

“DECONSTRUCTING” THE NORTHERN LEVANTINE PALACE: GENESIS AND DEVELOPMENT OF A PUBLIC BUILDING

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Abstract: Palaces, in many respects, represent the main outcome of the great socio-economic transformation that characterised the outgrowth of urban societies during the first half of the second millennium BC. In the Levant, the type of building that appeared was characterised by traits that make it quite different from similar and contemporaneous buildings located in Mesopotamia. This fact suggests the existence of an independent local tradition in the Levant which has thus usually been analysed in distinct chronological segments, with separate discussions of the relevant Middle Bronze Age (MBA) and Late Bronze Age (LBA) evidence to hand. This work uses two case studies of palace architecture dating to the MBA and LBA from Qatna to propose an analysis that highlights the existence of several shared traits. Via comparisons with contemporary examples, in particular Alalakh, a common genesis that developed along a unique and continuous path is suggested for both MBA and LBA palaces. The social role of northern Levantine palaces is thus seen as an expression of new local leaderships and as the vehicle of a common language whose origin might be traced back to the emergence of the so-called Amorite Koiné.

Keywords: Levant, Palaces, Architecture, Bronze Age, Amorite, Qatna, Alalakh, Ebla

Introduction. The Palace: one building, many meanings and functions.

Palaces are one of the most remarkable building types that emerged in the urban landscape of Middle Bronze Age (MBA) Northern Levantine settlements. They might be considered one of the hallmarks of societies possessing a high degree of socio-economic complexity, particularly with increasing levels of hierarchy and control of a wide range of crafts and economic activities. In this sense, their monumental features make them

the ideal “visual media” to convey the emergence of political power when this is capable of controlling and expending human energy, even if this means a waste of human resources (TZONIS 2018, 9; TRIGGER 1990, 125). At the same time, palaces are bearers of a number of socio-cultural aspects visible both in the external and internal layout that qualify them as an embodiment of practices and traditions (MARAN 2006; KALLAS 2019). These latter may not be related only to resident elites, but might rather pertain to larger sectors of ancient societies: in this sense, palaces may be capable of speaking to a wider audience (ECO 1980; JENKS 1980). To a certain extent, they may perhaps even be considered as a product of larger sectors of ancient societies. Palaces ultimately played a pivotal role in the development and management of economic activities (POSTGATE 2004), thus emerging in the urban landscape as real economic centres (DE MIROSCHEJJI 2019, 160).

The appearance of palaces in the Near East during the second millennium BC with specific functional and aesthetic features seems to reflect these aspects, to such an extent that they might be thought of as one of the consequences of the so-called Amorite phenomenon (BURKE 2014a, 2014b; HOMSHER and CRADIC 2017), i.e. the rise and consolidation of several Amorite dynasties in a number of urban centres. Many of the latter (e.g. Mari, Uruk and Ebla) had deep roots in third millennium – or even earlier – settlements, and thus the appearance of Amorite leaderships represented the reprise and /or reflowering of pre-existing important urban centres. Some others (e.g. Alalakh, Qatna) were, on the contrary, apparently unknown during the Early Bronze Age (EBA) and emerged in the Mesopotamian and Levantine political landscape as new dominant political centres.

Urban polities in the Northern Levant¹ featured palaces with typical and distinctive traits charac-

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¹ This term refers broadly to an area that extends from the coast to inner Western Syria, roughly delimited by a line stretching from Ebla to Qatna. Although aware of the dif-

ferences that may exist in specific sub-regions (and thus be local in character), we believe that this region shows a common architectural heritage throughout the MB and LBA, that justifies this approach.

Tell Mishrifeh - QATNA 2008 Topographic Map



University of UDINE

DTM derived from
rigging interpolation of
these points.
The reference frame is
local.

Field survey and computer graphics 2000: A. Beinai, A. Marchesini -
University of Udine
Field survey and computer graphics 2001-2008: A. Savio

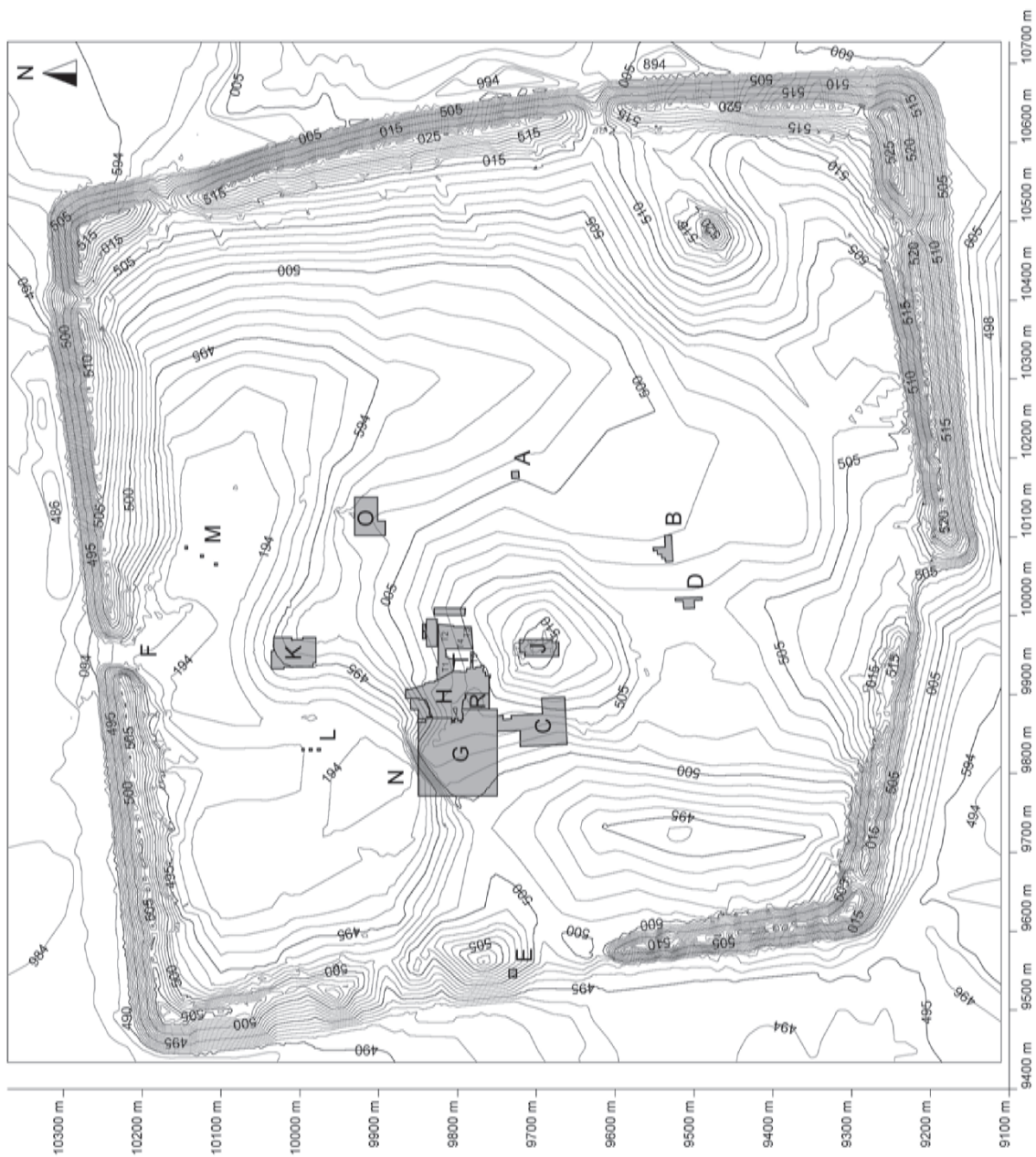


Fig. 1 Topographic map of Qatna showing positions of the Eastern Palace (Operation T), the Lower City Palace (Operation K) and the Royal Palace (Operations G, H and R)

terising their plans and appearance. Since the discovery of Yarim Lim’s Palace at Alalakh (WOOLLEY 1955) and later the massive second millennium body of data brought to light by the Italian Mission to Ebla (the Northern and Western Palaces are of particular relevance), the innovative traits of these examples of public architecture have been increasingly well understood (MORANDI BONACOSI 2015, 360). This has allowed archaeologists to propose the existence of a palace tradition in the Northern Levant that emerged during the second millennium BC and that differed completely from that of contemporary Mesopotamia (MARGUERON 1982, 3–8; 2019; MATTHIAE 2019, 94), i.e. from the administrative and other secular public buildings located in the Euphrates and Tigris area.

Recent discoveries at Qatna have confirmed such an interpretation, adding substantial evidence thanks to the excavation of two public buildings (the Eastern Palace and Lower City Palace, hereafter EP and LCP) that have significantly enriched our knowledge. This paper focuses on these two palaces in search of elements that may help to better trace the nature of a tradition that, albeit now fully recognised as independent, has many points that still require more careful and detailed study so that its distinctive traits may be completely understood. Although considered in the analysis of the results, the Royal Palace (RP) of Qatna, definitely the largest and most famous second millennium public building so far discovered at Qatna, seems, in this respect, less useful regarding the aims of this work. Its “representative/symbolic” role (which fulfils one of palaces’ most important functions, that is the celebration of rulers and manifestation of royal power, see POSTGATE 2004: 196; MIGLUS 2004, 233, 236–237) may have somehow over-influenced its architectural design through the adoption of extraneous architectural styles – visible, for example, in the disposition of the Court-Throne Room-Celebration Hall (PFÄLZNER 2007, 40–50; 2019, 262), whose antecedents are found in Mesopotamia (see below for a more detailed discussion). The use of “foreign architectural traditions” probably served to facilitate the integration of Qatna’s elite into the international circuit of official and diplomatic relationships with regions and societies with which Qatna was in touch during the second millennium BC. At the same time, however, this strategy has masked or hidden local traits that, albeit present, are more difficult to disentangle or recognise: In comparison with the EP and LCP, the RP may

consequently reflect to a lesser extent the palace tradition of the Northern Levant and, for this reason, has not been used as a primary key to understand the development of the locally rooted palace tradition that originated in the Northern Levant.

This work tries especially to contribute to this outcome via an analysis of the EP and LCP’s architectural features that permits a scheme of the Northern Levantine Palace in use throughout the MBA and Late Bronze Age (LBA) to be outlined. At the same time, this allows us to propose the existence of a unique and continuous tradition that started at the beginning of the second millennium, the MBA, and – notwithstanding some natural changes, modifications and “reinterpretations” – evolved along a continuous line until the end of the period, the LBA. Though both the EP and LCP lack the complete excavation of their architectural plans and their stratigraphy (see below), they nonetheless furnish a large set of data that characterises them as a unique case study for understanding the second millennium palace tradition of Western Syria and generally of the Northern Levant. Their combined analysis thus offers a unique overview of the architectural palace tradition attested in Qatna and provides a crucial reference point for the palaces of Northern Levant and Western Syria throughout almost the entire second millennium BC.

Research method: plan, units and courts

Regarding a research method for the present study, we decided to “dismantle” the architectural units of the palace into various discrete segments, focusing on three aspects that were chosen as indicators to illustrate the development of this unique architectural tradition.

