

## MITTANI EMPIRE AND THE QUESTION OF ABSOLUTE CHRONOLOGY: SOME ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

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### 1. INTRODUCTION\*\*

When the Hittite king Ḫattušili I started his forays to Northern Syria, a certain “King of the Hurrians” appeared as one of his main opponents. Nowadays it is widely accepted that this person must have been one of the first rulers of the political entity later known as “Mittani” (Fig. 1).<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the formation of this powerful kingdom must have taken place during the latest phase of the Old Babylonian Period and predated the sack of Babylon by the Hittites

under Ḫattušili’s grandson Muršili I by at least two generations (Fig. 2).<sup>2</sup> From an archaeological point of view there must be a significant overlap of what is called “Old Babylonian” and “Mittani” Periods in Northern Mesopotamia, although they appear in nearly all chronological charts as succeeding one the other with a distinctive break in between.

Still, until today archaeology has failed in establishing a stratigraphical and chronological sequence of late Old Babylonian and early Mittanian layers on sites in the core area of the kingdom, the so-called

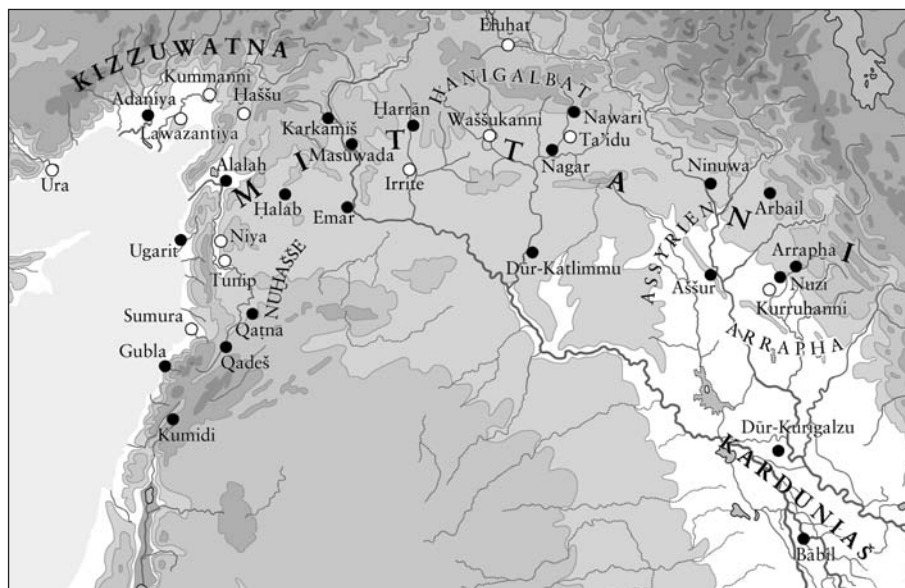


Fig. 1 Map of the Near East with the sites mentioned in the text

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<sup>1</sup> KLINGER 1988; KÜHNE 1999: 208; VAN KOPPEN 2004: 19ff. On the history of the Mittani Empire and its very beginnings, cf. WILHELM 1982 and KÜHNE 1999. The kingdom of “Mittani” is characterised by two significant features: First, the dominating linguistic group of this entity are the Hurrians, and second, the rulers bear exclusively non-Hurrians, in many cases definitively Indo-Arian throne-names. This second point distinguishes Mittani from all the other Hurrian units, either earlier or later. If van KOPPEN’s (2004: 23) proposal is

right, that the kingdom was a result of the acquisition of civil power by leaders of mercenaries, who derived from deportees, than the Indo-Arian influence may date back to the time in which these groups settled somewhere in or beyond the mountain ranges of the Zagros

<sup>2</sup> VAN KOPPEN (2004: 23) has argued on the base of Old Babylonian slave trade records, that the Hurrian kingdom of “Ḫanigalbat”, which later became known as “Mittani” may have constituted itself “at least 50 years before the end of the Old Babylonian period”. Side by side to this entity a first Kassite principality may have been established in Northern Mesopotamia (PODANY 2002: 50f.; VAN KOPPEN 2004: 22), although coming from the Zagros mountains (SASSMANNSHAUSEN 1999).

“Ḫabūr-triangle”.<sup>3</sup> One reason for that may be that none of the major urban capitals of the Mittani Empire has been excavated or investigated in a serious degree. Even the locations of its political centres Waššukanni,<sup>4</sup> Taʿidu<sup>5</sup> and Irride<sup>6</sup> are still uncertain. The only site in this region, which has revealed a spotlight on the transition phase of Old Babylonian and Mittani Period, is Tell Brāk, the ancient Naḡar.

Nevertheless, two outposts at the periphery of the empire provide the best archaeological evidence on Mittanian chronology: Nuzi (Yorḡan Tepe) in eastern Iraq and Alalaḡ (Tell Atchana) in the Hatay, both excavated in the 1920s to 40s!

