

SYRIAN TRADE ROUTES OF THE MARI AGE AND MB II HAZOR

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The celebrated appearance of the city of Hazor and its king Ibni-Adad in the Mari archive has stimulated the idea that the kingdom was an important political power at that time. This assumption has been applied to the interpretation of archaeological data.

In the early days of the excavations at Hazor, it was used for the purpose of dating, as the Mari evidence was accepted as a synchronism between Mesopotamian chronology and a particular phase in the history of that site. For the excavator of Hazor, Y. Yadin, this could only have been the age when the city had become the most prominent power in the region, in his view the phase when also the lower town was occupied (*e.g.* YADIN 1972: 2–6). According to this interpretation, the Mari evidence offers a *terminus ante quem* for the establishment of the greater, fortified city of Hazor (upper city stratum XVII, lower city stratum 4). YADIN remarked on the implications of this position for the correlation between the archaeology-based chronology of the MB II Levant and the astronomy-based chronology of Babylon (YADIN 1972: 107–108), and the implications of his view were elaborated by A. MALAMAT (1992).

Many archaeologists have been reluctant to apply this premise for chronological purposes. The reasons for this are the persistent lack of consensus about absolute dates for Mesopotamian chronology of the second millennium BC (*e.g.* DEVER 1992: 10–11; ILAN 1996: 244) and, more importantly, the fact that the correlation of the Mari references with the large stratum 4–3 city of Hazor has never been proven (*e.g.* ILAN 1996: 244; MAEIR 1997: 321).

Recently the assumption of the political importance of Hazor on the basis of the textual evidence from Mari was used once again for archaeological interpretation, this time to argue that a regional pat-

tern of material culture allows to recognize the area under political control of Hazor (MAEIR 1997, 2000).

It is the purpose of this paper to re-evaluate the basic assumption underlying these interpretations – that the Mari sources are evidence for Hazor’s being an important political power at that time – by an examination of the political relations and historical events in the greater Syrian area of the Mari age. In the course of this discussion, an alternative interpretation for the observed regional culture will be proposed.

THE MARI PALACE ARCHIVE

The kingdom of Mari was situated at the crossroads between Syria, northern Mesopotamia and the southern alluvial plain and maintained diplomatic contact with partners from all these regions. This makes the palace archive an important source for the history of much of the ancient Near East in the early second millennium BC, even though it allows for little historical depth: the available texts represent those parts of the personal archive of king Zimri-Lim that were considered not relevant enough to be transported to Babylon when Hammurabi had conquered the city. The archive covers the thirteen years of the reign of Zimri-Lim and includes also a selection of records from the time of his predecessors, Samsi-Addu of Ekallatum and his son Yasmah-Addu, the viceroy of Mari, mostly dating to the last years of their rule. In this way the archive offers dense, but incomplete documentation for a wide geographical horizon during a period of about twenty years (c. 1718–1698 BC).¹

The royal archive of Mari is less helpful in providing information about the politics of the Levant, for this was the area of influence of the powerful kingdoms of Aleppo and Qatna, where Mariote embassies as a rule were not established, while the potentially rel-

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¹ Absolute dates in this paper are given according to the Low

Chronology; for a justification see below. The date of events that cannot be placed with precision in the relative Mesopotamian chronology (the beginning and end of the reign of Yahdun-Lim; the date of conquest of Mari by Samsi-Addu) is qualified accordingly; with the exception of the beginning of the reign of Yahdun-Lim, the chronological leeway is only a few years.

evant letters of the kings of Aleppo and Qatna have not survived (DURAND 1999: 153–154). The information about Hazor in the archive is therefore limited to references to the traffic of gifts and messengers; no letters sent from Hazor or devoted to events pertaining to that city can be expected in the archive, or have for that matter been found. Apart from a single attestation from the time of Samsi-Addu, Hazor appears only in records from the time of Zimri-Lim, but as the relevant text categories are nonexistent for the preceding reign, it is not clear whether this fact is at all meaningful. The Mari archive thus shows that Hazor partook in the long-distance diplomatic exchange, but the available sources are inadequate to understand the relations of this kingdom with other powers in the region or to appreciate historical developments.

