tribes recurring in the texts that had alternated relationships with Ebla.⁵⁶ On the other hand, the regions of Qatna, Hazor and the Damascene are less known in the written documentation from the third millennium

⁵⁰ On the one hand, the identification of the geographical name Dugurasu with Egypt, proposed by BIGA and ROCCATI (2012 and see, recently, BIGA 2016, in particular pp. 695-711) has been contested (ARCHI 2016, pp. 40-43). On the other hand, contacts between Ebla and Egypt during the first half of the EB IV period are suggested by the material culture of Ebla, in particular the retrieval of inscribed pharaonic objects and bowls made of "Chefren's diorite" in the Palace G (SCANDONE MATTHIAE 1979, 1981, 1982, 1995, pp. 234-235; 1997). See, recently, D'ANDREA 2018d, pp. 205-206 and MATTHIAE 2018.

⁵¹ BONECHI 2016, p. 30.

⁵² BIGA 2016, pp. 697-698.

⁵³ BONECHI 2013, p. 250.

⁵⁴ GEYER ET AL. 2010. The true nature of "Very Long Wall" (*Très Long Mur*, TLM) is still enigmatic, but this feature is considered a boundary wall for the tribal socio-political entity called Ib'al (see discussion in the main text and references at fn. 56). LAFONT (2010) proposed that the construction of the TLM was prompted by Ebla in the twenty-fourth century BC in the context of rivalries with Mari, on the Euphrates, for the control of the steppe (see recently ARCHI 2018, p. 96), but the connection of the TLM with Ebla still has to be demonstrated.

⁵⁵ CASTEL, PELTENBURG 2007, pp. 613-614; MORANDI BONACOSI 2009, pp. 56-57; MAZZONI 2013b, p. 35; MOUAMAR 2016, 86-89, fig. 13; 2017a, 186-189, fig. 5; ARCHI 2018, p. 96.

⁵⁶ ARCHI PIACENTINI, POMPONIO 1993, pp. 297-299; BONECHI 1993, pp. 186-188; 2013, p. 250; CATAGNOTI 1997, p. 136; FRONZAROLI 2003, pp. 124-125; BIGA 2014; ARCHI 2018.

⁴⁷ D'ANDREA 2019a, in press b.

⁴⁸ ARCHI 2014, 2015b; BIGA 2013; 2016, pp. 693-695; BONECHI 2013, 2016.

⁴⁹ BONECHI 2013, p. 250; 2016, p. 30.

TABLE I – Proposed relative EB IV periodization of Southern Syria and the northern valleys of the southern Levant based on settlement sites, re-adapted from D’Andrea 2014a, Vol. 1, tab. 6

	Southern Syria			Southern Levant (Northern Regions)								
	Moumassakhin	Kh. al-Umbashi	Yabroud	Tell el-Waqqas (Hazor)	Kh. an-Na’ima (T. Na’ama)	Kh. Kerak (Beth Yerah)	Tell el-Hosn (Beth Shean)	Kh. Kishron (H. Qishron)	‘Afula	Nahal Rimmonim	‘Ain el-Hilu	Kh. el-Meiyiteh
“Early” EB IV	? ? ? ?	? ? ? ?				Period E ↓ ?						
“Central” EB IV	? ↑ ↑ +	? ↑ ↑ +		? ? ↑ ↑ Str. XVIII	? ? ↑ ↑ Ph. 7-5		? ↑ Ph. R-6	? ↑ +	? ↑ Str. V	? ↑ Str. II-III	? ↑ +	
“Late” EB IV	↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓	↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓	+ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓	↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ?	↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ?		↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ?	↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ?	↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ?	↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ?	↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ?	+ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓

BC.⁵⁷ The geographic name of Qatna has not yet been identified in the Ebla texts,⁵⁸ although it has been proposed that it might have been an important centre at that time.⁵⁹ As for the southern Levant, re-prising Bonechi,⁶⁰ in the Ebla texts, no references to the region of Hazor, in the Hula Valley of Upper Galilee, have been identified thus far. This datum is worth noting, because Hazor was one of the main sites located at the interface between the northern and southern Levant and, in the Middle Bronze Age, it would become a major regional settlement with material culture and architecture fully comparable to the coeval tradition of Western Syria.⁶¹