It was just in the recent years that several sites have revealed new archaeological material dating to the Mittani period. In Umm al-Marra between Aleppo (Ḫalab) and Emar layers were explored, which contained sherds of Nuzi-Ware and a cuneiform tablet dated to the reign of Šuttarna II with the impression of the seal of Sauštatar.<sup>7</sup> Another impression of the same seal was discovered in Tall Bazi at the Middle

Euphrates.<sup>8</sup> Mittani layers were furthermore excavated at Ekalte (Tall Munbaqa),<sup>9</sup> Emar<sup>10</sup> and Terqa<sup>11</sup> alongside the Euphrates. The data of these sites do not yet bring us forward in the question of absolute chronology<sup>12</sup> but may do so in the future.

Thus, the contribution of Mittani to the discussion about absolute chronology<sup>13</sup> seems to be quite limited although it is one of its keys. Some recent re-evaluations of the material culture of both sites can help to get some indications for the length of the Mittani Period.

## 2. NUZI

The middle size town of Nuzi (Fig. 3) belonged to the kingdom of Arrapḡa (modern Kirkūk), a vassal to the Mittani Empire in the area east of the Middle Tigris close to the Zagros ranges. The excavations concentrated on the Upper Town, the so-called *kerḡu*.<sup>14</sup>

Here, a palace, a temple, a storehouse and three quarters with private dwellings were explored. Stratigraphical sequences were counted separately in

	Mittani	Ḫatti	Aššur	Egypt
~ 1540 BC	“King of the Hurrians”	Ḫattušili I		
~ 1500 BC	Kirta (?)	Muršili I		
	Šuttarna I (?)	Ḫantili		Thutmosis I
	Parrattarna	Zidanta		
	Parsatatar			Thutmosis III
~ 1420 BC	Sauštatar	Ḫattušili II		Amenophis II
	(Parrattarna II ?)			
~ 1400 BC	Artatama I	Tutḡalia II		Thutmosis IV
	Šuttarna II	Arnuwanda I		Amenophis III
	Artaššumara			
~ 1360 BC	Tušratta	Šuppiluliuma I	Aššur-uballiḡ I	Amenophis IV (= Akhetaten)
	(daneben: Artatama II und Šuttarna III)			Tutankhamen
	Šattiwaza			
~ 1290 BC	Šattuara I	Muršili II	Adad-nērāri I	
	Wasašatta			
~ 1240 BC	Šattuara II	Ḫattušili III	Shalmaneser I	Ramses II
~ 1200 BC	Atal-Teššub	Tutḡaliya III (IV)	Tukulti-Ninurta I	

Fig. 2 List of known Mittani rulers and synchronisms with Ḫatti, Aššur and Egypt (after: WILHELM 1982 and KÜHNE 1999)

<sup>3</sup> There are just a few sites on which a sequence is attested at all (an overall comparative stratigraphy is given by PFÄLZNER 1995: 259, Abb. 162).

<sup>4</sup> Most likely to be identified with Tall Faḡḡariya; cf. KÜHNE 1995: 208, CANCIK-KIRSCHBAUM 1996: 33 (see map fig. 7 on p. 34) and GOREM *et al.* 2004: 44.

<sup>5</sup> Probably to be identified with Tall al-Ḫamīdiya (cf. HAAS and WÄFLER 1985; doubted by RÖLLIG 1997: 282).

<sup>6</sup> To be localised most likely somewhere at the upper Balih.

<sup>7</sup> SCHWARTZ *et al.* 2003: 349ff., fig. 34.

<sup>8</sup> Kind information by Dr. Adelheid Otto, Munich.

<sup>9</sup> MAYER 2002.

<sup>10</sup> FINKBEINER / SAKAL 2003.

<sup>11</sup> PODANY 2002; ROUAULT 2004.

<sup>12</sup> PRUZSINSKY 2004.

<sup>13</sup> On the recent discussion about absolute chronology cf. GASCHE *et al.* 1998 and a number of articles published in *Akkadica* 119–120 (2000) and HUNGER / PRUZSINSKY 2004. See furthermore READE 2001. Most of the scholars prefer either the low or the ultra-low chronology.

<sup>14</sup> STARR 1939; NOVÁK 1999; WILHELM and STEIN 1998–2001.



Fig. 3 Plan of the inner town of Nuzi (from: STARR 1939, Plan 13).