The reigns of Yahdun-Lim (c. 1744–c. 1730 BC) and Samsi-Addu (c. 1728–1711 BC)

The fragment of an Old Babylonian letter discovered in 1996 in an unstratified context at the upper city of Hazor (HOROWITZ & WASSERMAN 2000) most fortunately complements this picture. The names of the sender and addressee of this letter are lost, but it is clear that one person of superior status is addressing several subordinates. The largest part of the letter is taken up by a long list of commodities in large quantities: mostly textiles, but also objects made of precious metals and weapons. In a short narrative passage before the break at the end of the text, the sender announces that he will proceed to Ekallatum once he has arrived in Mari and orders the addressees to fulfil his commands. W. HOROWITZ and N. WASSERMAN presented their historical interpretation of this document at the *Rencontre Assyriologique* of 2000, where they persuasively argued that the episode referred to in this letter is most likely to be identified with the formal creation of an alliance between the royal houses of Qatna and Ekallatum through a marriage of Yasmah-Addu with a daughter of Išhi-Addu of Qatna, an event that is known to have occurred in the eponym year of Ikkupiya (1717/1716 BC), seven years before the end of

the reign of Samsi-Addu (HOROWITZ & WASSERMAN 2004; LEROUXEL 2002: 461). They identify the sender as Išhi-Addu and the multiple addressees as the king of Hazor together with his vassals; however, it is equally possible to understand the second person plural as the joint vassals of the king of Qatna, which would make the Hazor document just one specimen of a letter that was sent in multiple copies to all vassals of Išhi-Addu, instructing them to contribute to the compilation of his huge dowry and to safeguard its transport to Mari.

However the lost beginning of the letter is reconstructed,² the presence of the tablet at Hazor shows beyond reasonable doubt that this kingdom was at that time counted among the vassals of the king of Qatna. This observation raises a number of questions, such as whether Hazor – situated in the northern Jordan valley – formed the southern limit of Qatna's sphere of influence, and whether its recognition in this area was an ephemeral phenomenon or perhaps of a more permanent nature, but these questions cannot yet be answered for lack of relevant sources, especially of an earlier date. What seems clear, however, is that the Hazor letter shows the kingdom of Qatna at the peak of its power, because the twenty-year period of dense documentation from Mari which starts around the same time allows, to some extent, to observe the decline of Qatna's influence in the South over the following years. At that time Hazor first appears in the Mari sources, and it will be our concern to discuss whether these two facts may be connected.

The history of western Syria in the Old Babylonian period is determined by the continuous rivalry between the kingdoms of Qatna and Aleppo, the latter gradually expanding its influence at the cost of the former (KLENGEL 2000; VAN KOPPEN in print). The kingdom of Yamhad, with Aleppo as its capital, encompassed the wide northern plains with fertile soils, sufficient rainfall and open routes of communication. Qatna also held sizeable, though less extensive, arable domains and controlled a key junction of north-south and east-west routes, where the main overland trade route, connecting the southern Levant with the North,

² Given the fragmentary condition of the Hazor letter, other reconstructions of the lost address formula and different interpretations of its historical background are possible. Another view has been put forward by CHARPIN and ZIEGLER 2004, who argue that it was a letter of Samsi-Addu, written at the time of his conquest of Mari with the object of intimidating the western kingdoms and extracting a huge payoff to prevent his advance to the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. I do not follow this interpretation, because the exhortations to prevent harm and perform properly (lines 21' and 26') are consistent with a set rela-

tionship between a superior and his subordinates, rather than a message between an aggressor and his opponents. The detailed list of required goods also argues for an established tributary relationship between the correspondents. Perhaps *qātum kašādum* with Mari as the object (line 22') does in this case not imply the nuance of conquest, since *qātum* (and *ritum*) as the subject of the verb can express the execution of control in a wider range of meanings (see the dictionaries s.v.). This manner of speaking does not surprise in a high-toned public statement of a superior ruler informing his followers about his foreign exploits.

and a direct access way to the Mediterranean coast met (ASTOUR 1995; JOANNÈS 1996). Mountains and deserts block east-west circulation almost everywhere in the Near East, but a route along the edge of the desert, passing through the oasis of Palmyra, allowed direct passage from Qatna to the middle Euphrates (JOANNÈS 1997). The one other major route for the flow of goods between the Mediterranean Sea and the Mesopotamian plain led from Ugarit on the northern coast to the port of Emar on the Euphrates, passing all the way through territories under the control of Aleppo.