The archaeological evidence is problematic as well. In fact, at present, in the dataset from Southern Syria and the northern valleys of the southern Levant (Tab. I), it is difficult to trace a phase corresponding, chronologically, to the time of the Ebla Archives. In fact, pottery types comparable either to EB IVA assemblages in Inland Western Syria or to the early EB IV phase of the southern Levant have not been identified at sites in Southern Syria.⁶² Likewise, an early EB IV phase is thus far invisible archaeologically also in the Beqa’ and, with few exceptions, in the northernmost regions of the southern Levant.⁶³ Even at Hazor larger exposure of the EB IV Stratum XVIII in recent excavations seems to support a date of this phase to the second half of the EB IV period⁶⁴, a detail that might

⁵⁷ BONECHI 2013, p. 250. On the Damascene, see earlier KLENGEL 1985.

⁵⁸ BONECHI 2013, p. 250; MORANDI BONACOSSO 2009, pp. 56-57.

⁵⁹ MORANDI BONACOSSO 2009, p. 57.

⁶⁰ BONECHI 2013, p. 250; 2016, p. 30.

⁶¹ See, e.g. ORNAN 2012, with bibliography.

⁶² D’ANDREA 2014a, Vol. 1, pp. 114-117, tab. 5.

⁶³ D’ANDREA 2014a, Vol. 1, pp. 117-123, tab. 6; 2019b, pp. 62-63 and Tab. 1; in press b.

⁶⁴ See chronological remarks in BECHAR 2015, p. 47.

TABLE II – Schematic representation of current gaps in relative inter-regional synchronization for the EB IV period in the Levant based on comparative stratigraphy and ceramic chronology. *Transitions are marked in order to make the scheme flexible enough to incorporate them, but with two caveats: 1) passages between periods and phases can be smooth or sharp at individual sites and area, and 2) transitional phases have not been identified at every sites and region

Inland Western Syria	Southern Syria	Northern Lebanon	Southern Lebanon	Southern Levant (northern areas)	Southern Levant (central and southern areas)
EB III ↓ ↓ ↓	EB III ↓ ↓ ↓	EB III ↓ ↓ ↓	EB III ↓ ↓ ↓?	EB III ↓ ↓ ↓	EB III ↓ ↓ ↓
-----/EB III-EB IV Transition*-----					
EB IVA ↓ ↓ ↓	? ? ? ?	EB IVA ↓ ↓ ↓	? ? ? ?	? ? ? ?	Early EB IV ↓ ↓ ↓
EB IVB ↓ ↓ ↓	EB IVB ↓ ↓ ↓?	EB IVB ↓ ↓ ↓	EB IV ↓ ↓ ↓	EB IV ↓ ↓ ↓	Central EB IV ↓ ↓ ↓
-----/EB-MB Transition*-----					

explain why the latter site seems not mentioned in the EB IVA Ebla texts. Conversely, the available archaeological evidence from Southern Syria and the northern areas of the southern Levant seems to document a phase of settlement during a later stage of the EB IV period (Tab. I), which might roughly correspond to the EB IVB period of Western Syria, based on pottery parallels;⁶⁵ in fact, during this phase, wares related to Syrian ceramics appear in the southern Levant. In this context, we do not refer simply to the spread of different regional variants of goblets and teapots across the latter region,⁶⁶ but to a different, well defined phenomenon recognized since long time: the appearance of hard-textured, grey-coloured wares often

decorated with white painted motifs in the area encompassing Central and Southern Syria, the Beqa' and the Hula Valley (see below).⁶⁷

The factors lying behind the current impossibility to isolate early EB IV phases and assemblages in Southern Syria, the Beqa' and the northern regions of the southern Levant still have to be understood. As the present author has proposed in earlier works,⁶⁸ this situation might be due to low archaeological visibility of landscape occupation in those areas concealing the existence of an earlier EB IV archaeological phase, such as either reversion to pastoralism or a more opportunistic way of landscape use with short-lived settlements shifting from one site to another. This may be the case of pastoralism in Southern Syria and intermittent occupation of

⁶⁵ D'ANDREA 2014a, Vol. 1, p. 116; 2014b, pp. 203-206, with relevant bibliography.