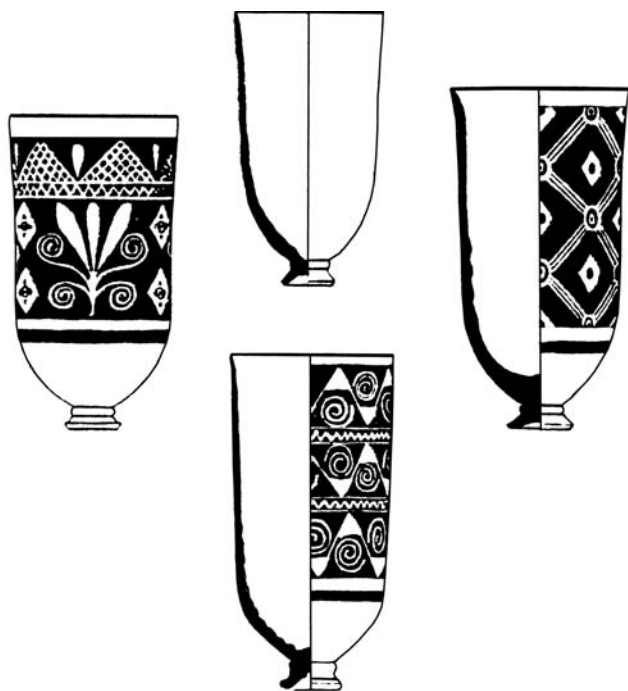


Fig. 4 So-called “Nuzi-Ware” found in Nuzi, Stratum II  
(from: STEIN 1984: 49, 10–13)

each area. The best-investigated phase was Stratum II of the town with the contemporary Temple A. The characteristic pottery was the proper “Nuzi-Ware” with its white-on-black painted decoration (Fig. 4).<sup>15</sup> Although thousands of cuneiform tablets were discovered, only one direct historical connection could be established so far: It is the seal of the Mittani king Sauštatar that provides us with a *terminus post quem*. However, the duration of Stratum II can be assigned to four or five generations, a period of about 100 years.<sup>16</sup> An evaluation of the chronology of Stratum

II by Diana Stein has shown that it was destroyed around 1340 BC, so that its beginnings can be dated approximately around 1440 BC.<sup>17</sup>

The material culture of Stratum III, lying directly below Stratum II, shows a close relation to the material of the following layer. The most significant exception is the “Nuzi-Ware”, which is not attested in Stratum III at all.<sup>18</sup> This could mean, that this ware probably was not developed before the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The beginning of Stratum III must be dated to the second half, probably to the last quarter, of the 16<sup>th</sup> century BC, if its duration was equivalent to that of the succeeding Stratum II.

The underlying Stratum IV can most probably be linked with Temple F.<sup>19</sup> Due to the objects found in Temple F, this phase is dated to the Old Babylonian Period. This is confirmed by the close relationship of the pottery found in Stratum IV and Stratum VII, the latter definitively belonging to the latest phase of the Neo-Sumerian or the earliest phase of the Old Babylonian Period.<sup>20</sup> There is, however, also some tradition in the material culture from Stratum IV to III, thus indicating a general continuity of occupation.

The transition of Old Babylonian to Mittani Period in Nuzi is characterised by the massive infiltration of Hurrian speaking persons on the one hand and the re-naming of the town from *Gasur* to *Nuzi* on the other hand. Nevertheless, architecture indicates an unbroken development:<sup>21</sup> The palace, for example, connects elements of Old Babylonian palace architecture with those of the Middle and Neo Assyrian type. The layout of the Temple shows no evident change from 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium on to its very end. And the houses follow some old-fashioned layout patterns.

PERIOD	DWELLING AREA	TEMPLE AREA	PIT L 4	MATERIAL
Middle Assyrian	Stratum I			
Mittani (~1440–1340)	Stratum II ↔ Temple A ↔ Pavement I			Nuzi-Ware, Archives
Early Mittani	Stratum III	Temple B–E		no Nuzi-Ware but related Material
Old Babylonian	Stratum IV	Temple F	↑	↑
Neo-Sumerian	Stratum V–VII Stratum VIII	Temple G	Pavement IIA Pavement IIB	<b>Old Babylonian Tablet Ur III-Tablet</b>
Akkadian			Pavement III	Old Akkadian Tablets

Fig. 5 Stratigraphical sequence in Nuzi with proposed absolute dating

<sup>15</sup> On Nuzi-Ware cf. STEIN 1984; HROUDA 1989; PFÄLZNER 1995: 238ff.; POSTGATE *et al.* 1997: 54f.; OATES *et al.* 1997: 67f.; and the references cited there.

<sup>15</sup> WILHELM and STEIN 1998–2001: 636f.

<sup>17</sup> STEIN 1989.

<sup>18</sup> STEIN 1984.

<sup>19</sup> WILHELM and STEIN 1998–2001: 641; OPIFICIUS 1961: 18f.

<sup>20</sup> STARR 1939: 203; WILHELM and STEIN 1998–2001: 641.

<sup>21</sup> NOVÁK 1999.

Therefore, a *hiatus* can be excluded and a short chronological distance from Old Babylonian to Mittani Period can be taken for sure. This leads us to the following stratigraphical and chronological scheme (Fig. 5).