Mari and Qatna had a shared interest in the flow of Levantine-Mesopotamian trade by way of the Palmyra route, and these commercial interests help to explain why Mari was routinely allied with Qatna and from time to time in conflict with Aleppo. This political alignment was already in place in the time of Yahdun-Lim, the first powerful king of Mari and a predecessor of Samsi-Addu: a new source treats a joint operation of Yahdun-Lim, Amud-pi-El, the first known king of Qatna, and a third ruler against a city under the control of Aleppo (HEIMPEL 2003: 312). The famous campaign of Yahdun-Lim to the Mediterranean Sea and the cedar mountains (FRAYNE 1990: 605–606), an event for which so far no political motive could be discerned, can now be understood as a military campaign undertaken with, and on behalf of his ally, the king of Qatna, who seems to have exercised control over the rulers of the coastal region afterwards (see below). Yahdun-Lim's inscription recounts this feat as a solo action, in line with genre conventions and comparable with a later inscription of Samsi-Addu, who relates his aid to Qatna in words similar to those of Yahdun-Lim (GRAYSON 1987: 50). The analogy with the Syrian policy of Samsi-Addu may even suggest that the common enemy of Yahdun-Lim and Qatna during this campaign was no other than the king of Aleppo; fact is that, according to Yahdun-Lim's inscription, this king responded by instigating a rebellion of Mari's own vassals. Subsequently the king of Mari erected the fortress of Dur-Yahdun-Lim at, or near, Deir ez-Zor in order to protect the strategic point where the Palmyra route met the Euphrates valley (DURAND 1997: 119–120).

The dynastic change following the removal of Yahdun-Lim's family from the throne of Mari did not affect the established alliance with Qatna, for Samsi-Addu of Ekallatum, the new ruler over Mari, and Išhi-Addu, the king of Qatna who had, presumably, succeeded Amud-pi-El, concluded their pact in the

eponym year of Ikuppiya, shortly after Samsi-Addu's son Yasmah-Addu had taken up residence in the palace of Mari. It is well possible that the single reference to Hazor from the time prior to the reign of Zimri-Lim can be dated to this year, or thereabouts. It is a short letter in which Samsi-Addu instructs his son to entrust the messengers of the king of Hazor and of "four kings of Amurru" to a messenger from Qatna, who will escort them back to Išhi-Addu (BONECHI 1992: 10). This letter was sent together with a delegation that left the court of Samsi-Addu to return home, and it is probable that the rulers mentioned in it considered Išhi-Addu as their superior. That the king of Hazor himself did so is revealed by the Hazor letter, but the political status of the "kings of Amurru" is otherwise unknown. Amurru was an important entity in Syrian geography, as is clear from a Mari letter where the trio of "the land of Yamhad, the land of Qatna and the land of Amurru" stands for all of western Syria; Amurru referred in later times to the area along the central Levantine coast, approximately between Byblos and Ugarit, including the Jebel Ansariyah in the East (SINGER 1991); it is almost certain that this geographic delimitation is also valid for the time of Samsi-Addu. The Mari archive is almost silent about this region, but its position, directly west of Qatna, and the fact that it appears together with Hazor in the aforementioned letter may imply that its kings were counted among the vassals of Qatna as well. If so, then the visit should be seen in the context of the blossoming relationship between Išhi-Addu and Samsi-Addu, with the king of Qatna honouring his ally by arranging a delegation of faraway nations to appear at his court.³

In the course of the following years, troops of Samsi-Addu were called upon according to the terms of the mutual pact in order to help Išhi-Addu fight an uprising of cities in the South of his kingdom. The letters of Samsi-Addu's generals to their lord offer a unique view on southern Syria in the early second millennium BC, but remain largely unpublished; we rely on a recent historical synthesis that incorporates their evidence (CHARPIN & ZIEGLER 2003: 101–102, 124–125; see also CHARPIN 1999). These troops were based at the city of Qadeš and sent against various cities in the Beqa'a valley and, some years later, against cities in the land of Apum, the region around the oasis of Damascus. It would be premature to speculate about the background of this conflict with most of the evidence inaccessible, but it is worthy of note that CHARPIN and

³ A possible ideological motive for this visit was Samsi-Addu's ambition to find recognition at the "four corners" of

the known world, imitating a paradigm of Sargonic kingship (EIDEM & HØJLUND 1997).