⁶⁶ For recent reappraisals of this phenomenon, see WELTON, COOPER 2014; D'ANDREA, VACCA 2015, with bibliography.

⁶⁷ D'ANDREA 2014b; 2017, pp. 177-181, with bibliography, and fig. 3.

⁶⁸ D'ANDREA 2014a, Vol. 1, pp. 223-232, 234, 270-272, tab. 11; in press d.

short-lived settlements shifting from one place to another in the northern regions of the southern Levant following a short dryer period around 2500 BC, documented by the proxy data available.⁶⁹ On the other hand, there is a problem of low-resolution ceramic chronologies for the Beqa', Southern Syria and Upper Galilee affecting our ability to recognize the early EB IV phase in these areas, because specific archaeological correlates of such phase have not been defined in these regions thus far. This is due mainly to a lack of long EB IV stratigraphic sequences in the areas listed above (Tabs I-II), which make it difficult to trace the development of local pottery traditions through EB IV.

5. Discussion. Reconsidering North-South Connectivity across the Levant in EB IV

The current difficulty to isolate an earlier EB IV phase in the Beqa', Southern Syria and the northern regions of the southern Levant does not per se rule out an involvement of the southern Levantine communities in large-scale herding activities in the "peripheral" areas of the northern Levant proposed by Wilkinson *et Al.*, reprising Bunimovitz and Greenberg (see above). However, in the suggested interpretations of EB IV connectivity between the northern and southern Levant other chronological issues that further complicate the picture have been not taken into account thus far and are discussed below.

The Ebla texts report on a limited time-span before the destruction of the EB IVA city that has been estimated by some scholars as circa forty years.⁷⁰ As said before, radiocarbon dates place the destruction of Ebla in the interval between 2367 and 2293 cal BC in the 2-sigma range.⁷¹ This means that the

texts refer *just* to a situation in place during forty years within the twenty-fourth century BC, but not later than the beginning of the twenty-third century BC (that is, not during EB IVB).

With regard to patterns of north-south Levantine connectivity during EB IV, it has to be considered that Ebla's hegemony in the regional scenario ceased after its destruction in the twenty-fourth century BC. This suggests that interactions between the northern and southern Levant should have been dissimilar in different EB IV phases and that it is unlikely that a single interpretive construct applies to the EB IV period as a whole. In particular, it is questionable that the socio-economic organization of the period of the Ebla Archives, before the destruction of the city, may apply to the situation after the destruction, because this event marked a major divide between and after ca. 2300 BC in the socio-political history of Western Syria.

There are no direct textual data from the Levant for the period between ca. 2300 and ca. 1900 BC and, therefore, the socio-political situation and economic organization of Western Syria during the second half of the EB IV period are less clear than the EB IVA conditions. It is generally acknowledged that the available data suggest that changes and transformations took place in Inland Syria during the last quarter of the third millennium BC and at the turn from the third to the second millennium BC. However, the lack of written sources makes it difficult to explain changes and transformations in socio-cultural and socio-political terms. However, it is reasonable that the socio-political situation and the socio-economic organization of inland Western Syria during the second half of the EB IV period were rather different from the configuration of the region during the first half of the period, when Ebla was a dominant regional centre.

⁶⁹ FINKELSTEIN, LANGGUT 2014, p. 222, fig. 1; LANGGUT ET AL. 2015, p. 226; LANGGUT, ADAMS, FINKELSTEIN 2016, pp. 128-130.

⁷⁰ ARCHI 1996 = 2015c, in particular pp. 118-120, 2015a, 7.