Even if there is no significant overlap of the Old Babylonian Period (in Babylonia) and the beginning of the Mittani Period (in Nuzi and other places in the North), as it should be taken in account, the transition between both phases should be dated not earlier than the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

### 3. NAGAR

The site of Tell Brāk is situated at the lower Ġagğag in the so-called “Ĥabūr-triangle”, the heartland of the

Mittani kingdom, also known as “Hanigalbat”.<sup>22</sup> It can be identified with the ancient city of Nagar,<sup>23</sup> flourishing in the late 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium, but still of some importance during the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium as well.<sup>24</sup>

Tell Brāk has been the subject of archaeological investigations during the 30s and from the 80s until today. A sequence of nearly uninterrupted occupation is attested from the 3<sup>rd</sup> or even the late 4<sup>th</sup> until the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC. However, the excavations could not provide a profitable contribution to the discussion of absolute chronology of early Mittani.

In Area HH at the northern edge of the mound, a stratigraphical sequence was identified, that distinguishes ten building levels from the Old Babylonian to

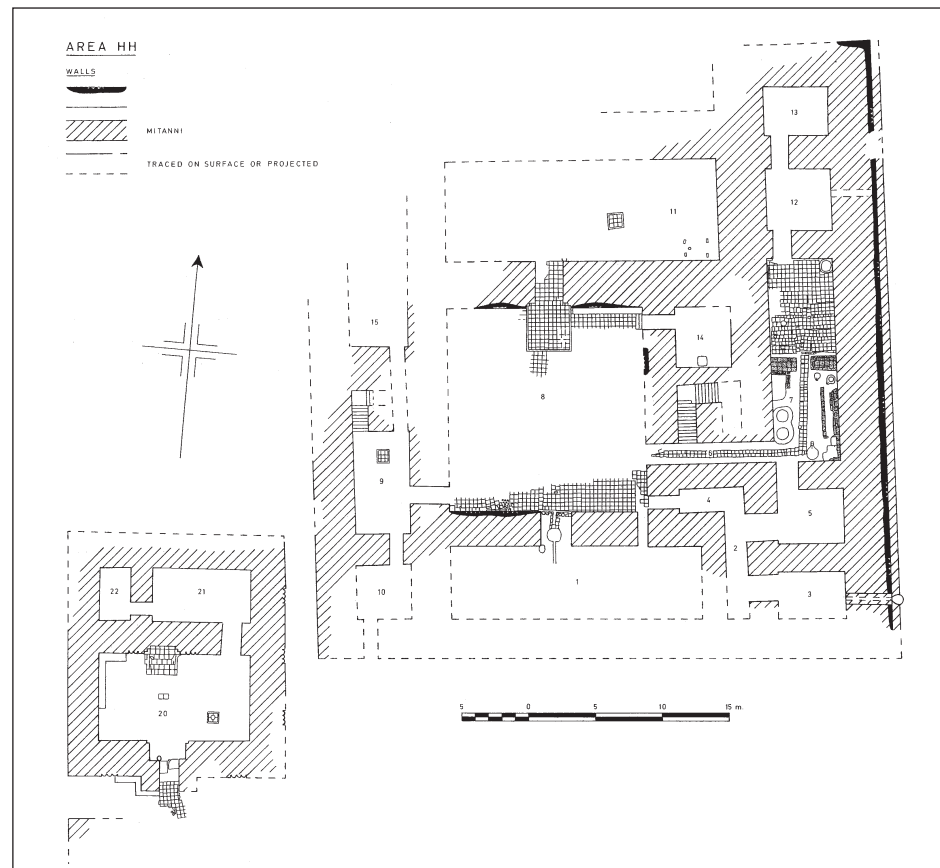


Fig. 6 Mittanian palace and temple in Nagar (Tell Brāk), Area HH (from: OATES et al. 1997: 4, fig. 12)

<sup>22</sup> On the distinction of Ĥanigalbat and Mittani cf. KÜHNE 1999.

<sup>23</sup> MATTHEWS and EIDEM 1993; EIDEM, FINKEL and BONECHI 2001.

<sup>24</sup> It should not be mixed up (as done by STEINKELLER 1998, 95) with another, close-by town, which was named Nawar in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC and Nabula in the Neo-Assyrian period (KESSLER 1978–79 and 1999) and is to be

localised at Girnavaz close to the modern city of Nusaybin (ERKANAL 1988; DONBAZ 1988; RÖLLIG 1998). This is most likely the Nawar, to which the titulature of the Hurrian king Atal-Šēn, ruler of Urkeš and Nawar in the late 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium, refers (WILHELM 1982: 12ff.; SALVINI 1998, 108ff.). It was an important worship centre of the Storm God. On the localisation of Urkeš at modern Tall Mozān cf. BUCCELLATI 1998, BUCCELLATI and KELLY-BUCCELLATI 1999.