ZIEGLER 2003: 101 think that the revolt of the southern cities was originally supported by Aleppo. After a number of years Samsi-Addu's troops returned home. This happened after an episode of intensive diplomatic traffic between the courts of Samsi-Addu, Qatna and Aleppo (CHARPIN and ZIEGLER 2003: 124), which may suggest that a diplomatic reconciliation between Samsi-Addu and Yarim-Lim, the new king of Aleppo, had now taken place that brought Mari's military support to Qatna to an end. Whether this implies that permanent control over the southern Syrian cities ultimately surpassed Qatna's capacities cannot be substantiated without adequate sources of a later date.

The reign of Zimri-Lim (1710–1698 BC)

At the time of Samsi-Addu's successor Zimri-Lim, Syria was experiencing a period of tranquillity. The age-old hostility between Qatna and Aleppo had been decided in favour of the latter, and Amud-pi-El II, the new king of Qatna, was one among many to acknowledge the leadership of Yarim-Lim of Aleppo, a kingdom that was now celebrated as the most powerful of the Amorite states. In the words of a Mari official: "There is no king who is strong enough by himself: ten or fifteen kings follow Hammurabi, the ruler of Babylon; just as many Rim-Sin, the ruler of Larsa; just as many Ibal-pi-El, the ruler of Ešnunna; just as many Amud-pi-El, the ruler of Qatna; (but) twenty kings follow Yarim-Lim, the ruler of Yamhad". The Amorite world was, according to this text, carved up in six zones of influence,⁴ five of which were headed by kings of more or less equal power, but with a sixth, the kingdom of Aleppo, in a class of its own. This is surely an idealized view, because there were in fact only two truly decisive powers at that time: the eastern kings acknowledged the supremacy of the mighty king of Elam in south-western Iran (CHARPIN and DURAND 1991), whereas the western kings felt much the same towards the king of Aleppo.

The rise of Aleppo had deeply transformed the balance of power in Syria. Zimri-Lim owed his throne to the support of Aleppo and took care to act in its interests, but also maintained diplomatic contacts with Qatna, as this kingdom was now reconciled with Aleppo. Qatna accepted, at least in theory, the superiority of Aleppo, but its behaviour at the time of the next major

crisis, when Elam invaded Mesopotamia in Zimri-Lim's tenth year (CHARPIN and ZIEGLER 2003: 222), suggests that its aspirations to power had not yet subsided.

One consequence of the political changes in Syria was that the overland trade routes running from the southern Levant and the Mediterranean coast to Qatna were now conveniently linked with Emar, Aleppo's port-of-trade on the Euphrates; traders' caravans from Hazor were now coming all the way up to Aleppo (DURAND 1990: 63–64). One effect of this was that the Palmyra route, which had until then connected Qatna through the desert with Mari, lost its strategic importance; another result was that all the major trade routes between the Mediterranean Sea and the Mesopotamian plain fell under the direct control of Aleppo. This rearrangement of power over the Syrian trade routes secured the wealth and strength of the kingdom of Aleppo, explains Qatna's gradual decline of power and was certainly one of the factors why Mari, a kingdom that in the days of Zimri-Lim had already lost much of its former strategic and commercial importance (DURAND 1990: 84–89), never recovered from its Babylonian defeat.