⁷¹ CALCAGNILE, QUARTA, D'ELIA 2013. Several proposals have been advanced on the causes of the destruction of EB IVA2 Ebla; Matthiae maintains that Sargon of Akkad de-

stroyed the city (MATTHIAE 1989b = 2013e; 2009b = 2013d), while ARCHI and BIGA (2003; see also ARCHI 2014; 2015c) proposed that EB IVA2 Ebla was destroyed by Mari, but see the analysis in SALLABERGER, SCHRACKAMP 2015 and FOSTER 2016. Finally, DURAND (2012) proposed that the responsible for the destruction of Ebla at the end of EB IV was Ididi, a *Shakkanakku* of Mari, on behalf of Sargon of Akkad. See recently, the discussion in MATTHIAE in press. On the chronology of the Ebla destruction, see also the considerations by SCHWARTZ 2017, pp. 97, 100.

As for the Ebla region, the archaeological evidence documents that, after the destruction at the end of EB IVA, Ebla experienced a phase of crisis and gradual recovery and reorganization. A new phase of growth, although on a less monumental scale than the EB IVA city, began with the construction of temples, a palace and, possibly, of the rampart, as the present author has proposed recently.⁷² It is plausible that transformations resulted from endogenous factors and were connected with the ability of local socio-cultural components (whether or not we may label them Amorite) to take a leading political role by controlling key economic activities that fuelled inter-regional contacts.⁷³

For EB IVB, the pottery evidence suggests that there were bi-directional contacts between Ebla and the Hama region to the south.⁷⁴ Future research on the pottery evidence will hopefully reveal whether the site had contacts with other centres in the Middle and Upper Orontes sectors (e.g., Tell Mishrifeh/Qaṭna and Tell Nebi Mend) and the Syrian steppe (e.g., Tell Shayrat). The available ceramic evidence shows that Ebla had contacts with the Middle Euphrates on the east.⁷⁵ Likewise, the texts from Drehem document contacts with Southern Mesopotamia on the south-east (see above).

The archaeological evidence suggests that changes and transformations took place in other areas within the northern Levant too during the last quarter of the third millennium BC; this is the case of Central and Southern Syria. In fact, during EB IVB, sites in the Orontes Valley and the Syrian steppe apparently gained importance, such as Tell Nebi Mend that was fortified, and Tell Shayrat that reached 100 ha in size.⁷⁶ Southern Syria witnessed the re-establishment of permanent settlements during EB IVB, as suggested, for examples, by the discoveries at Yabroud, Moumassakhin and Khirbet al-Umbashi.⁷⁷ Likewise, this was the phase

when the southern Levant recovered from crisis following the end of local urbanization and was drawn again into networks of inter-regional connectivity.⁷⁸ Like Southern Syria, the northern regions of the southern Levant witnessed the re-establishment of settlements too, with several permanent villages attested in this phase (Tab. I).⁷⁹ In particular, in the Hula Valley, Hazor was re-occupied by a substantial village during the second half of the EB IV period.⁸⁰

It is possible that these data from different regional areas are interconnected with one another and reflect new socio-political and/or socio-economic balances emerged from ca. 2300 BC. Such changes in the second half of EB IV might have been triggered by the collapse of the polity of Ebla that, during EB IVA, exerted its direct political and economic control over northern inner Syria and “indirect” control on several other areas within the Levant, possibly corresponding to as many socio-political entities.⁸¹ The vanishing of the Ebla polity might have allowed some of those entities to gain a leading regional role in EB IVB, for example by controlling key territories, resources, or certain economic activities. This might be the case of the tribal confederation of Ib'al that, as we said, had alternated relationships with Ebla during EB IVA, until it swore an oath and was subjugated by Ebla itself.⁸² Therefore, if we accept the proposal that the region to the east and south of Qaṭna, bounded by the Very Long Wall, might have corresponded to the territory of Ib'al, our interpretation might find support in the archaeological evidence. In fact, sites laying within this area, like Tell Shayrat and

an EB IV extensive occupation (NICOLLE, ÉCHALLIER 2004) and the EB IV pottery retrieved at the site (ÉCHALLIER, BRAEMER 2004, fig. 584) point to a phase comparable to EB IVB in Inland Western Syria, a consideration that may apply also to the assemblages from Moumassakhin (AL-MAQDISSI 1989) and Yabroud (ABOU ASSAF 1967). This proposal has been elaborated in D'ANDREA 2014a, Vol. 1, pp. 114-117, tab. 5, Vol. 2, pp. 3-9; 2014b, in particular pp. 200-206).