the Middle Assyrian period.<sup>25</sup> Besides that, some domestic structures, a palace and an adjacent temple were examined (Fig. 6). All of them were built in Level 6, in which the “Nuzi-Ware” appears for the first time and is associated with “Hābūr-ware”.<sup>26</sup> Both types of pottery are attested together in the following Level 5 as well, while in the pre-dating Levels 8 and 7 just pure Middle Bronze Age material was found, represented e.g. by distinct bronze pins or by comb incised decoration on ceramic jars and pots. Therefore, Level 7 and probably also Level 8 may represent the transition or overlapping period between what is

called “Old Babylonian” and “Mittani” in Northern Mesopotamia.<sup>27</sup> Level 10 is ascribed to the time of Assyrian king Šamši-Adad I based on the objects.

The excavators date the foundation of the palace to the late 16<sup>th</sup> or early 15<sup>th</sup> century. But in contrast to this opinion and judging from the first appearance of Nuzi-beakers in Nuzi itself (see above), the beakers found in the construction phase point to a date not before the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century BC. Level 6 should then be correlated more or less to Stratum II at Nuzi.

Several cuneiform tablets were discovered within



Fig. 7 Plan of Alalah (from: WOOLLEY 1955)

<sup>25</sup> cf. OATES, OATES and McDONALD 1997: 35, Table 1 and 2.

<sup>26</sup> cf. OATES, OATES and McDONALD 1997: 68.

<sup>27</sup> This is confirmed by the fact, that the ceramic material both from Tell Rimaḥ and Tell Brāk does not allow to distinguish between painted wares of “Late Old Babylonian” and “Early Mittani” levels (cf. OATES, OATES and McDONALD 1997: 64).

<sup>28</sup> cf. EIDEM in: OATES, OATES and McDONALD 1997: 39–46, documents 4 and 5.

<sup>29</sup> WILHELM 1982: 40f.; KÜHNE 1999: 218.

<sup>30</sup> COLBOW 2000: 119f.

the palace. Two legal documents are dated precisely to the reigns of the Mittani kings Artasšumara and Tušratta,<sup>28</sup> both sons of king Šuttarna II, ruling in the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century BC.<sup>29</sup> The glyptic associated with the tablets is of pure Mittani style.<sup>30</sup>

#### 4. ALALAH

Alalah was the capital of the minor kingdom of Mukiš at the lower Orontes River (Fig. 7). During the Old Babylonian Period it belonged to the powerful kingdom of Yamhad with its capital Aleppo and was ruled by a *secundogenitur* of the royal house of Yamhad. After the sack of Aleppo by the Hittites under Mušili I the city of Alalah, just like all the other territories of former Yamhad, got under the control of the newly established Mittani empire. The events during this period of changing political constellations are known from the so-called “autobiography” of king Idrimi of Alalah, written on his famous statue.<sup>31</sup> Idrimi was the youngest son of the last independent king of Aleppo who lost his throne after a certain *mašiktu* “event”.

In the stratigraphical sequence of Alalah two layers are well dated through archives: Level VII of the late Old Syrian Period (equivalent to Old Babylonian Period in Mesopotamia), and Level IV of the developed Mittani period. Both can be associated with rulers or events attested in other sources as well: Level VII was founded by the kings of Yamhad after the time of the Mari-archives and destroyed most probably by Ḫattušili I during his first campaign to Syria, one or two generations before the fall of Babylon. Level IV was established by king Niqmepa, son of the mentioned Idrimi.<sup>32</sup>

Since the Levels VI and V are “sandwiched” by these two levels it is of high interest to estimate their duration. One problem is that none of them provided us with cuneiform texts. In addition, architecture is preserved in a very bad and fragmentary way. Is this just bad luck of the excavations or does this mean, that these two levels were just short-living interfaces? A possible answer was given by five very thorough studies: by Marie-Henriette Gates (1982), Marlies Heinz (1992), Wilfred van Soldt (2000),