The first is the building plan and generally the internal layout of the building, particularly the room distribution. The second aspect is the occurrence of architectural units and blocks characterising the palaces: with the first term, we refer to “preformed” combinations (made up generally of 3 to 4 rooms) that were used in composing the plan of new buildings or, when necessary, to adapt and transform pre-existing structures into new buildings, both functionally and visually speaking. Assembled together, such units formed the final plans of palaces and administrative buildings that were, thus, to some extent, mosaics in which different pieces were used to compose a larger and more complex whole. The second term (blocks) is

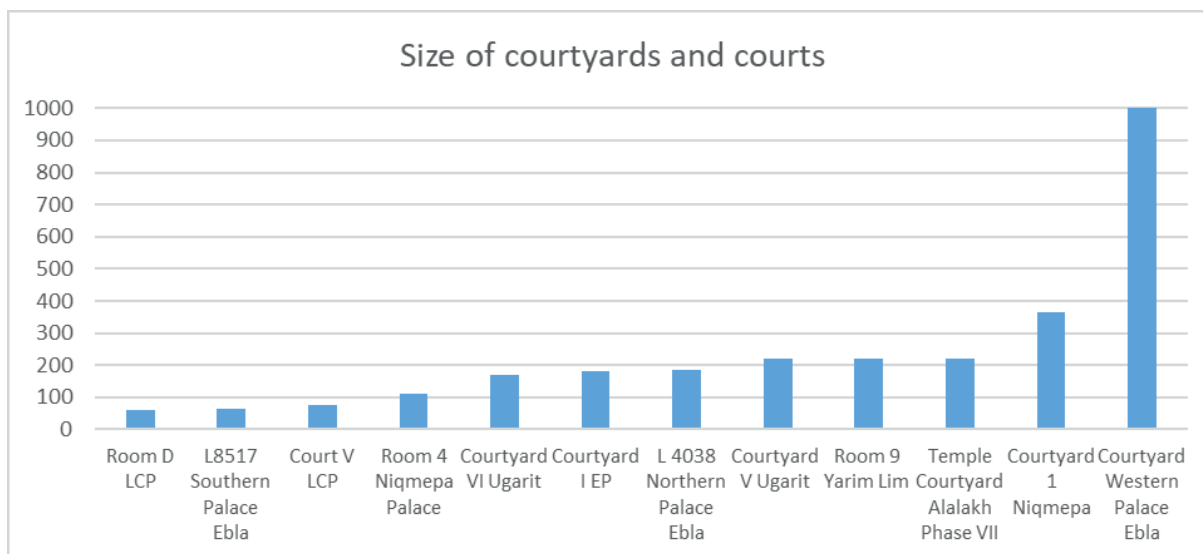


Table 1 Areas of courtyards and courts (sq. m.)

COURTYARDS/COURTS	area sq. m.
Room D LCP	60
L8517 Southern Palace Ebla	66
Court V LCP	76
Room 4 Niqmepa Palace	110
Courtyard VI Ugarit	170
Courtyard I EP	180
L 4038 Northern Palace Ebla	186
Courtyard V Ugarit	220
Room 9 Yarim Lim	220
Temple Courtyard Alalakh Phase VII	220
Courtyard 1 Niqmepa	366
Courtyard Western Palace Ebla	1030

Table 2 Areas of the courtyards considered here in square metres (median = 183, mean = 242)

used to mean larger building sectors – that may also include (or be entirely made up of) the units mentioned above. These architectural blocks are indicators of the existence of larger preconceived architectural schemes on which the organisation of the palace plan was based. The last features studied are the courtyards and their position within the plan of the palaces. We have analysed the large enclosures present in the buildings discussed here on the basis of size-range distribution in order to avoid generic and perhaps confusing definitions (Table 1). Apart from the Western Palace Court of Ebla, whose limits are unclear (hence its dimensions may be exaggerated), the vast majority

aggregate around an area of 200 +/-20 sq. m., whereas a smaller group falls between ca. 50 and 100 sq. m. (see Table 2 for the precise figures). This information, together with data from archaeological reports, has been used as the basis of the following definition of the former category as open and unroofed “courtyards”, whereas the smaller specimens (<100 sq. m.) are referred to as “courts”. This method is based on a common-sense approach and is employed here as a simple “rule of thumb”, whose validity may be tested by future work.

The body of data: the Eastern Palace and the Lower City Palace

The EP is a public building with a longitudinal axis running roughly N-S; it covers an area of about 1560 sq. m. with a perimeter of about 165 m and, at present, comprises 26 rooms. Since it has not been completely excavated, much of the eastern and northern portions (in particular the latter) is still in need of fuller investigation; the perimeter given in Fig. 2 may thus be modified in the future.

Most of the western and the southern parts, on the other hand, has been unearthed, although the boundaries of the former are largely those of a later extensive LBA pit and should not, thus, be taken as the real original western EP limit. The western sector (if it ever existed) has been totally removed; natural erosion and modern structures have further contributed to its poor state of preservation, removing what may have still stood after

the excavation of the LBA pit. Hypotheses have been made about some components of the western sector on the basis of earlier walls (the so-called North Western extension) that were later reused as foundations for the EP’s new rooms (see, for example, Room R, Fig. 2). A closer examination of the available data is, however, necessary in order

to be sure that there is convincing evidence for the existence of this western sector (and, if so, what its original extent was). Excavation of the southern area, though also incomplete, has uncovered sloping surfaces abutting the southern wall of Room P, thus suggesting that EP walls did not extend beyond that point.

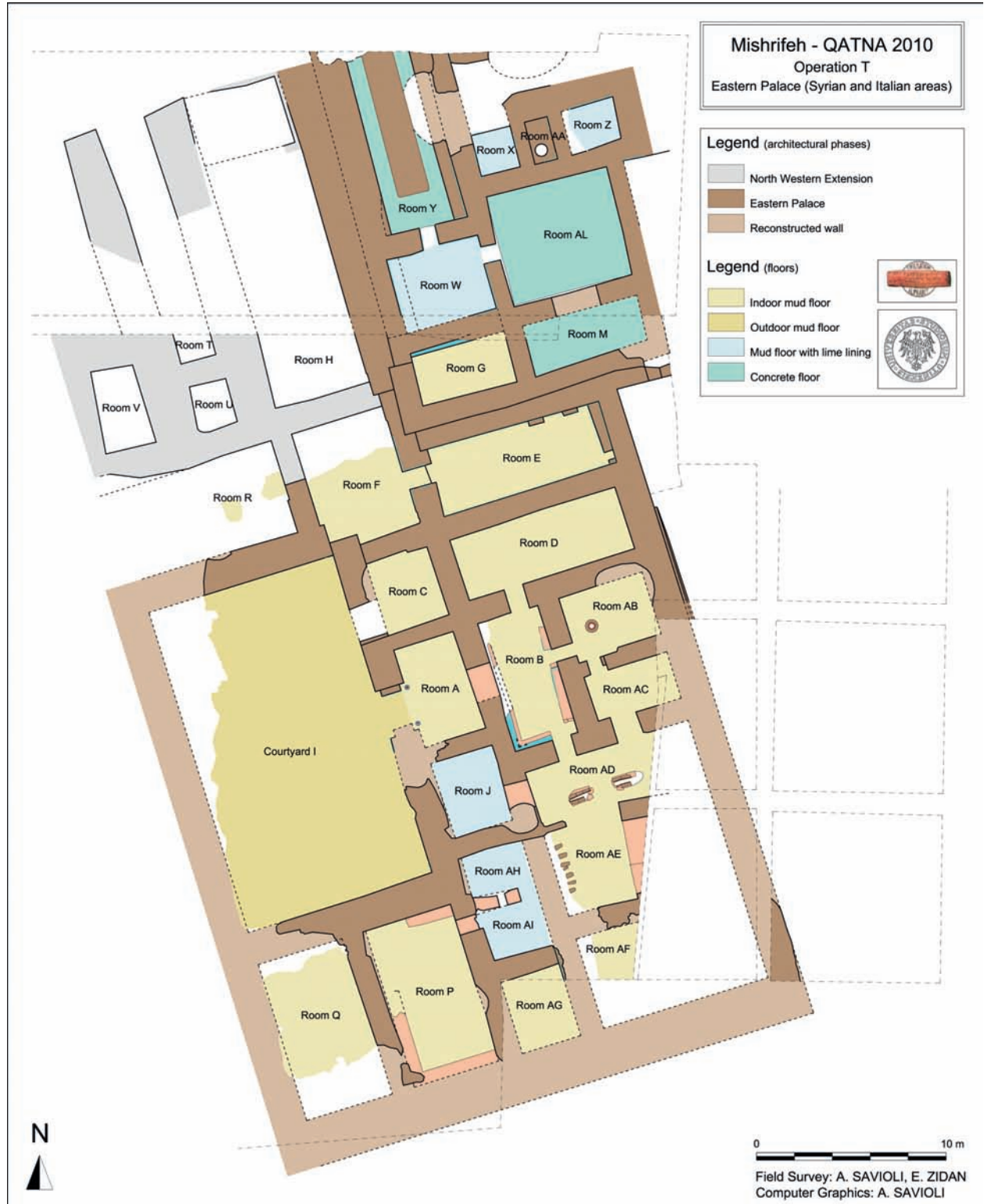


Fig. 2 Schematic plan of the Eastern Palace



Fig. 3 View of Room E showing the new walls added and the pre-existing buttresses

The building procedure used for the EP's construction is one of its most noteworthy aspects. Preliminary studies have demonstrated that the EP is the result of the union of two pre-existing buildings (MORANDI BONACOSSÌ et al. 2009) that were modified with the addition (or in some cases, removal) of walls and the re-flooring of several rooms (some of them with a thick layer of robust white plaster) so as to create the new palace.

The EP is thus not a new construction but rather the adaptation of two pre-existing buildings named, according to their position, the Southern Building and the Northern Building (MORANDI BONACOSSÌ et al. 2009). The unification of these two buildings was identified thanks to the study of a number of structural details that were recognised during the excavation of the EP (IAMONI 2015). The most important were identified in Room E, which functions as a *trait d'union* between the two main bodies of the palace. Two new walls were built out from pre-existing buttresses that protruded from the external northern façade of the Southern Building in order to create the eastern and western sides of the new Room E. The room's perimeter was then completed through the modification of

the already extant walls of the Southern and Northern Buildings.

As far as the latter are concerned, at present we cannot add much to that described in previous publications (IAMONI and KANHOUSH 2009; MORANDI BONACOSSÌ et al. 2009; IAMONI 2015; KANHOUSH 2015). Although a detailed analysis of the excavated data is still underway, it seems likely that they were probably private premises, although of a particularly prestigious nature. This conclusion seems most reliable regarding the Southern Building, whose rooms have been excavated in many cases down to their lower deposits, thus shedding light on the earliest occupation levels. There is less certainty regarding the Northern Building: the massive work carried out on it (in particular the re-flooring with hard layers of concrete), for the purpose of making it the EP's most prestigious sector, radically modified the original structure and created a physical barrier that made it impossible to go deeper and investigate the underlying early levels.

The building's chronology has not been definitively assessed; a monograph is planned to give an exhaustive account of the results achieved and of the ceramic assemblages from the excavations.