⁷⁸ D'ANDREA 2014a, Vol. 1, pp. 253-264, 277-278; 2018c, in particular pp. 86-88.

⁷⁹ D'ANDREA in press b.

⁸⁰ BECHAR 2013; 2015, pp. 30-34, figs. 2-4; 2017.

⁸¹ In this regard, see the analysis in COOPER 2010.

⁸² CATAGNOTI 1997, p. 136.

⁷² D'ANDREA in press c.

⁷³ For a more detailed analysis of these phenomena and of their archaeological correlates, see D'ANDREA in press c.

⁷⁴ VACCA ET AL. 2018, pp. 25-28, fig. 4:1-2.

⁷⁵ D'ANDREA 2018c.

⁷⁶ KENNEDY 2015, p. 64; 2016, p. 3; MOUAMAR 2016, pp. 74-77, figs. 3, 6, 12.

⁷⁷ For example, the site of Khirbet al-Umbashi clearly had

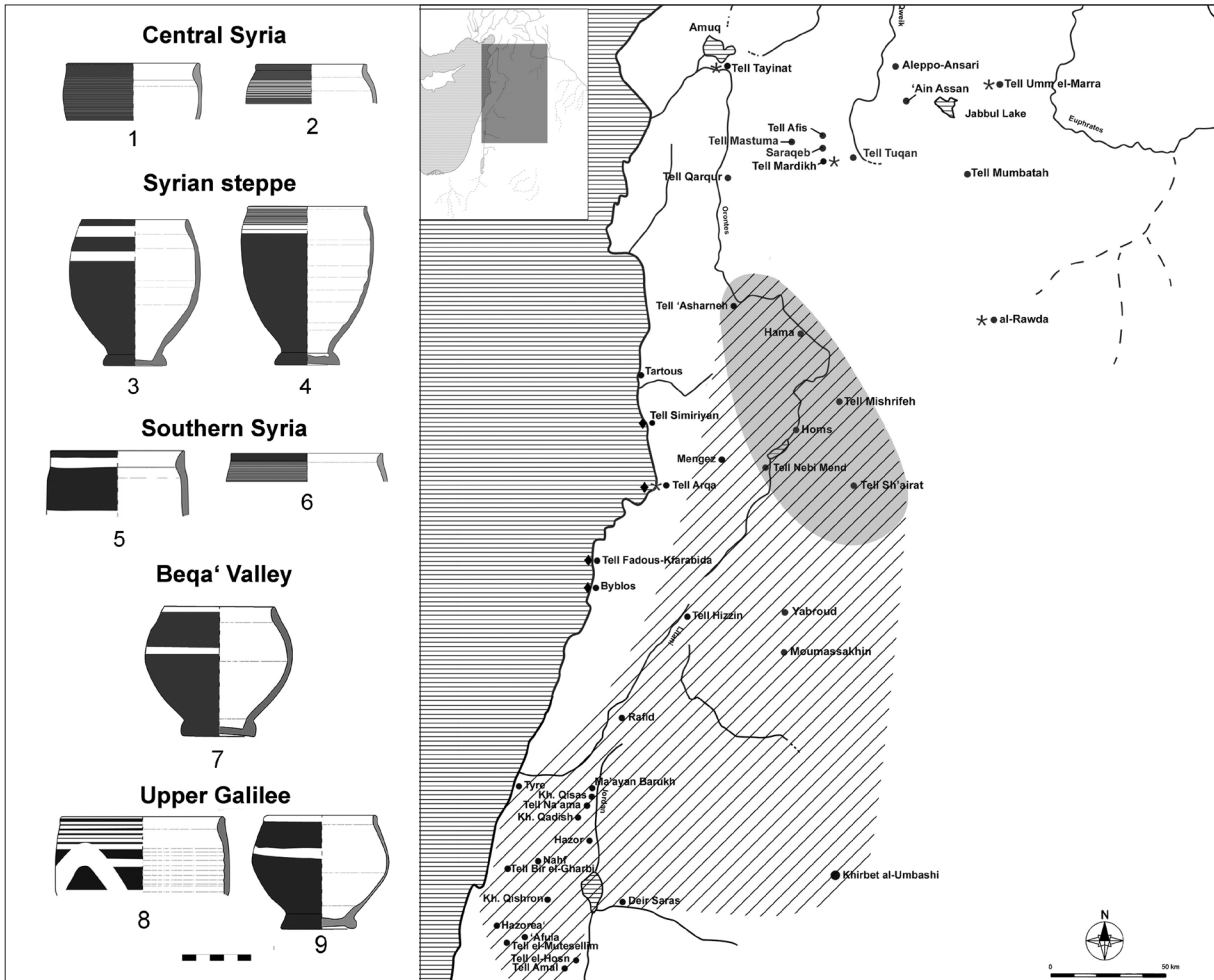


FIGURE 3
 EB IV “grey wares” in the Levant. On the left, vessels from Tell Nebi Mend (nos 1-2; redrawn after MATTHIAS 2000: fig. 23.5:87, 90); Tell Shayrat (nos 3-4; redrawn after MOUAMAR 2016: fig. 8: 8-9); Khirbet al-Umbashi (no. 5; redrawn after ÉCHALLIER, BRAEMER 2004: fig. 584: C.157); Moumassakhin (no. 6; redrawn after AL-MAQDISSI 1989: fig. 20(a): 130); Tell Hizzin (no. 7; redrawn after GENZ, SADER 2008: Pl. 1:2); Tell el-Waqas/Hazor (no. 8; redrawn after BECHAR 2015: fig. 5: 9), Khirbet Qadish/Qedesh (no. 9, redrawn after TADMOR 1978: fig. 8: 1). On the right, map of distribution of grey wares in EB IVA (grey area) and EB IV (dashed area); the star and diamond signs represent EB IVA and IVB imports respectively (map on the right reproduced after D’ANDREA 2017; fig. 3)

Tell Nebi Mend, expanded during EB IVB, and Qatna itself developed continuously all through EB IV and the EB/MB transition. Therefore, it might be possible to frame the re-establishment of permanent settlements in Southern Syria and Upper Galilee, including the substantial settlement at Hazor in the last quarter of the third millennium BC, within the phenomenon of expanding centres in Central Syria. Interestingly, this might antici-

pate some aspects of the Middle Bronze Age regional organization.