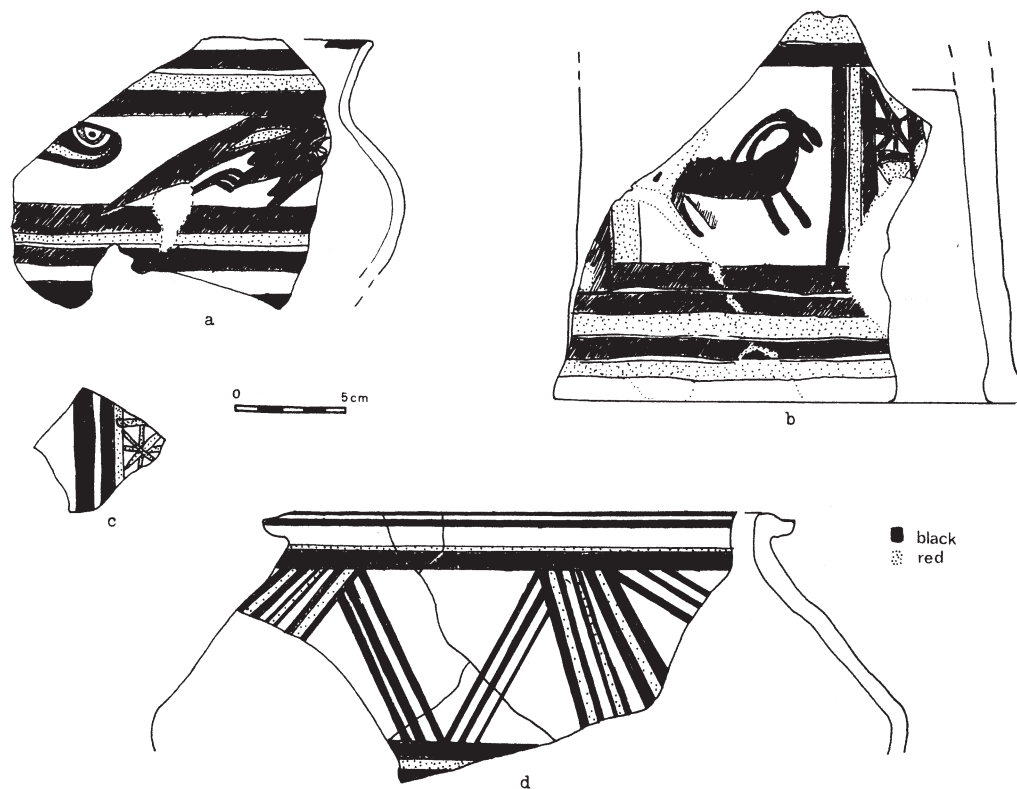


Fig. 8 “Bichrome Ware” found in Levels VI and V at Alalah (from: GATES 1981: 20, Ill. 5)

<sup>31</sup> Cf. DIETRICH and LORETZ 1981; KLENGEL 1981; MAYER-OPIFICIUS 1981.

<sup>32</sup> And not, as often suggested (ZEEB 2004: 87), by Idrimi (cf. BERGOFFEN 2005).

LEVEL	CERAMIC	KINGS	EVENTS	PROPOSED DATE
VII	Middle Bronze Age Material		Destruction by Ḫattušili I (?)	1645–1540 BC
VI	Cypriote Bichrome-Ware and Local (Syrian) Ware in Level VII-tradition		End: <i>mašiktu</i> in Ḫalab (Muršili I ?)	1540–1499 BC
Va		Idrimi ↓	Interface and Reign of Idrimi	1499–1450 BC
Vb			End: campaign of Thutmosis III (?)	
IV	Cypriote White-Slip-II-Ware, Nuzi-Ware	Niqmepa	Destruction by Šuppiluliuma	1450–1340 BC

Fig. 9 Stratigraphical sequence in Alalaḫ with proposed absolute dating (dating based on VAN SOLDT 2000)

Frank Zeeb (2001), and most recently by Celia Bergoffen (2005).

M.-H. Gates examined the archaeological evidence and stressed that only in Levels VI and V the so-called Cypriote “Bichrome-Ware” (Fig. 8) is to be found.<sup>33</sup> In Level IV it is replaced by “White-Slip-II-Ware” and “Nuzi-Ware”, both formerly not attested. The common ware is in close connection to Middle Bronze Age pottery. As a result of her analysis Gates concluded that the material clearly points to a lifespan of both levels of little more than a century. Thus she argued for a short absolute chronology. She was followed by M. Heinz’s analysis of the ceramic found in Level VII.<sup>34</sup> Heinz pointed to the close relations of this material to such one found in very early Mittani levels on sites like Hadidi. This should be taken as a clear indication for a close chronological connection. C. Bergoffen re-examined once again the Cypriot pottery from Alalaḫ in connection to all available archaeological and philological data.<sup>35</sup> Also her results confirm the low chronology in most aspects.

Since these three studies base mostly on archaeological data, W. van Soldt and F. Zeeb paid most of their attention to philological and epigraphic data.<sup>36</sup> Independently of each other they both even reduced the proposed lifespan of Levels VI and V and concluded that the ultra-low absolute chronology of

H. Gasche<sup>37</sup> should be preferred. In contrast to Zeeb, van Soldt argues that the so-called *mašiktu* in Ḫalab should be identified with the destruction of the city by Muršili I. Therefore the beginning of the reign of Idrimi in Alalaḫ should be connected rather with Level Va than Level Vb (as preferred by H. Gates before).