Preliminary studies suggest a short life for the EP, with a major phase of use around the MB IIA and a likely end (or restructuring of the building for

new functional purposes) during the MB IIB. A later continuation of the building’s occupation – though perhaps no longer as palace but rather as a

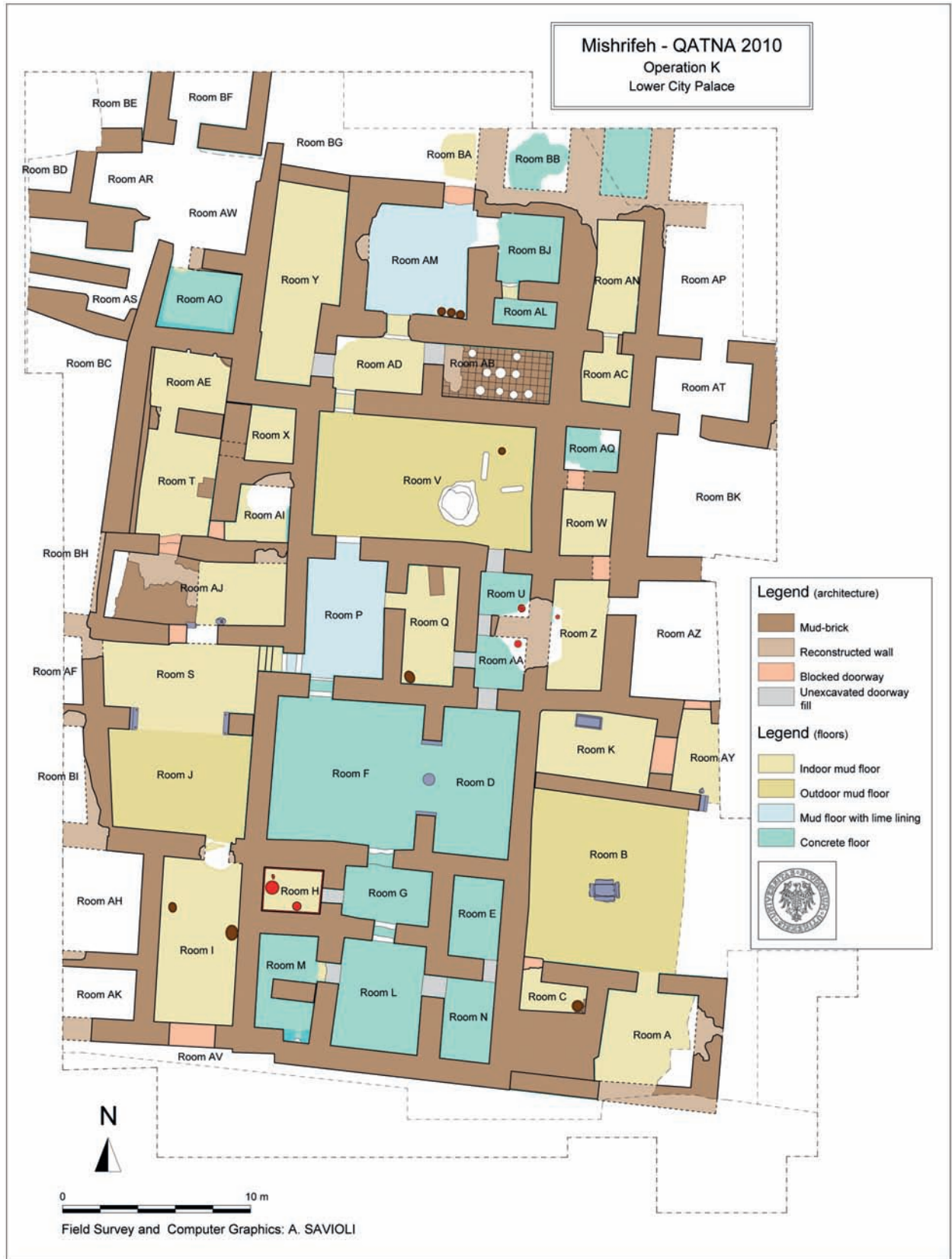


Fig. 4 Schematic map of the Lower City Palace

Lab No.	Sample No.	$\delta^{13}\text{C}$ (1 σ deviation) [‰]	^{14}C Age (1 σ deviation) [BP]	Calibrated Age (1 σ , 68.2 % probability)	Calibrated Age (2 σ , 95.4 % probability)
VERA-5523	MSH 10K 10435.701	-21.5 ± 1.8	3065 ± 40	3065 ± 40	1430 (92 %) 1250 1240 (3.4 %) 1210
VERA-5524	MSH 10K 10433.701	-22.4 ± 1.1	3110 ± 35	1430 (53.0 %) 1370 1340 (15.2 %) 1310	1460–1290
VERA-5525	MSH 10K 10433.702	-22.0 ± 1.3	3120 ± 40	1440 (55.3 %) 1370 1340 (12.9 %) 1310	1500–1290

Table 3 ^{14}C determinations from the LCP (MORANDI BONACOSSÌ 2015, 369, Table 2)

metallurgical workshop – has been currently dated to the MB III and LB I. It is yet, however, to be understood whether these craft activities were also conducted during the major phase of use of the EP during the MB II. Some indications – such as the retrieval of metal artefacts from lower, possibly pre-EP levels and the occurrence of traces of pyrotechnological installations – seem to point in this direction, although a more accurate analysis of the evidence to hand is necessary before proposing a reliable interpretation in this sense.

The LCP is a building excavated in Qatna during the 2000–2010 campaigns (LUCIANI 2003a, 2003b, 2006; MORANDI BONACOSSÌ 2015; TURRI 2019). It is located in front of Qatna's northern gate, at distance of about 175 m, probably on one of the major roads that crossed the city. Although not complete, the excavation of the building has brought to light a sizeable area, measuring 35 m along its shorter, roughly E-W aligned side and more than 51 m along its major N-S axis. It thus covers an area of about 2200 sq. m, with a perimeter of more than 170 m, and comprises more than 60 rooms forming different building sectors, for example, private and official and/or ceremonial (Fig. 4).

Aside from the RP, whose foundation chronology is debated (NOVÁK 2004; MORANDI BONACOSSÌ 2007; PFÄLZNER 2019c), the LCP is, so far, the only LBA Palace excavated at Qatna. Its origin (phases K15 and 14) appears to date to the end of the LB I, which, according to the recently proposed chronology (IAMONI 2012, 161–170), may have spanned approximately the entire 15th century BC. The LCP's major period of use has been divided into two phases (K13 and 12), during which the building underwent some renovation or, in some cases, substantial modification of the original plan of some rooms (LUCIANI 2006; MORANDI BONACOSSÌ 2015). These, however, never radically changed the

LCP's overall plan, which maintained its original shape and layout. As far as the chronology of Phases K13 and K12 is concerned, this has been fixed on the basis of the study of the common and imported wares (the latter include Cypriot and Mycenaean LH IIIA2 pottery) in the LB II A, 14th century BC, (LUCIANI 2008; IAMONI 2012, 77–79; MORANDI BONACOSSÌ 2015, 370–371). This dating has been further confirmed by three radiocarbon determinations (Table 3) from phase K13 layers that were centred on the early 14th century (MORANDI BONACOSSÌ 2015).

Epigraphic and textual evidence also supports this chronology. A scarab bearing the cartouche of Pharaoh Amenhotep III (BOSCHLOOS 2015), who reigned in the first half of the 14th century, was found in deposits from Room AC assigned to Phase K13; it can thus be used as a *terminus post quem* for the following (and last) phase of the building, K12, after which the LCP was probably abandoned for a short time before being resettled during Phase K11. Detailed summaries have already been presented (MORANDI BONACOSSÌ 2015) and show similarities with the Southern Palace of Ebla (MATTHIAE 2004, 2010, 449–452; MORANDI BONACOSSÌ 2015, 367), thus providing a first relationship between the MBA and LBA palace tradition. As we will see, these might be closer and involve more MBA and LBA buildings in the Levant.

A brief excursus: the case of Tell Atchana/Alalakh

As will appear clear in the following discussion of the three major traits that have been selected to analyse MBA and LBA palaces (internal plan, court, and architectural units/blocks), Alalakh is a case study that provides fundamental information for understanding the development of the palace tradition in the northern region of the Levant. The

several parallels and similarities between Yarim Lim (Level VII) and the Niqmepa Palace (Level IV) and the EP and LCP and their similar timespan, make Tell Atchana a crucial site for the comprehension of Northern Levantine palace architecture in the second millennium BC. Though Alalakh is referred to in most studies concerning the Levant – or generally the archaeology of Syria

(AKKERMANS and SCHWARTZ 2003, 304–305, 331–333), it is necessary here to outline the distinctive features that make it an illuminating case study for the investigation of MBA and LBA public architecture.

During its excavation, Woolley recorded a deep stratigraphic sequence characterised by 19 different occupation levels, spanning – according to his

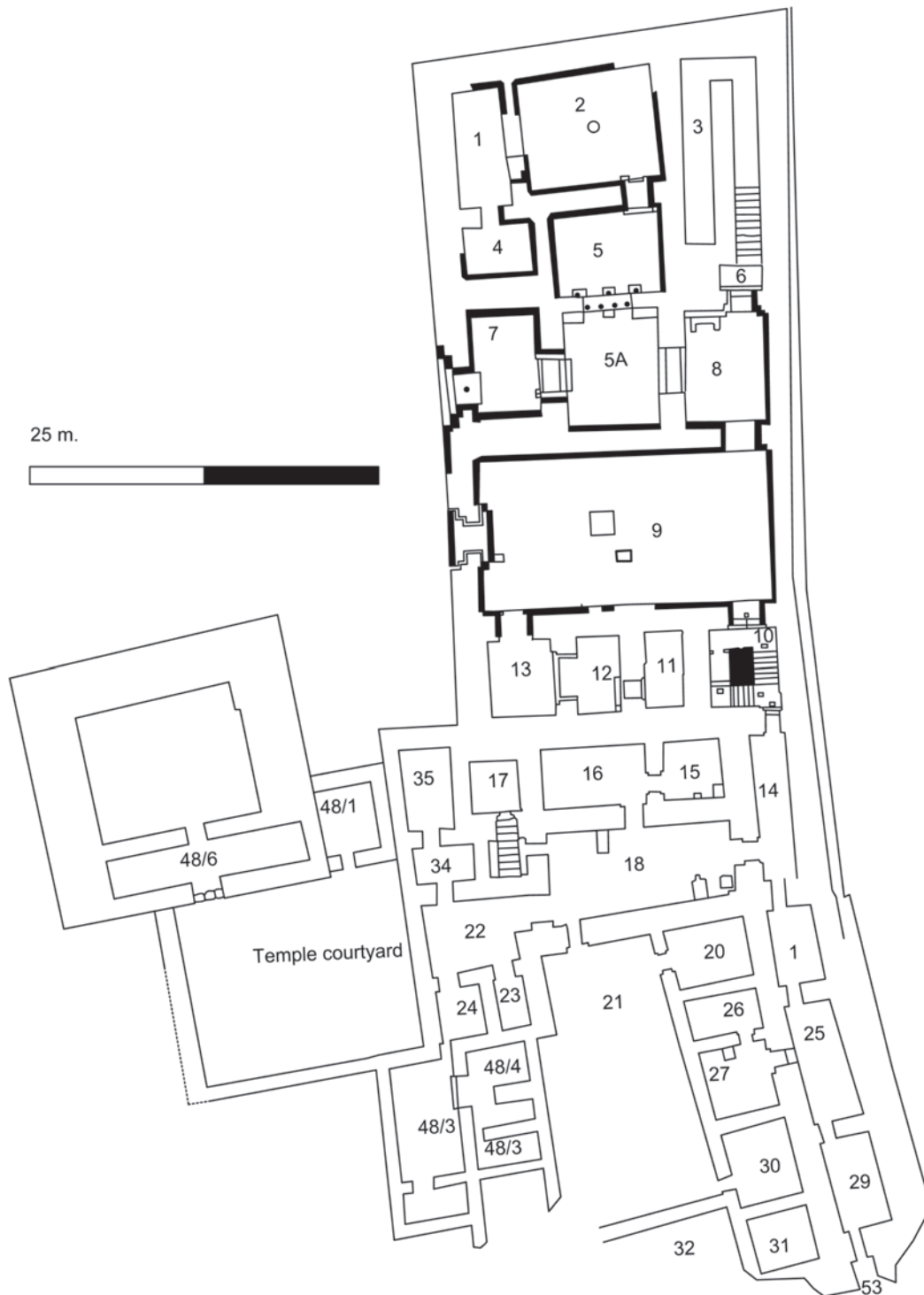


Fig. 5 The Palace of Yarim Lim (here redrawn by the author using Autocad 2018 after WOOLLEY 1955: fig. 35, north on the top)

reconstruction – the third and second millennium BC (WOOLLEY 1955). Though recent studies and particularly the reopening of a new archaeological project at Tell Atchana have questioned the reliability of Woolley's conclusions, especially regarding the dating of the earliest and latest levels of his sequence (CARRE GATES 1987; HEINZ 1992; STEIN

1997; YENER 2010), the chronology of the two main public buildings of Alalakh, namely Yarim Lim's Palace – assigned to Phase VII, corresponding roughly to MB II B (17th century BC) – and Niqmepa's Palace – Phase IV, roughly late LB I – LB II A (15th century – early 14th century BC) – has remained substantially untouched.