In this regard, it is worth emphasizing that from the second half of the EB IV period a common “technological milieu” was established in that larger area (see map on fig. 3). This is documented by the appearance of techno-stylistically related wares in Central (the Upper and Middle Orontes sectors) and Southern Syria, the Beqa’ and Upper

Galilee (fig. 3: 1-9), which seem not produced in the Ebla region in EB IVB, based on the evidence uncovered thus far. As anticipated above, we do not refer simply to the spread of goblets and teapots typical of the Levantine EB IV with several regional variants.⁸³ The phenomenon in question is different, well defined and represented by the grey hard-textured wares and related classes of pottery typical of the second half of the EB IV period (the Grey Ware,⁸⁴ the Black Wheel-made Ware,⁸⁵ and related wares found at Tell Nebi Mend⁸⁶), which are briefly described below, summarizing from the author's previous works.⁸⁷ It seems that regional variants of grey wares found in Central and Southern Syria, in the Beqa' and in Upper Galilee were locally produced at different sites and areas with various "recipes" whose petrographic properties reflect local geomorphology and availability of raw materials, though all aimed to achieve the same aesthetic results. Goblet, teapots, jars, and bottles have grey surfaces, often decorated with white painted motifs. The ancestry of this tradition lays in the EB IVA grey wares of the Upper and Middle Orontes sectors (e.g., the White-on-Black Ware), which might explain why certain earlier techno-stylistic and morphological traits are retained in the EB IVB tradition.⁸⁸ However, based on data available thus far, it seems likely that they spread outside this original core only during EB IVB.⁸⁹

⁸³ WELTON, COOPER 2014; D'ANDREA, VACCA 2015.

⁸⁴ MOUAMAR 2016: pp. 82-83, fig. 8:8-11; 2017b, pp. 82-83, fig. 14, 85-86, fig. 16; 2018; BOILEAU 2018.