The opening up of a relatively safe and undemanding trade route between the southern Levant and Emar coincides with the proliferation of text types in the Mari palace archive in which references to Hazor can be found: accounts of gifts and expenses for visitors and letters announcing the arrival of messengers. Zimri-Lim first entered into diplomatic contact with Hazor in his third year, when a delegation from that city, together with many other foreign representatives, was received at his court for the celebration of the Ištar festival (CHARPIN & ZIEGLER 2003: 196). The contact between the two courts was rekindled in his seventh year, and from then on gifts were exchanged on a regular basis, with a noticeable intensification in the tenth year, when Zimri-Lim stayed with his court and army in Aleppo and Ugarit. The gift traffic was conducted by messenger caravans, but others travelled between the kingdoms as well, like a group of "Amorite singers" from Hazor who stayed for some time at the court of Mari.⁵ Mari was not the only Mesopotamian kingdom to maintain contacts with the southern Levant; the mention of diplomatic traffic between Babylon and Hazor in the

⁴ The writer omits his own lord, Zimri-Lim of Mari, from the list (LAFONT 2001: 222 note 34).

⁵ Or, perhaps, the other way round; their arrival in Mari is reported in OZAN 1997: 296–297 no. 143; the departure of, pos-

sibly, the same singers is the subject of an unpublished letter (BONECHI 1992: 16 note 21). It is not clear whether "Amorite singers" are performers of a certain type, or musicians from a specific place of origin (ZIEGLER 1999: 118 and 216).

letters indicates that a similar exchange of persons and goods took place between these kingdoms.

Hazor and the long-distance gift exchange during the reign of Zimri-Lim

The most important fact which can be learned about Hazor from the Mari archive is that its king, Ibni-Adad, exchanged messengers and gifts with Zimri-Lim. The donation of gifts from one royal court to another was an essential component of international communication; the relations between rulers were expressed in terms based on the family model, and the gift exchange between them followed the reciprocity pattern of household-level interactions. The continuing giving and receiving of presents fulfilled various functions: it expressed the respect of the participants for each other, confirmed their political solidarity and was a means of non-verbal communication, all of which was governed by an intricate, but largely elusive, code of behaviour (LAFONT 2001: 306–312). In addition, long-distance gift exchange gave the contributors access to foreign luxury wares that marked their social distinction. Throughout the ancient Near East, exquisite foreign products were highly appreciated (for Mari see *e.g.* GUICHARD 1999), and the possession of such objects and the ability to maintain relations with far-away partners carried high prestige (LIVERANI 1990: 227). This allowed ruling elites to interact with their remote fellows to their mutual advantage, as the reception of foreign ambassadors, the employ of foreign specialists and the display and distribution of exotic luxury products increased their prestige in their communities and also abroad, when these products were passed on to recipients even further away from their original source.

Zimri-Lim exchanged gifts with kings of equal political status and his vassal kings, but also with kings who acknowledged others as their political superior: the important trade cities of northern Syria, for example, were vassals of Aleppo but maintained lively diplomatic and commercial connections with the palace of Mari. It would thus seem that political federations were no exclusive groups, and that diplomatic contact with a subordinate state was possible if the partner was on friendly terms with the superior ruler. This allowed Zimri-Lim to engage in diplomatic contacts with all parts of Syria and bring the received goods into circulation among his Mesopotamian partners, while in return products from Mesopotamia and eastern regions found their way to the Syrian courts through the hands of the king of Mari.

The evidence for gift exchange between Mari and Hazor is found in administrative texts that record the receipt and expenditure of commodities in the royal

treasury (BONECHI 1992). Two groups of attestations can be distinguished. The first occur in a number of texts that all refer to the same event: an exchange of metal objects between the two royal houses, when Zimri-Lim, on his trip through the kingdom of Aleppo, sent tin to the king of Hazor and received in turn objects of silver and gold. One of the objects received at that occasion was some years later handed out again as a gift to a king of Karana. The other group consists of two tablets that summarize the annual gifts of non-metal items (textiles in particular) that were sent to, and received from Hazor over a period of several years (ZL 7–12); one text gives details of the transactions of the year when Zimri-Lim travelled to Aleppo and the following year (ARMT 23 541), the other deals with the earlier and later years of contact between the two royal houses (BONECHI 1992: 11–13). Both texts bring together expenditures and receipts on a single tablet, and it has been observed that this feature has no parallel elsewhere in the corpus about royal gifts (DURAND 1999: 159; LEROUXEL 2002: 445–446). While they resemble bureaucratic balanced accounts in this way, there is no indication for their purpose: the suggestion that they represent an act of accounting after the death of Ibni-Adad remains unproven (LEROUXEL 2002: 446).