Taking all these studies in account, we can, in my point of view, come to the following and most convincing chronological correlation and interpretation of the Alalaḫ sequence (Fig. 9):<sup>38</sup> Level VII was destroyed by Ḫattušili I<sup>39</sup> and directly followed by Level VI. The end of Level VI was marked possibly by the siege or threat of the town by Muršili I, grandson of Ḫattušili, about 30 or 40 years later.<sup>40</sup> This event could have been the same one, which was mentioned as *mašiktu* in the inscription of Idrimi.<sup>41</sup> In Level V two phases can be distinguished: Va and Vb. The change of the architecture between both phases may have been the result of building activities of Idrimi during his long reign. The reconstruction of the city under Idrimi’s son Niqmepa, which mark the beginning of Level IV, may have happened more or less in the time of the first forays of Thutmose III in Syria around 1450 BC.<sup>42</sup>

This chronological framework with the dating of Idrimi as one of the immediate successors of the Old

<sup>33</sup> GATES 1982. In a later publication, the author follows the ultra-low chronology of GASCHE et al. 1998; cf. GATES 2000: 78.

<sup>34</sup> HEINZ 1992.

<sup>35</sup> BERGOFFEN 2005.

<sup>36</sup> VAN SOLDT 2000; ZEEB 2001 and 2004.

<sup>37</sup> GASCHE et al. 1998.

<sup>38</sup> For a different, but in my eyes not convincing, reconstruction of the chronology of Alalaḫ cf. EDER 2003.

<sup>39</sup> ZEEB 2004: 86f.

<sup>40</sup> The timespan between the sack of Alalaḫ under Ḫattušili I and the siege of Ḫalab under Muršili I is difficult to estimate (VAN SOLDT 2000: 108f.; ZEEB 2004: 86).

<sup>41</sup> One problem connected with this suggestion is the chronology of Kizzuwatna: Idrimi is attested as contemporary of

Pilliya of Kizzuwatna (AIT 3) who has made a treaty with Hittite king Zidanta (KUB XXXVI 108), most probably the second bearer of this name (DI MARTINO 2004: 36f.). There ruled approximately eight (!) kings between Muršili I and Zidanta II (cf. WILHELM 2004) of uncertain duration. It is not impossible but quite unlikely that Idrimi’s reign could overspan this time.

<sup>42</sup> On the possible synchronism of Idrimi, Parratarna and Thutmosis III cf. REDFORD 2003: 229ff. and HELCK 1971: 117f. That the Egyptians reached the territory of Alalakh at this time is proven by the mentioned place names (ASTOUR 1963). Most likely Thutmose has invaded the territory of Alalakh during his 33<sup>rd</sup> year in his 8<sup>th</sup> campaign (REDFORD 2003: 220ff.). I thank Alexander Ahrens for this information.





Fig. 10 Seal of king Idrimi of Alalakh, found in Level IV (from: COLLON 1975: 99, fig. 189) Scale 2:1

Syrian kings of Ḥalab would explain, e.g., why his seal is of pure Old Syrian style in the tradition of the glyptic from Level VII and shows no Mittani influence at all (Fig. 10).<sup>43</sup>

##### 5. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE STRATIGRAPHY AND CHRONOLOGY OF NUZI, NAGAR AND ALALAH

Let us now take a look at the stratigraphical and chronological correlation of Nuzi, Nagar and Alalakh. This must primarily base on the analysis of first appearance of equivalent features like seals and pottery.

A thorough study by Diana Stein has helped to establish the detailed relation of Stratum II in Nuzi and Level IV in Alalakh:<sup>44</sup> At least the beginning of both levels should be more or less contemporary, since both are characterised by the first appearance of “Nuzi-Ware”. The construction of the Mittani palace at Nagar (Level 6) dates to the same chronological horizon.

Levels VI and V in Alalakh should be more or less contemporary with Stratum III at Nuzi. Both predate the appearance of “Nuzi-Ware” and “White-

Slip-II-Ware” but belong to the same material horizon as their following layers. That means, that both can be labelled “Middle Syrian” or “Mittani” in a pure chronological sense of these terms. The same could be taken in account for Nagar Level 7, although too few material was discovered there to judge.

Historical considerations lead to the result, that the Mittani Empire was already established and developed in the time of Nuzi Stratum III and Alalakh Level V or even Level VI. Its formation must have taken place in Northern Mesopotamia simultaneous to the final phases of Nuzi Stratum IV, Alalakh Level VII and therefore also Nagar Level 8, all of them clearly to be labelled “Old Babylonian” due to their material culture.

If we now try to calculate the lifespan of Nuzi Stratum III and Alalakh Levels VI and V, they both cannot exceed over more than 100 years because of several reasons. That is, roughly speaking, the chronological distance between Ḥattušili I and Sauštatar of Mittani, the latter attested both in Alalakh Level IV and Nuzi Stratum II. This indicates that there are good reasons to prefer a short or even an ultra-short chronology (Fig. 11).