⁸⁵ D'ANDREA 2014a; 2014b; 2017; in press d; BECHAR 2015; GENZ, BADRESHANY, JEAN in press.

⁸⁶ KENNEDY, BADRESHANY, PHILIP 2018.

⁸⁷ D'ANDREA 2017, in particular p. 181; 2018c, 83-84 and fig. 1.

⁸⁸ D'ANDREA 2014a, p. 163, citing earlier references; 2014b, pp. 198-200, fig. 10:b; 2017, p. 178; in press d; D'ANDREA, VACCA 2015, p. 48 and fig. 3:1-8 citing earlier references. On the ancestry of the grey EB IV vessels and parallels with the Orontes Valley assemblages, see already DEVER 1980, pp. 50-51, fig. 5, and n. 38 at p. 60; MAZZONI 1985, pp. 14-15, though more in the perspective of Syrian imports in the southern Levant. See also WELTON, COOPER 2014, pp. 335-336.

⁸⁹ See the analysis in D'ANDREA 2017, pp. 177-181 and D'ANDREA in press d, with bibliography.

6. Concluding Remarks. Ebla and the South in EB IV: Problems and Prospects

A peripheral involvement of the southern Levantine communities in large-scale herding activities in the drier agro-pastoral regions of Syria during EB IV has been proposed for quite a long time, but has not been proved, thus far, by means of either archaeological, textual or bioarchaeological data.

In the paper, we discussed the importance of a high-resolution definition of the chronological and geographic scales of connectivity between the northern and southern Levant through the EB IV period to understand the mechanisms lying behind contacts and interactions. The refinement of regional periodization schemes for the northern and southern Levant has made it possible to understand patterns of occupation of various areas through different EB IV phases, to synchronize these regions with one another, and to isolate blind spots in current scholarly knowledge (Tabs. I-II). In the proposed chronological scheme (Tab. II), apparent "gaps" during the earlier EB IV phase(s) in areas located at the northern edge of the southern Levant might be connected with subsistence strategies possibly including pastoralism and mobility at a higher degree than during EB III and the later EB IV phase(s). However, there is no evidence, at present, to connect these phenomena with the formation and rise of the Ebla polity in northern inner Syria. Conversely, the reappearance of occupation in those areas during the later EB IV phases was concurrent with a phase of expansion of sites in Central Syria after the fall of Ebla, an event which altered regional and inter-regional scenarios. The connections between Central and Southern Syria, the Beqa', and Upper Galilee visible from the pottery (the various regional "grey" wares techno-stylistically related to one another; fig. 3: 1-9) seem to be ascribable to the second half of the EB IV period too.⁹⁰

Therefore, seen from this perspective, connections between the northern and southern Levant in the EB IV period gain both chronological resolution – limited to the second half of the EB IV

⁹⁰ D'ANDREA 2017, in particular p. 181.

period, i.e. Syrian EB IVB – and geographic definition – concentrated in Central and Southern Syria, the Beqa', and the northernmost areas of the southern Levant, like Upper Galilee. This phenomenon might be explained as the result of increasing contacts among those areas triggered by the new role taken by sites in the Upper and Middle Orontes sector and the adjacent steppe region during EB IVB, after the vanishing of the Ebla polity, as we have proposed in this article. However, whether or not intense EB IVB interactions among the areas listed above, made possible by changes in regional socio-political balances, developed from less intense and “structured” contacts begun in EB IVA – and thus far not emerging from the archaeological and textual data – will, hopefully, be clarified when the stratigraphy and nature of earli-

er EB IV phases in northern regions of the southern Levant will come into sharper focus.

On the other hand, and concluding, absence of evidence might not be evidence of absence. Bioarchaeology might provide a means to re-investigate interactions between the northern and southern Levant in the EB IV period from a different perspective through isotopic analysis of human and animal bones in order to test both human residential mobility connected with pastoralism and movements of flocks. This method has not yet been applied to the study of the Levant in EB IV. The answer may be lying in the very same means of such proposed long-distance interactions between Ebla and its presumed southern horizon – the flocks and the people involved in their management – and the investigation of this issue may represent a prosperous future avenue of research.

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