These records reveal that diplomatic communication between Mari and Hazor was of low intensity, and that Zimri-Lim always took the initiative by sending out his gift first, which was then reciprocated by an shipment of comparable goods. All incidents of diplomatic exchange can be situated in specific ceremonial contexts: the yearly gift of textiles is most likely to be understood in the setting of the Ištar festival, an important dynastic celebration for which the attendance of fellow rulers or their representatives was mandatory (LEROUXEL 2002: 437); the preceding gift of Zimri-Lim may well have been part of the invitation. The singular instance of an exchange of gifts outside of this annual pattern is the donation of tin and the reciprocal gift of silver and gold from the time of Zimri-Lim's stay in the kingdom of Aleppo (VILLARD 1986). This motive for this trip remains rather opaque in the light of the available sources, but it may well have been part of some larger diplomatic and military gathering of the allies and vassals of Aleppo (CHARPIN and ZIEGLER 2003: 214–215); it is quite likely, but at this time not confirmed by other evidence, that a delegation from Hazor participated in this event as well.

It is generally assumed that the choice of gifts carried an inherent meaning, but these connotations largely escape us. Textiles and objects of precious metals were customary gifts, but a shipment of tin – the base material for bronze – may have carried particular

significance in the context of a military gathering; Zimri-Lim had received a large supply of this strategic commodity in previous years from Elam as a payoff for military aid, and distributed most of it again to his overlord, the king of Aleppo, and Aleppo's allies, among them the king of Hazor, during his trips through this kingdom (JOANNÈS 1991). Worthy of note are also the chariot fittings which Zimri-Lim sent instead of the usual textiles as his annual gift for the king of Hazor in his eleventh year (BONECHI 1992: 13); the description of the gift received in return is broken, and the significance of these items remains unknown.

CONCLUSIONS

The Mari evidence shows Syria in the time of Zimri-Lim as a region without border restrictions, as allegiance to the all-powerful kingdom of Aleppo facilitated and regulated exchange between the local rulers. Hazor's participation in this gift exchange is hence no argument for its sovereignty.

In fact, the Mari sources do not allow a qualified judgment about the political or economic importance of this entity at that time; instead it reveals, to some degree, the views held by a Mesopotamian king about this distant place. Its remoteness lent particular prestige to the messengers and gifts coming from Hazor, and Zimri-Lim no doubt appreciated and put effort in their participation in the yearly Ištar festival in his palace at Mari. Aside from these occasions, it seems that he encountered an embassy from Hazor only at one other occasion, during an international event hosted by the mighty king of Aleppo. If this suggestion can be substantiated, then it would confirm that Hazor in the days of Zimri-Lim acknowledged the superiority of Aleppo; if so, then the attendance of its ambassadors at the Ištar festival at Mari may likewise have been brought about by Zimri-Lim's sponsor, the king of Aleppo. But whatever the status of Ibni-Adad of Hazor at that time may have been – autonomous ruler or follower of the kings of Qatna and Aleppo – it is clear that he entertained good relations with these kingdoms, as this was a prerequisite for all communications via the land route passing through their territories.

Diplomatic contacts with this faraway partner were also a means to acquire much-appreciated exotic luxury products. Hazor was in this respect a particularly attractive partner, as it was situated on the northbound trade route for merchandise from the Arabian peninsula and especially Egypt. The annual gift for the king of Mari, for example, consisted of linen textiles “from Byblos” (*gublayû*), which were in all probability of Egyptian origin (DURAND 1999: 159; MAEIR 2000: 45). The role of Hazor as a trade empori-

um between Syria and the southern Levant is well established (ILAN 1995: 306–308; MAEIR 2000), and this feature may have been a decisive factor why this city attracted the interest of Mari and Babylon.