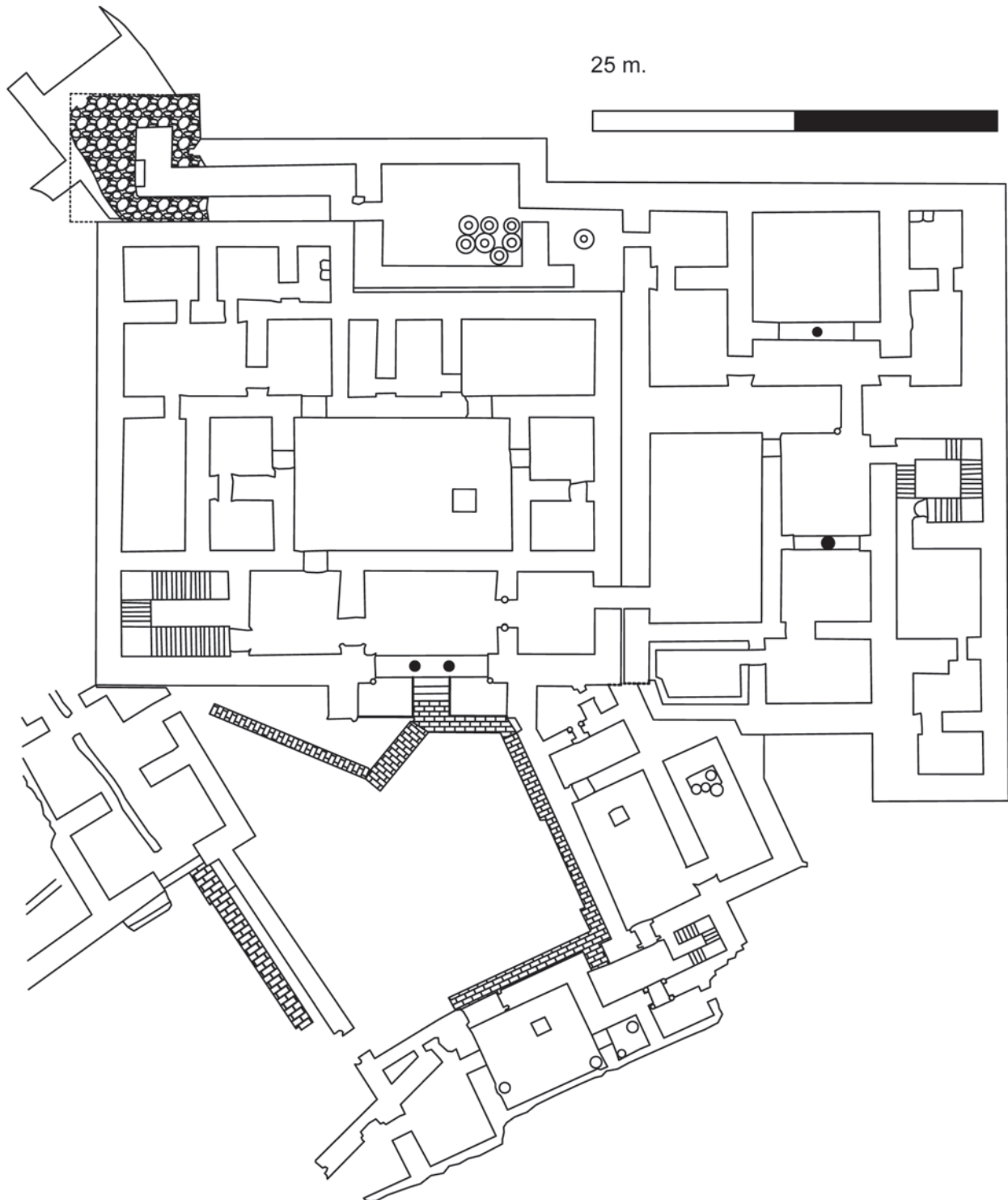


Fig. 6 The Palace of Niqmepa (here redrawn by the author using Autocad 2018 on the basis of WOOLLEY 1955: fig. 44, north on the top)

Both palaces thus offer unparalleled views of the 2nd millennium BC architectural tradition in the upper region of the Northern Levant. The first, with its unusual “stretched” plan, is one of the better preserved MBA palaces. Its elongated shape and the apparent absence of peripheral wings and a proper large courtyard are striking; perhaps there were specific reasons (the nature of the ground?) that hampered the building of a larger palace. At the same time, the presence of elements common to other palaces in the Southern Levant (such as the use of decorative orthostats and concrete floors in the building’s ceremonial sector and the position of the staircase on its NE corner) has permitted the identification of a coherent set of architectural features that characterise MBA palace architecture.

Similarly, the Niqmepa Palace (Fig. 6) represents the LB development of the preceding MBA palace tradition, with which – in spite of some substantial changes – it shares several traits. The general development is different, with a plan elongated in an E-W direction, emphasized by the location of the main gate on the southern long side of the building. The palace has a rectangular shape which, although orientated differently, is comparable with that of its MBA counterpart and, above all, with those of the EP and LCP at Qatna. The shape of the building is composed of two different units, the main one of which is located in the building’s western sector, whereas the second (the so-called Ilim – Ilimma annex) constitutes the eastern part. They are roughly the same size (about 1000 sq. m) and form together a coherent and unique building plan, with a clear symmetry that can be seen in the similar dimensions of the two different building *corpora* (Fig. 8) and in the opposing positions of the square buttress rooms (possibly two towers, WOOLLEY 1955, 112), nos. 36 and 31 in Woolley’s account, located respectively at the building’s NW and SE corner (WOOLLEY, 1955, Fig. 44).

The first of these (36) has been masked by Woolley’s reconstruction of the Niqmepa Palace: according to Alalakh’s first excavator, Room 36 was combined with Room E5 of the so-called Level IV Castle, that Woolley himself considered older than Niqmepa’s Palace, albeit also in use during

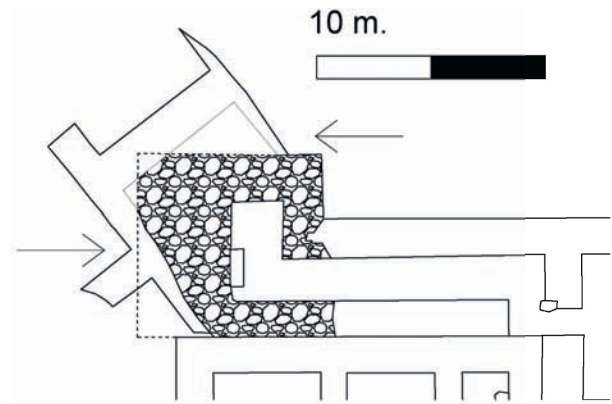


Fig. 7 Details of Room 36 (north in the upper part of the image). The two arrows indicate where the stone foundations of the room above overlap the pre-existing walls of the Castle complex. The dashed line shows the suggested perimeter of the room.

the same Phase IV (WOOLLEY 1955, 156). However, examination of the stratigraphy and the overall plan of the two rooms suggests a more plausible square shape (Fig. 7),² as proposed here (Fig. 8), and as Woolley possibly also imagined in his axonometric view of the palace (WOOLLEY 1955, 117, Fig. 47).

In a similar way to what has been seen in the Qatna EP and LCP, the Level VII and Level IV palaces of Alalakh, thus, offer a unique perspective on the MBA and LBA palace tradition. They both exhibit a rectangular plan that, although orientated differently (N-S vs. E-W), clearly constitutes the general model for second millennium secular public buildings in the Levant and, in this respect, they provide a much more complete regional overview.

Building plan and internal room distribution

The first aspect considered in this analysis is the general development and internal layout of the palace. The EP has a quite distinctive elongated rectangular shape, with major axes measuring 56 and 29 m. The plan features regularly arranged palace rooms, which are present in parallel rows. This aspect is especially clear in the central and southern sectors, whereas it is less marked in the northern area – where the construction of the EP’s ceremonial sector must have modified the arrangement

² Briefly, Room 36 shows two contrasting stratigraphic relationships: the eastern and western Ilim Ilimma wall foundations made of stone clearly overlap a wall of the pre-existing so-called “Castle”, whereas the NW corner is

apparently covered by another wall of the same previous phase. We believe that the latter may simply derive from the partial reuse of pre-existing structures that were incorporated into the foundations of the new Room 36.

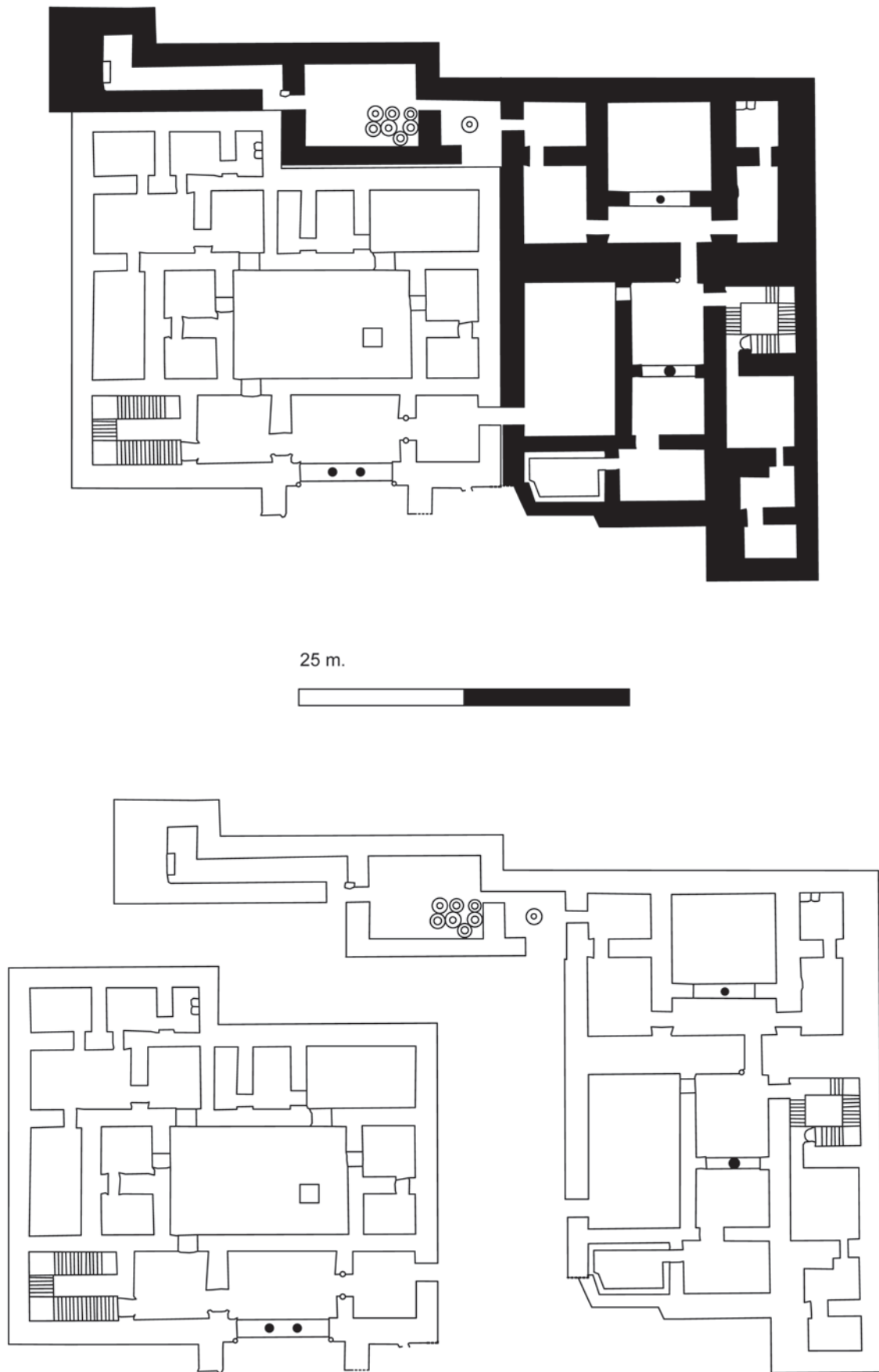


Fig. 8 The Palace of Niqmepa as proposed by the author (the walls of the Level IV Castle complex are not drawn here) and below its "deconstruction" into the original building and the Ilim Ilimma annex

palace of Alalakh – Phase VII also constitutes a notable example of similar architectural planning (WOOLLEY 1955). It has been suggested that the MB palace excavated at Tilmen Höyük should also be included in the Northern Levantine Palace tradition (MARCHETTI 2006; more recently see PFÄLZNER 2019b, 130–131). However, although a few elements are apparently in common (PFÄLZNER 2019b, 130–131), the Tilmen Höyük palace has a rather different layout, making it difficult to compare with the palaces of Qatna, Ebla and Alalakh. Its position 100 km north west of Aleppo may have exposed it to the influence of different traditions (extraneous to the Northern Levant) that may have significantly altered the building plan, thus leading to a different type of palace.