##### 5. QAṬNA

Some observations made in the recent re-excavation of the Bronze Age palace at Qaṭna can possibly support a low chronology.<sup>45</sup> The city is situated close to the Orontes River near the modern city of Ḥoms. It was the capital of a major kingdom in the Old Syrian Period and became a vassal to the Mittani Empire during the Middle Syrian Period.<sup>46</sup>

The re-examination of the chronology of the royal palace of Qaṭna shows that it was established in the middle of the Old Syrian Period (early MBA II), that is to say, more or less, during the time of the Mari archives, and was destroyed in the time of the

NUZI	NAGAR	ALALAH	CERAMIC	MESOPOTAMIAN CHRONOLOGY	PROPOSED DATE
II	6	IV	Nuzi-Ware, White-Slip II	<i>Mittani</i>	~ 1450/40–1340 BC
III	7	VI–V	Bichrome (Al.), Ḥābūr (Ng.)	Late Old Babylonian / Early Mittani	~ 1540–1450/40 BC
IV	8	VII	MBA II	Late Old Babylonian	~ 1650–1540 BC

Fig. 11 Comparative stratigraphy of Nuzi, Nagar and Alalakh with proposed approximate dating

<sup>43</sup> COLLON 1975: 99, Cat. No. 189.

<sup>44</sup> STEIN 1989.

<sup>45</sup> On the excavations in Qaṭna cf. DU MESNIL DU BUISSON 1935, AL-MAQDISSI 2001, AL-MAQDISSI *et al.* 2002, MORANDI

BONACOSSO *et al.* 2003. On the German excavations of the palace in particular cf. NOVÁK and PFÄLZNER 2000, 2001, 2002 and 2003.

<sup>46</sup> On the general history of the city cf. KLENGEL 2000.

Hittite king Šuppiluliuma I in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>47</sup> The architecture of the palace in many aspects followed Old Babylonian patterns. As far as we know at present stage of investigations, even the floors of the building were in use during its complete lifespan. Even if we take in account that they consisted of very hard and long-living lime-mortar, the duration of their use could not have been too long.

The material found in the layers of the destruction phase reminds strongly of that of Alalaḫ Level IV, because here it is represented two “Nuzi”-beakers and three “White-Slip-II”-vessels.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, many groups of objects show a continuous development during the time of existence of the palace. This is, e. g., the case with the ceramics and is most of all obvious with the well represented glyptic.<sup>49</sup>

Most of the sealings certainly date to the Old Syrian Period because of stylistic and iconographic reasons. But it is difficult to distinguish between older and younger examples since even the sealings found on the cuneiform tablets dating to the 14<sup>th</sup> century nearly show no elements different to those of the Old Syrian glyptic style.<sup>50</sup>

Hence the material culture of Qatna also seems to indicate a relatively short chronological distance

from the time of the Mari archive to that one of the Amarna archive.

## 7. SUMMARY

This very brief archaeological evaluation of the comparative stratigraphy and chronology may help to estimate the duration of the Mittani Empire. Historical records show that it must have been founded one or two generations before the sack of Babylon and thus before the transition from Middle to Late Bronze Age. Its end as independent realm can be dated to the time of Hittite king Šuppiluliuma I in the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century BC.

Only few sites situated in the area of the Mittani Empire provide stratigraphical sequences covering the formation period and the complete lifespan of the Mittani empire: Nuzi, Nagar, Alalaḫ and Qatna. Nevertheless, they reveal an important key to the answer of absolute chronology. The examination of their material culture leads to the conclusion that there is clear evidence on a short chronology system. We can eliminate both the Middle and the High Chronology and must therefore choose only between the Low and the Ultra-Low Chronology. This would help us to erase one of our fictional “Dark Ages”.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Cf. NOVÁK 2004 and RICHTER 2002 and 2003.

<sup>48</sup> NOVÁK 2004: 308f., figs. 9 and 10.

<sup>49</sup> EISEN-NOVÁK 2002 and EISEN-NOVÁK *apud* NOVÁK and PFÄLZNER 2003.

<sup>50</sup> EISEN-NOVÁK in: NOVÁK and PFÄLZNER 2003: 152ff.

<sup>51</sup> One of the few strong opponents to the ultra-low chronology in recent years is Hittitology (cf. BECKMAN 2000). Its argumentation bases only on the estimation of the average duration of generations of Hittite kings. In its view the ultra-low chronology provides too little time for each generation. But how weak these arguments are, is demonstrat-

ed by the generation chart published by Beckman himself: In several cases it is not at all clear, how the relation between predecessor and successor was (see e.g. BECKMAN 2000: 26, Chart 1, No. 5, 9, 12 etc.). If we erase doubtful candidates for own generations like e.g. Generations V (Zidanta I), VIII (Alluwamna) and X (Zidanta II) we can count 16 instead of 19 generations in total and therefore the whole argumentation is not striking any more. It must be stressed that the Hittite evidence is of no significance to the question of absolute chronology (cf. now WILHELM 2004)!

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