Access to this far-away port-of-trade was always entirely dependent on the cooperation of the powerful kingdoms of Syria. It cannot be excluded that direct contact between Mesopotamian rulers and the king of Hazor was already taking place before the reign of Zimri-Lim, when the king of Hazor is known to be a vassal of Qatna, but the Mari archive does not contain the relevant text categories from that time that would allow to prove or disprove this possibility. Yet it can be expected that this was not the case, as the king of Qatna may well have preferred to employ the southern imports through Hazor for his own interests. Substantial textual evidence about long-distance gift exchange only becomes available for the following period, and then Hazor appears as an established member of the system. It is quite possible that its membership was of recent date and was connected with an expansion of diplomatic contacts and trade between Mesopotamia and the southern Levant at that time, encouraged by the new political order in Syria and the opening up of convenient trade routes. Mesopotamian rulers – Zimri-Lim of Mari and Hammurabi of Babylon – now entered into direct diplomatic contact and exchanged without intermediaries with Hazor; if this indeed was an innovation, then it can perhaps be attributed to the decline of Qatna's influence in the South, but textual evidence to prove this assumption is so far not available.

Archaeological implications

We will now return to the two applications of Mari evidence about Hazor to archaeological interpretation, as mentioned in the beginning of this paper. The first concerns the date of the expansion of Hazor: at first, only the upper town of this city was settled, but in the course of the MB II phase a sizeable and fortified lower town came into existence. There is no scholarly consensus about the date of the lower town's first settlement, or of the construction of the first fortifications: both happened, according to the traditional view, in the MB IIB phase (YADIN 1972: 201–206); according to another view, at least part of the lower town was already settled and fortified during the MB IIA phase (HERZOG 1997: 120; MAEIR 1997: 321). The Mari evidence is obviously irrelevant to this problem, as settlement size cannot be considered a factor for the participation in long-distance diplomatic exchange.

However, the Mari evidence is certainly relevant for the interpretation of a pottery assemblage from a large tomb in Hazor of the transitional phase MB IIA–B

(MAEIR 1997). This assemblage is considered a prime example of a regional type of material culture, “which is virtually identical to that of south-eastern Syria (*i.e.* the Damascene basin)” (MAEIR 2000: 38). A.M. MAEIR has argued that this is the manifestation of a contemporary political sphere of influence, which he identifies as the domain of the kingdom of Hazor. He refers to the Mari evidence to support the theory that, during the MB IIA–B phase, the political control of Hazor extended well into southern Syria, perhaps as far north as Yabrud (MAEIR 1997: 322–323; 2000).

The interpretation of the Mari evidence presented above excludes this view, as the kingdom of Qatna is known to have been in control of this region at the beginning of the two decades documented in the Mari sources; Qatna may have been in power already before this time, and perhaps afterwards as well, but the sources are silent in this respect. While MAEIR may be right in his observation that the archaeological material from the MB II A–B period at Hazor, as well as nearby Tell Dan (ILAN 1996: 244) is characterized by long-lasting Syrian styles, more work is necessary for a definition of a regional style and the identification of its chronology and geography; as he remarked himself (MAEIR 1997: 322), the archaeology of southern Syria remains poorly known. If a political explanation for this alleged regional pattern of material culture is permissible at all, then historical considerations favour its identification as the effect of a Syrian political centre

in regions as far south as the northern Jordan valley, rather than the other way around: the date for the transitional phase MB II A–B on the basis of the Tell el-Daba’a excavations (BIETAK 1991) does not discourage the hypothesis that it may in fact be linked with the southern expansion of Qatna’s realm of influence discussed in this paper, but new historical and archaeological evidence is necessary to substantiate this idea.

APPENDIX: A NOTE ON CHRONOLOGY

Mesopotamian history of the late third and early second millennium BC possesses a secure relative chronology (for the synchronisms of the Mari age see the table in CHARPIN & ZIEGLER 2003: 262), but the absolute chronology has been much discussed in recent years; many support significantly lower dates than the conventionally used Middle Chronology (GASCHE *et al.* 1998), but arguments against this lower dating have also been put forward. These discussions have made it clear that the astronomical foundation of early Mesopotamian chronology is best left aside, and that no alternative tools are yet available to propose absolute dates. Absolute dates in this paper follow the Low Chronology (for the Middle Chronology, deduct 64 years), which seems closest to the known historical facts (but no margin of error can yet be given); they are to be seen as convenient tools for the benefit of interdisciplinary discussion only.

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