Contemporaneous Mesopotamian palaces located in the Euphrates and Tigris area, the true core of Mesopotamia – such as (from south to north) the Sinkashid Palace of Uruk, the Old Palace and Palace of Adad Nirari at Assur (PREUSSER 1955), the Zimri Lim Palace of Mari (PARROT 1958), the MBA Palace A of Tuttul (STROMMINGER 1986, 1991; MIGLUS 2019) – have, on the contrary, rather “compact” square plans, whose antecedents may be seen perhaps in the 3rd millennium BC palaces of Tell Brak – the Palace of Naram Sin (MALLOWAN 1947) – and Ur – the so-called Ekhursag (WOOLLEY 1974). This suggests that Mesopotamian Palaces exhibit continuity between the third and second millennia; this is much harder to recognise in the Levant because of the absence of substantial EBA evidence (see below).

When we turn to the LBA, we again find a similar plan. The LCP shows a longitudinal development which is undoubtedly similar to that of the EP. Though slightly larger, the LCP has a definitely higher number of rooms (60 vs. 26), laid out along a main long axis. Interestingly, the LCP’s rooms – especially those in the central palace sector, the likely core or backbone (and probably also the earliest sector) of the palace – are arranged in parallel rows. The peripheral eastern and western wings, though possibly added in later phases, offer similar evidence: they, however, also follow the original plan and tend to replicate the original elongated form of the building’s inner core – somehow mirroring, though on a larger scale, the basic tripartite module typical of second millennium large private houses, such as the Tablet Building of Hadidi (DORNEMANN 1981; MATTHIAE 1997b; McCLELLAN 1997, 37).

The Courtyard

The EP possesses a large courtyard (Courtyard I, with an area of almost 180 sq m), which is bigger than any of its rooms. Its presence is the most visible consequence of the monumental process that led to the formation of the EP. Courtyard I is located on its western wing and, thus, seems excluded from the main body of the building (Fig. 10). This is an important point since it underlines the different role then played by what must have been an essential part of a palace in the Near East. Courtyards in Mesopotamian palaces are generally the core of the building, which develops sectors around them (MARGUERON 1982, 479–480, 499–531). This of course depends on the multiple functions of courtyards, among which three seem of particular importance.

Firstly, courtyards allowed light to reach internal rooms that would otherwise be too dark to be inhabited (MARGUERON 1982, 523–524). Secondly, courtyards were crucial hubs that connected different sectors of the palace, and thus different groups of people (e.g. residents and staff) who lived and worked there (MARGUERON 1982, 479–480). Last but not least, they played a symbolic role, conferring prestige, since their position, in many cases, underlined the presence of or gave access to the most prestigious and important sector of the palace, i.e. the audience hall and the throne room. These factors explain their frequently internal position and rather symmetrical arrangement in palaces and public buildings of very large size, such as the second millennium Palace of Zimri Lim at Mari (PARROT 1958) and the Assyrian Palaces of the 1st millennium BC imperial period (KERTAI 2015, 197–199).

Though these functions might also have been maintained in part in the EP with the smaller Room AL (see below, the audience unit), Courtyard I’s location suggests a clear evolution of its role. Its lateral position within the architectural layout of the palace implies less association with a prestigious area (at least as far as the official and/or administrative sector is concerned). The courtyard must have retained a prestigious function regarding the outside, as an accompaniment to the monumental entrance to the palace. The EP’s construction seems to support this hypothesis: as explained above in more detail, Courtyard I was built as an addition that served to increase the building’s monumental aspect. Another public building excavated in Ebla, the Western Palace,



Fig. 10 View of the EP; in the foreground the large Courtyard I and the large LB pit

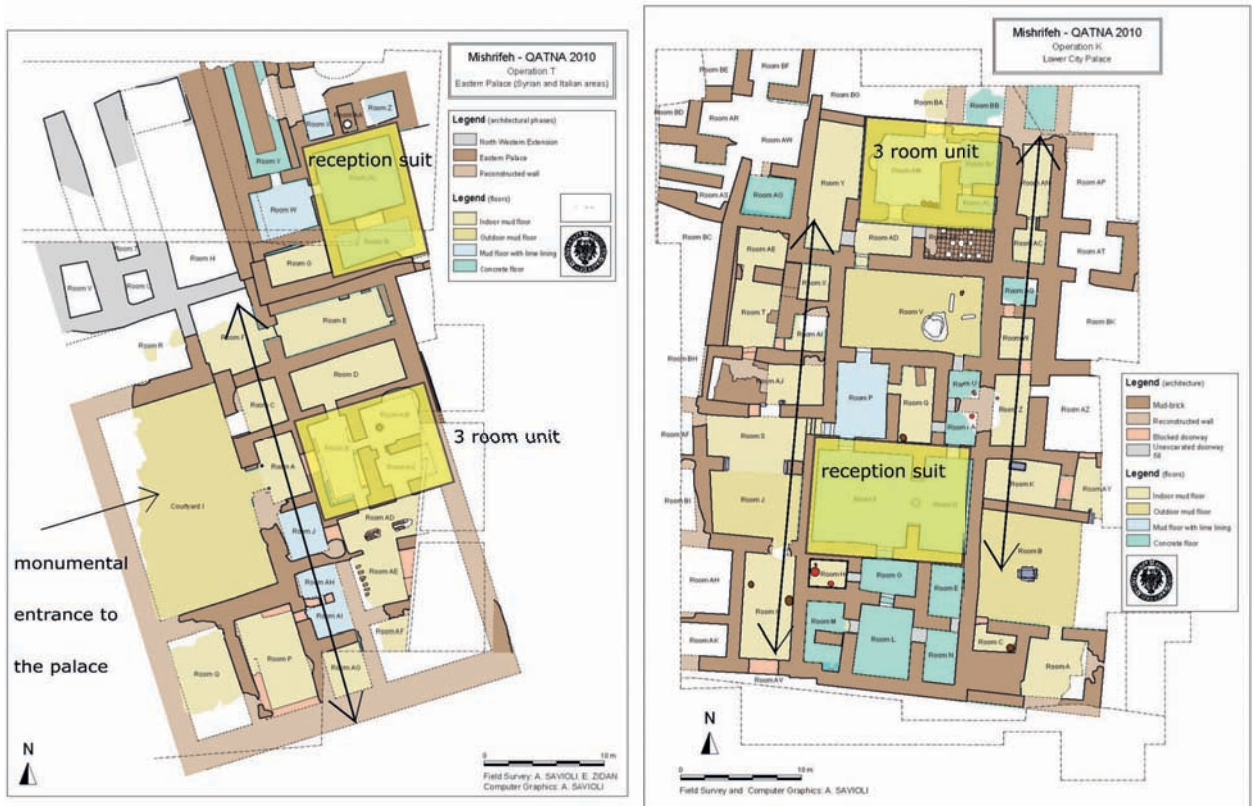


Fig. 11 The EP and LCP together, with highlighted the three main features analysed (peripheral court/monumental entrance, stretched layout and architectural units)

shows a very similar arrangement, which corroborates this new role of courtyards (MATTHIAE 2010), thus, suggesting the appearance of a different model for their use. The existence in Qatna of two buildings in which the courtyard's role was exploited in both ways (the classic Mesopotamian in the RP – though also here may be noted the position next to the building's southern edge – and the Levantine tradition in the EP) confirms that different models were behind these two different plans. The occurrence of a similar trend also in the Southern Levant during the final part of the MBA is noteworthy (KEMPINSKI 1992, 196), and may indicate contacts with the area of Israel/Palestine.

The LCP seems to differ markedly from this model. The building is characterised by a greater concentration of rooms, which reflects and partly explains the palace's lack of a main courtyard. Although large rooms – or courts – such as Rooms V and F are also present in the LCP, none of them reach the size of the EP's Courtyard I; the only possible exception might be Room B, whose eastern limit has not yet been unearthed; however, the information available does not suggest that Room B is a proper courtyard. Unlike the EP, the LCP does not have a large peripheral courtyard; this absence is probably due to the emergence of a new architectural tradition, perhaps the result of “natural” transformation of an MBA model, later re-adapted for palaces of the later centuries of the 2nd millennium BC (see below).

The absence of a large courtyard in the LCP is somehow counterbalanced by the presence of smaller courts in different sectors of the palace: they are distributed more or less evenly in the building plan and are, above all, internal, i.e. not in peripheral positions as in the EP. This arrangement, especially if seen in combination with their smaller size, might possibly be the consequence of a much larger number of diverse, separate sectors that together made up the LCP but were, at the same time, functionally independent. This development may ultimately have been the result of the slow transformation that converted a public building that symbolized hierarchy and prestige (KALLAS 2017) during the MBA, into the multi-functional structure of the LBA.

Architectural blocks and units

The EP shows another peculiar feature: the occurrence of at least two architectural units. The first is the reception unit (MATTHIAE 1990), in use for the

most important sector of the palace. This unit is composed of a larger, usually square, room (in this case Room AL) which constitutes the anteroom to the “throne” reception room (here Room M); a large door framed by one or two columns (probably timbers) gave access to the latter, where the visitor and the owner of the palace came face to face. The denomination “throne room” does not necessarily imply the presence of royalty in the EP; the figure of authority may have been a high-ranking personage belonging to the city's governing elite. In this respect, the discovery of a mace head in the deposits in Room M (IAMONI 2015, 461–462) is noteworthy and suggests that the owner of the EP was in the highest position of Qatna's administrative hierarchy.

The success of this room composition unit is demonstrated by its widespread use in contemporary MBA buildings that makes it a hallmark of second millennium palace architecture. The Western Palace of Ebla and the Yarim Lim Palace of Alalakh confirm the early MBA origin of this model: reception unit L3038 possesses the structure “vestibule + throne room, entered through a large columned doorway” and suggests, therefore, that the knowledge of this architectural plan was shared with the Northern Levant/Western Syria.

A further unit that appears in the EP is the three-room module, which features one large, usually rectangular room and two smaller square rooms on one of its long sides (Rooms B, AB and AC). This latter is less frequent in MBA palaces; at Alalakh we find a similar arrangement with Rooms 22, 23 and 24. Its presence in the EP may have been inherited from the pre-existing Southern Building, thus suggesting a private origin for this composition. In fact, the three-room unit mirrors the plan of the small domestic houses in use during the second millennium (AKKERMANS and SCHWARTZ 2003, 307–308): its occurrence in the Southern Building and later in the EP is a further element stressing the private sphere as a source of ideas/schematic modules for public palace architecture, and therefore a common origin for both types of building.

The layout of the LCP is characterised by the presence of architectural units and larger building blocks. Among the former, the audience/reception unit is also found (Rooms F and D), demonstrating the success of this unit which perhaps increased in frequency during the LBA. Parallels in this respect are found in Qatna and other LBA public buildings in the Levant.

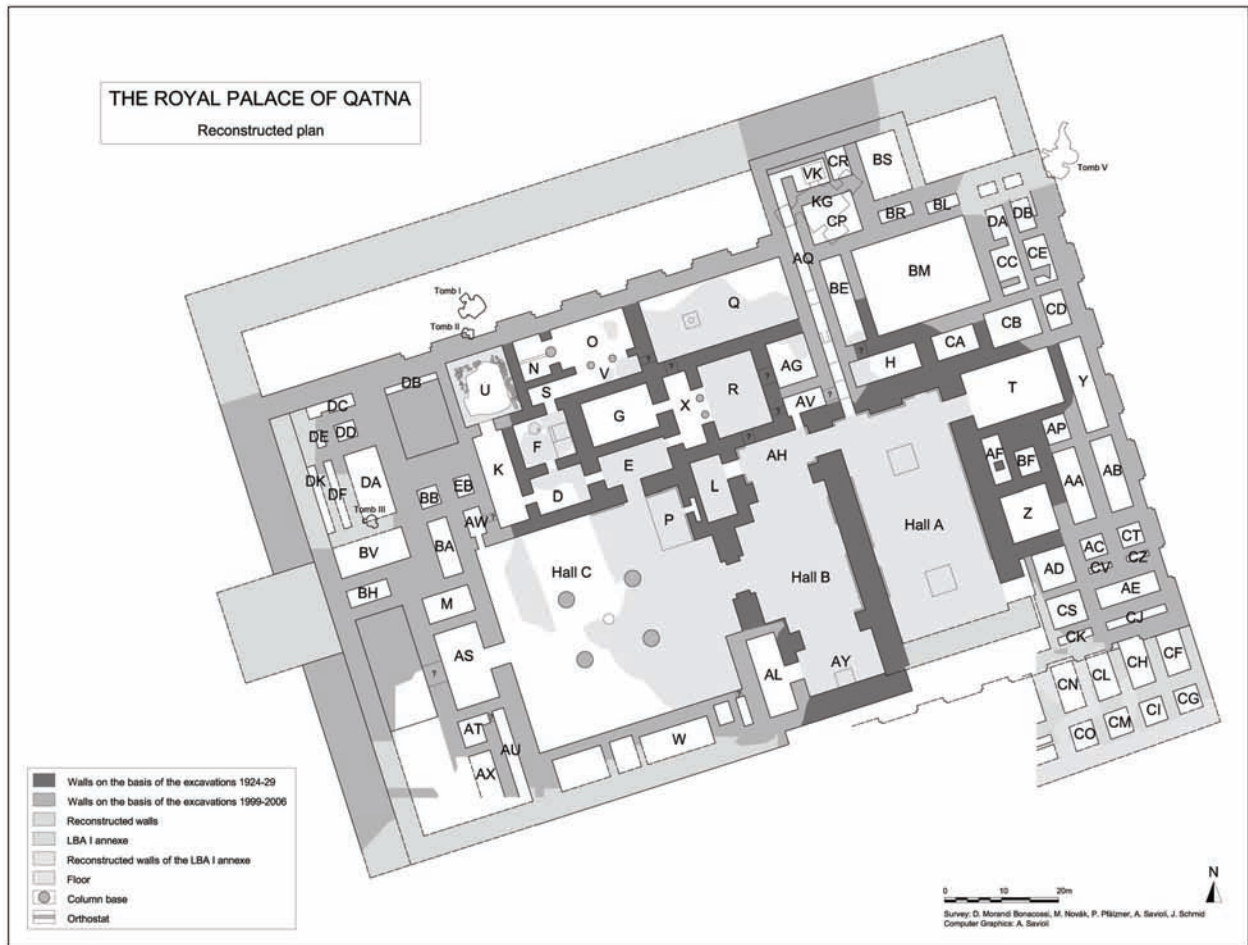


Fig. 12 The Royal Palace of Qatna

The RP of Qatna is one of the best examples (Fig. 12), since it shows the widespread use of this module in rooms O-V and X-R (PFÄLZNER 2007; 2019b, 126), but Rooms 24 and 23 of the Niqmepa Palace at Alalakh Level IV (WOOLLEY 1955), Rooms 64 and Courtyard IV and Courtyard I and Rooms 72–71 of the RP of Ugarit dated to the LB II (SCHAEFFER 1962, 9–17), and Rooms VII, VIII and IX of the Northern Palace at Ras Ibn Hani (BOUNNI et al. 1998, 116, Fig. 4) are also good examples. All these buildings attest to its spread during the LBA in the Northern Levant and confirm the profound connections between the MBA and LBA northern Levantine palace architecture.

The triple-room scheme appears in the LCP as well, with Rooms AM, BJ and AL; the LCP also shows a variation of this unit, which is larger in size with more rooms (Fig. 13). It is a four-room module, in which the larger component is actually an internal court (Court V), which is flanked along one long side by three smaller rooms (P, Q and U-A). This composition, though not present in the EP, seems also to be another standard arrangement

of Northern Levant Palaces, as an example is once more found at Alalakh, although in the MBA Palace of Yarim Lim (Rooms 9–13). There, however, it differs in size: the greater dimensions of the court permit four rooms to be placed along one of its long sides. This suggests that the original scheme of 1 long room + 2 small rooms was flexible and adaptable to different conditions and situations.

Regarding architectural blocks, the LCP constitutes an example of their employment in its symmetric layout around the central axis (Fig. 14), where the architectural units previously discussed occur.

The presence of these blocks contributes to give an internal “coherence” to the central axis that is clearly visible in the regular room arrangement and in the alignments of the peripheral and internal walls. This suggests their original “independence” from the LCP’s wider general plan, that may be explained by the putative antiquity of the central axis regarding the other wings/sectors of the building. The LCP may thus perhaps be com-



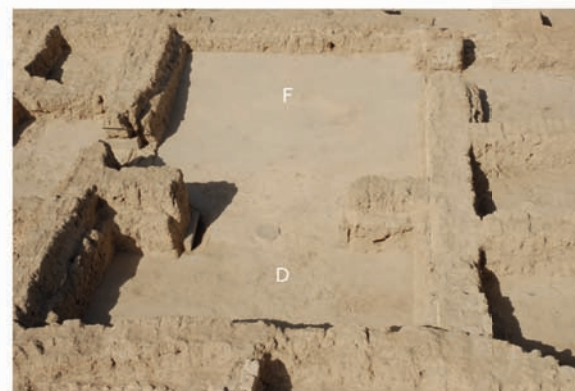
View of LCP from north; in foreground Rooms AM, BJ and AL



View of the central sector of LCP from east



View of the central southern sector from south-east



View of the reception suit of LCP from east

Fig. 13 View of the main axis/architectural block of the LCP: on the upper left the three room module, whereas on the upper and lower right the reception suit. The lower left photo shows the main central block of LCP.

posed of (and have been built in) different blocks/units (MORANDI BONACOSSO 2015, 362–363, though here the author focuses on the functional role of these blocks), each of which were attached to the building's core, or backbone, in a way perhaps substantially similar to the formation of the RP of Ugarit (SCHAEFFER 1962, 11–15). Each of these blocks probably had a particular purpose among the different and multiple functions of a LBA palace. Due to the ceremonial role of the reception unit and the attached Court V, the central axis probably maintained its original plan better than the other LCP wings, where reworking and possibly functional changes brought about significant modifications that may hamper our understanding of the original plan. The similarity between the LCP's central axis and Yarim Lim's Palace (in particular the rooms 1–9 sector) is evident and corroborates the idea of an earlier origin of the LCP (or at least of its central nucleus), that – on the basis of this similarity – may possibly date back to the very late MBA (Fig. 14). Yet, the use of this building block continued (and possibly became a hallmark) in the LBA: a possible example consists

of Rooms 26–35 and 63–67 of the RP of Ugarit, here highlighted in Fig. 15. These were already recognised as part of two enlargements (*Aile C* and *Aile D*) of the original main body of the RP, comparable with the extension of the Palace of Niqmepa (SCHAEFFER 1962, 12–13 and Fig. 28).

As far as the LCP is concerned, its similarity to the Palace of Yarim Lim may even reveal a pre-existing MBA public or private building that was later reused and modified to become the LCP of the LBA, in a very similar way to what was observed for the EP. The absence of soundings dug into the building's stratigraphy makes it impossible to verify this hypothesis, but the presence of significant pottery assemblages, in particular of bowls, dating to the late MBA–early LBA (IAMONI 2012, 125–126) may offer support.

MBA and LBA palaces in the Northern Levant: diagnostic traits and development

The features discussed above demonstrate the occurrence of a high degree of standardization, of which our understanding has been significantly

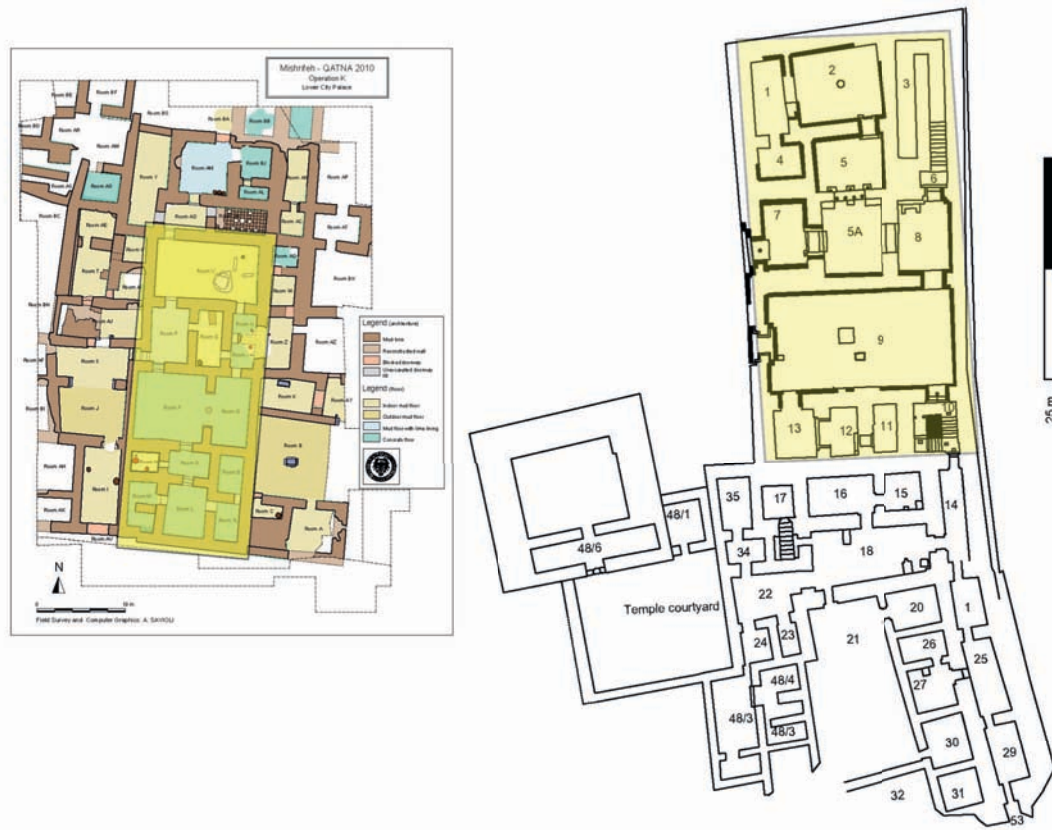


Fig. 14 The LCP and Yarim Lim Palace with highlighted the architectural blocks that form part of the two buildings

enriched by the recent discoveries made at Qatna; much still remains to be done, especially in order to understand the potential connection with southern Levantine tradition (see below). However, the present-day situation makes it possible to go in more detail into and to shed light on some traits that seem to be common to both the MBA and LBA architectural traditions of the Levant.

Among the three facets analysed, the identification of schematic building units and/or blocks – which seem to be adaptable to different contexts – is the most noticeable feature pointing to a common root for MBA and LBA palaces. The EP evidence in this respect is illuminating. The palace’s origin from pre-existing buildings whose function must have been different (private) from that of the EP (public) is of great importance, because it demonstrates the level of “adaptability” of the architectural units to different functional contexts. Their occurrence in the EP and LCP also shows that the architectural rules concerning the construction of public buildings, in this case palaces, did not change across the MBA–LBA periods.

The presence of these model blocks/units suggests that palaces were – and generally the planning of administrative buildings was – configured

through the insertion of different predefined blocks that altogether shaped the final outline of the building. As the EP suggests, such blocks must have been “flexible”, i.e. they could be used in different types of architecture (private or public). At the same time, this feature is particularly important since it explains the level of standardisation found in palace architecture in the Levant during the second millennium BC, and the possibility of reusing previous buildings with different functions (thus implying that the domestic and public spheres share a common root – which indeed we also find in the Akkadian term for palace, *ekallu(m)* that is “large/great house”, see WINTER 1993, 27; POSTGATE 2004, 195; see also ARCHI 2019 for the use of a different word in 3rd millennium texts from Ebla). It is noteworthy that a similar approach, defined “the Monumentalization of the domestic” (WRIGHT 2006, 61) has also been observed in the creation of Mycenaean Palaces.

The flexibility of this building technique is made particularly clear by an analysis of the position of these units. The reception suites, for example, are located in different sectors of the palaces discussed here: during the MBA in the central (e.g. the Western Palace of Ebla) or northern portion of

the palace (e.g. Qatna's EP and the Yarim Lim Palace of Alalakh VII); during the LBA in the northern and central sector of the LCP and RP, whereas at Alalakh IV it is found in the eastern sector. Such a varied distribution suggests that building units were modifiable on the basis of new ideas, specific requirements or particular problems, such as ground (bedrock) morphology and/or surface conditions (see also in this respect MATTHIAE 2013b, 236).

Though adaptable in their position and orientation, architectural units and blocks are thus the consequence (or the active agent) of palace design that was, to an extent, standardised and well-known across the entire northern Levant. This aspect might be further enhanced by the size of these buildings (Tab. 1): both palaces of Alalakh covered areas of more than 2000 sq. m. (the first 2700 sq. m. and the second 2000), in general agreement with the areas of the other palaces discussed above (the EP and LCP measure respectively 1800 and 2000 sq. m., though both – it must be stressed once more – are still incomplete). A general area of about 2000 sq. m. thus seems a reasonable average size for MBA and LBA palaces, though it is rather clear that local conditions (pre-existing buildings, surface regularity, morphology of underground soils and possible presence of bedrock, giving increased foundation stability) may have facilitated the building of larger structures, such as the Western Palace of Ebla, with an area of about 7500 sq. m. In some other cases, particular conditions may have hampered the building of large structures, such as Niqmepa's Palace and the EP. In both latter cases the pre-existing buildings affected the construction of the new palaces in two ways: they made the reuse of walls and rooms possible for the new palaces, but, at the same time, they obstructed the unimpeded planning of very large buildings.

The RP of Qatna, with an area of 16,000 sq. m. – excluding the LBA annex that was probably never completed (MORANDI BONACOSSÌ 2007, 2012) – does not fall within this roughly estimated range, which makes it a sort of outlier in the group of palaces examined here. Though it was probably built following a similar approach – i.e. via the defini-

tion of single blocks that may have been part of a coherent original plan (PFÄLZNER 2019a, 239; 2019b, 121–122) or added in a later phase, such as the LB annex (MORANDI BONACOSSÌ 2007, 229; see also “Unit 10” in PFÄLZNER 2019a, 242) – its status and symbolic role as the concrete representation of the prestige of the ruling dynasty of a regional capital (PFÄLZNER 2019a, 238; 2019b, 137–138) has generated an overemphasised building, whose huge size places it in a different class of palaces. It was a building with a powerful visual message, whose purpose was, first of all, to communicate to local and foreign visitors the power (and possibly the Amorite roots?) of the kings of Qatna: the reception suite (Hall A-C) may have been planned in this sense, in light of the frequent contacts occurring between Qatna and Mari (and to a wider extent, Mesopotamia, see KLENGEL 1992, 2000; ZIEGLER 2007). From this perspective may also be seen the occurrence of the four monumental columns (PFÄLZNER 2019c, 157–158), whose position in Hall C is absolutely innovative, with an origin that has been rightly located in the Levant (PFÄLZNER 2019a, 246; 2019b, 125). Furthermore, their similarity with the Mycenaean “Megaron” suggests that the four columns and the central basalt basin are a consequence of the contacts between Qatna and the Aegean world: Hall C would thus appear to have been an architectural feature capable of interacting with both East and West³. Qatna's RP was hence quite different in size and in function from the palaces considered of primary importance for the purpose of this article: it may be seen as the best evidence of the international role Qatna played, especially during the LBA, and consequently as a building that responded to the different stimuli to which Qatna was subjected during the latter half of the second millennium BC. This may also explain why other RPs (e.g. those of Alalakh Level VII and IV) never reached the size of that of Qatna: the smaller size of their kingdoms meant that such mega-buildings did not arise.

The dimension of the RP, EP and LCP may also point to the existence of a kind of “palace hierarchy”, or also perhaps a “double tradition” (Mesopotamian and Levantine) that characterised

³ PFÄLZNER (2019a, 246; 2019b, 125) suggests that Hall C may have been a model for Mycenaean societies that came into contact with the Qatna elite: this hypothesis is intriguing but perhaps rather hazardous. The evidence to hand concerning a “Megaron-like” room is, at present, poor (if

not almost limited exclusively to Qatna itself) in the Levant but widespread in Greece (e.g. Mycenae, Tiryns and Pylos, to cite the most outstanding examples). Thus in this case a more cautious approach seems necessary, until further pertinent data emerge.

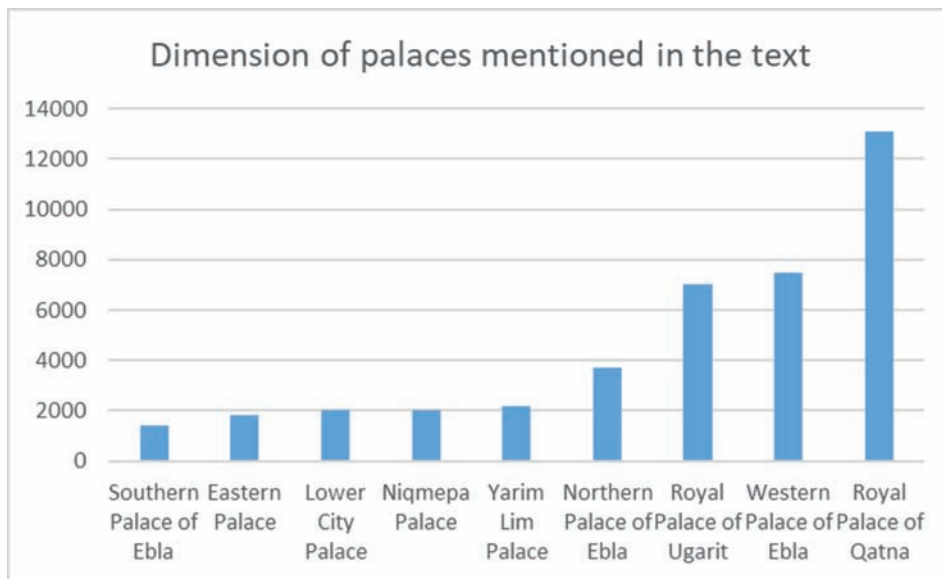


Table 4 Palace sizes

those centres, such as Qatna, where the emergence of new ruling dynasties such as the Amorite dynasty of Ishhi Adad, made use of an already existing architectural tradition with which they were acquainted.

A recent classification has proposed a further subdivision of Syrian palaces into three different types (PFÄLZNER 2019a; 2019b), although it is exclusively based on the differences that distinguish the formal layout of the representative units, with no attention to other aspects that contributed to the formalization of palace architecture in Mesopotamia and the Northern Levantine region in particular. The first two types reflect a subdivision of the classic throne room-celebration room scheme (MARGUERON 1982, 209–380; HEINRICH 1984, 41–44; 68; 81) on the basis of the presence/absence of lateral wings (or corridors?) that give an apparent tripartite plan to the internal celebration room and also a different function to each room (PFÄLZNER 2019a, 249–252; 2019b, 128–133). These two types (or sub-types) are of minor concern for the present work since they regard more specifically Mesopotamian or Mesopotamia-related buildings.

The third type concerns palaces from northwest Syria (PFÄLZNER 2019a, 252–255), proposing a definition already discussed in previous work (MATTHIAE 2002; MARCHETTI 2006; IAMONI 2015; KALLAS 2017), which, in this case, is based on the presence of the typical audience suite (MATTHIAE

1990). It broadly coincides with the Northern Levantine Palace analysed here; it is, however, restricted to the use of a specific type of reception unit (PFÄLZNER 2019b, 127) and in this sense lacks a wider and more complete consideration of the distinctive architectural traits that offer a deeper understanding of the emergence and development of this crucial building type. Nevertheless, in the broader context of 2nd millennium Syrian palaces this category contributes to the definition of an original palace tradition in the Northern Levant.

MBA and LBA palaces in the Northern Levant: a common genesis?

Whether the origin of this type of building is an entirely MBA innovation or the development an EBA tradition is a question that cannot be answered at present: the scant EBA evidence so far available (consisting mainly of Palace G of Ebla, for a summary of which see MATTHIAE 2010, 71–93; PINNOCK 2019) is insufficient for a full understanding of the possible third millennium BC origins of this great tradition. However, an examination of Palace G (fig. 16: 1) in search of evidence of the architectural traits highlighted above reveals the presence of two elements of continuity. The first is the emphasised use of a courtyard in Palace G of Mardikh IIB1⁴, where Room L2752, known as the Court of Audience, was dec-

⁴ It is impossible to classify Room L2752 as either court or courtyard because of its incomplete plan: however, the esti-

mate proposed by Matthiae (60 m long and 42 m wide, see MATTHIAE 2010, 381) would give the huge area of 2520 sq m.

orated by porches that added a rather spectacular visual effect (MATTHIAE 2013a; 2013b, pl. 4 and pl. 9). From a functional point of view, it must be stressed that L2572's primary use was the formal reception of visitors and/or elite personnel, and not the embellishment/monumentalization of the palace entrance.

At the same time, from an architectural perspective, the Palace G Court of Audience was located in a lateral sector of the palace area (MATTHIAE 2010, 79). The presence of the monumental staircase leading to internal quarters located westwards of L2752 points in this direction: a significant part of Palace G must be located further west, below the second millennium acropolis (MATTHIAE 2010, 71; 2013a: 184; PINNOCK 2019, 70–72).

Palace G's Court of Audience thus very likely had a double role: it was a room suitable first to host the diplomatic and economic tasks that were typical duties of the king of Ebla, and second for the reception of visitors from outside. The Court of Audience provides a first solid demonstration of the use of courtyards as architectural elements planned to highlight monumental palace entrances already during the third millennium. The superimposition of the later second millennium Mardikh IIIA phase has made the excavation of a larger sector of Palace G impossible: as a consequence, the reconstruction given above is hypothetical and needs to be tested with further case studies that at present are absent in the Levant.

In this respect, Matthiae has identified the third millennium palaces of Tell Chuera and Tell Bi'a/Tuttul located in the middle Euphrates and Balikh region as possible references for the definition of a common palace tradition during the EBA (MATTHIAE 2013b, 238–240 and references therein). Although a few parallels concerning especially reception quarters present in the area may be taken as evidence of architectural points of contact, these buildings' general overall plan differs substantially from Palace G, whose reconstructed plan is less unitary (MATTHIAE 2013b, 237). This may suggest the prevalence of a genuine Mesopotamian tradition in the Tell Bi'a and Tell Chuera palaces that is not otherwise recognisable in Palace G of Ebla. On the other hand, this uniform and compact plan is perfectly visible in the great "classic" tradition that developed in the Euphrates and Tigris basins during the second millennium BC.

The second element that suggests a third-millennium origin for the MB and LB palaces of the Northern Levant is the method used to design the

palaces' architectural layout. During the EBA at Ebla a technique has been envisaged that was defined by Matthiae as "integrative composition", consisting of the addition of blocks to pre-existing units for the assemblage of buildings. Such an approach would have resulted in an irregular plan significantly different from contemporaneous Mesopotamian palaces, and from second millennium palaces such as the Eastern Palace of Qatna and the Ebla Western Palace. However, the method bears strong similarities to the use of architectural units evidenced in Northern Levantine palaces of the MB and LBA. It thus seems likely that the technique might have been inherited by a pre-existing EB architectural school which was reworked during the early MB and improved during the middle MBA, as the appearance of standardised development seen in the Qatna, Alalakh and Ebla palace case studies demonstrates.

The Archaic Palace and the Northern Palace (fig. 16, 2–3) excavated at Ebla and dated to the very late EBA / early MBA (MATTHIAE 2006; 2013a: 194; 2013c: 293–294; 2019) may corroborate this reconstruction. Both buildings are characterised by irregular perimeters that are the results of plans made up of different blocks (MATTHIAE 2013b, 237). However, it should be stressed that the Northern Palace (which is built directly above the Archaic Palace, MATTHIAE 2013c, 293) features the three/four room module, (rooms L4038, L4150, L4027 and L4115), which, as we have seen, was a hallmark of MB II–III Northern Levantine palaces. The Archaic and Northern Palaces might therefore constitute a trait d'union between the EBA and MB – LB palace traditions in the Northern Levant.

On the basis of the evidence from the Archaic and Northern Palaces the origin of the great architectural tradition discussed here has been located in the MB IA (MATTHIAE 2019, 94). Here we propose viewing the early MBA as an experimental phase during which palace architecture re-used pre-existing knowledge as the basis of a new tradition that flourished during the MB IB – MB II (in agreement with MATTHIAE 2019, 94), with the emergence of palaces characterised by a standardised layout, similar room distribution and specific formal features, such as the use of peripheral courts. These latter elements became possible only when planning methods had been fully mastered, so as to eliminate irregularities and produce a standardised type of palace via the formalisation of the architectural features highlighted in this

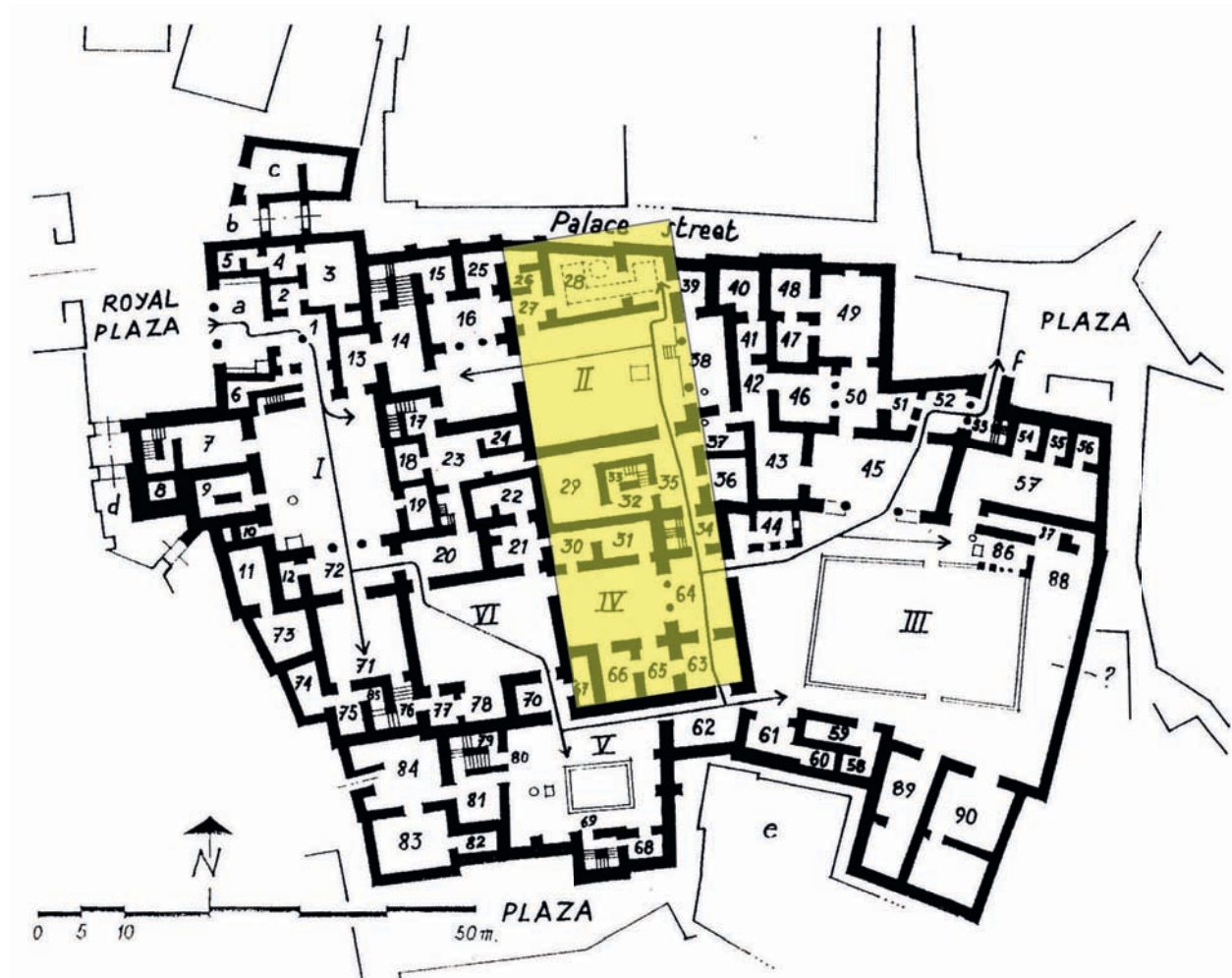


Fig. 15 The Royal Palace of Ugarit with the architectural block highlighted

text: this palace tradition, as reconstructed above, characterised Western Syria and the Northern Levant for c. 600 years – i.e. the entire MB II-III and, with the variations noted here, the following LBA.

Conclusions

The data gathered in this brief study are consistent with a common and, above all, local genesis for MBA and LBA palaces in the Northern Levant. Similar plans and internal layouts, and the presence of comparable architectural units and blocks are seen in buildings of both the MBA and LBA. This suggests the presence of a strong relationship between the architecture of the MBA and LBA and, consequently, the existence of a linear development of a unique architectural tradition that characterises the Northern Levantine region during the MBA and LBA. The occurrence of a coherent and standardised palace tradition has been noted for the MBA (MATTHIAE 1989; 2019,

contra PFÄLZNER 2019b, 127) and recently enriched by new data (IAMONI 2015): in this paper we propose that this architectural school extended, following a trajectory of continuous development, well into the LBA. There is, however, a problematic feature in this reconstruction: the position of the courtyard. We have seen that in the MB it was peripheral regarding the main body of the building. At the same time, its imposing size suggests that it played a significant part in the creation of a monumental building whose role would have been “visually” understood by the community.

This large peripheral courtyard seems to disappear from palace design in the LBA: the LCP and the Palace of Niqmepe do not have one. Yet, evidence from the last of these buildings can help to understand this change. The palace entrance, with its typical double-columned doorway (a likely precursor of the *hilani* model), is preceded by what Woolley called Courtyard 1. The position and orientation of this courtyard, however, reveal clearly that it was not part of the original plan of Niqme-

pa's Palace, but belonged more to the North-western Gate and the Castle sector, that, although considered part of Alalakh's Level IV by Woolley, was clearly part of a preceding Level IV subphase (FINK 2010). Hence Courtyard I was obtained by reusing the pre-existing structures to create an external open area that emphasized the main entrance to the building. This raises the possibility that during the LBA this peripheral feature was eventually transformed into an open area which was no longer part of the main body of the building, although, from a functional and symbolic point of view, it was still crucial for the success of its external appearance. It would be tempting to link this (partial) disappearance of the peripheral courtyard with the emergence of new building module prototypes that later, during the Iron Age, were to become classic components of palace architecture in the Northern Levant, i.e. the *bit hilani* (FRANKFORT 1952) mentioned already. Several buildings of the *bit hilani* type (e.g. the Lower Palace of Zincirli) show evidence of courtyards that are clearly no longer coherent and integrated parts of the original palace plan.

Such similarity strengthens again the relationship between LBA and Iron Age architecture and demonstrates the changing role of courtyards in Levantine palaces throughout the second and first millennium. Though the information available is again insufficient to verify this hypothesis, it is interesting to note that the RP of Ugarit also provides some similar evidence. Although its connection with the elite of one of the largest Levantine coastal cities makes it different from the palaces discussed here (in a similar way to the RP of Qatna mentioned above), it is noteworthy that its main entrance is preceded by an open area (the "Royal Plaza") that may have served for the monumental emphasis of the main palace gate (YON 2006, 36–37).

The palace played a crucial role in the social landscape of an urban settlement: as an agent and/or expression of the local elite and attached bureaucracy, the palace would have been recognised immediately as the manifestation of the local political leadership (KNAPP 2009, 47–49; KALLAS 2017). This explains the importance given to the entrance and the need to make it monumental. At the same time, palaces were hubs of socio-economic interconnections at local, regional and – depending on the type of urban settlement – supraregional levels and, thus, had to be identified as multifunctional centres. During a period of

increasing contacts, the only possible way to express these multiple roles was the creation of a repertoire of architectural elements (units/blocks and internal layout): together they had to constitute a "common visual language" comprehensible to local inhabitants as well as Northern Levantine societies. The inclusion of domestic modules in this repertoire was possibly an attempt to facilitate this process.

In this sense, it would be tempting to consider Northern Levantine palaces as one of the expressions of the "Western Amorite Koinè" (PINNOCK 2009, 79) in urban settlements, comparable to entirely new elements, such as the construction of ramparts, novel funerary rituals evidenced by the use of hypogea and the use of the temple *in antis* for religious practices (BURKE 2014a, 360–361; see, however, HOMSHER and CRADIC 2007 for a more critical review of the real occurrence of Amorite elements in the archaeological records). The innovation represented by the palaces examined here must, therefore, have been the result of a process of consolidation of local leaderships that occurred at bureaucratic/diplomatic, economic and "visual/material" levels. It would have strengthened the negotiation of Amorite identity, stimulating local and regional interaction – intended as a set of actions and consequent appropriate reactions (HAHN 2012) – among Levantine polities, in a similar way to other classes of artefacts, from pottery to luxury items (see e.g. the so-called "International Style" of the LBA; FELDMAN 2006) more usually employed by archaeologists to explore these phenomena. We believe that this work has offered substantial evidence that public architecture should be included in this line of research.

Future studies based on ongoing excavation projects in neighbouring areas may provide further data to corroborate and enrich this study and may also help to identify a regional boundary for the diffusion of this architectural tradition. The traits shared by the Palace of Megiddo Phase XII and the Syrian tradition have already been noted (NIGRO 1994, 26) and the progressive movement of the courtyard to a peripheral position at the end of the MBA has been observed as well (KEMPINSKI 1992). Ongoing research at Hazor may provide a clearer idea of the points of contact between the two areas during the MBA and possible changes during the LBA. Elsewhere, study of pottery production has suggested that the latter period was characterised by supraregional influences that, as a result of the wider range of contacts and interac-

tions of Levantine/Western Syrian societies with neighbouring areas (MAZZONI 2002), significantly expanded the limits of the original MBA ceramic region of the Orontes Valley (IAMONI 2012, 187): it will be interesting to verify whether this also occurred in the field of public architecture or whether it remained “anchored” more locally.

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Acknowledgments

This article was written in 2017 and 2018: I wish to thank the two anonymous reviewers, whose comments permitted the expansion and enrichment of some aspects of this work. I would also like to express my deepest gratitude to P. Matthiae and F. Pinnock for providing me with the plans of Palace G, the Northern Palace and the Archaic Palace. It goes without saying that any remaining mistakes must be ascribed to the author.

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