

Royal Funerary Practices and Inter-regional Contacts in the Middle Bronze Age Levant: New Evidence from Qatna¹

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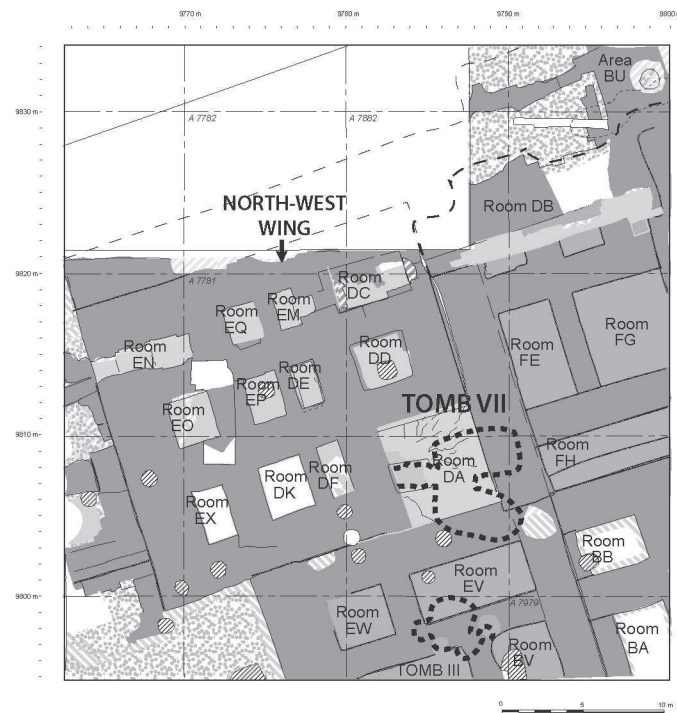


Figure 1: The North-West Wing of the Royal Palace of Qatna with the localisation of Tomb VII.

Following up on the discovery of the Royal Hypogeum in 2002,² another tomb in association with a royal context was found at Qatna during the excavations of the 2009 and 2010 seasons.³ It is labelled Tomb VII⁴ and is located below the North-West Wing of the royal palace. The tomb was un-looted

and contained a rich inventory of objects, which allows interesting insights into the funerary practices of the last part of the Middle Bronze Age. Tomb VII, as will be demonstrated, adds some new aspects to our understanding of the funerary cult in Middle and Late Bronze Age Syria.⁵

The date of the tomb is established both through the objects found in it and through its architectural connection to the royal palace. The North-West Wing of the palace is an independent construction unit, which was directly attached to and functionally connected with the palace (figure 1).⁶ It must have

1 This report is the result of the work of the international excavation project at Qatna, which has been carried out since 1999. The research is conducted by three joint missions: the team of the General Department of Antiquities, Damascus, the team of the University of Udine in collaboration with the General Directorate of Antiquities at Damascus, and the team of the University of Tübingen, also in collaboration with the General Directorate of Antiquities at Damascus. A special word of thanks goes to Dr. Michel al-Maqdissi and the Syrian General Directorate of Antiquities for their support; for a full and updated bibliography see: <http://www.qatna-projekt.uni-tuebingen.de/Referenzen-Bibliographie.html> (last accessed 3.2.2014).

2 Al-Maqdissi *et al.* 2003; Pfälzner (ed.) 2011.

3 For preliminary reports on Tomb VII see: Pfälzner – Dohmann-Pfälzner 2010; 2011.

4 On the numbering of the chamber tombs at Qatna see: *ibid.*: 64–67.

5 For earlier assessments on the funerary cult of Syria in the second millennium BC see: Salles 1980; 1995; Gronberg 1990; Hachmann (ed.) 1996; Pfälzner 2003; 2005; 2007b; 2009b; 2011b; al-Maqdissi *et al.* 2003; Cornelius – Niehr 2004; Niehr 2006a; 2006b; Marchegay 2008; Suriano 2010; Doumet-Serhal 2010; al-Maqdissi 2011; Morandi Bonacossi 2011; and the contributions of Andreou, Felli, Jacquet, Keswani, S. Lange, Niehr, Pfälzner, Teinz and Wissing, in: Pfälzner *et al.* (eds.) 2012.

6 For preliminary reports on the North-West Wing of the Royal Palace see: Dohmann-Pfälzner – Pfälzner 2008: 20–45;

been added to the royal palace at some date during the Middle Bronze Age IIA period (18th to mid-17th cent. BC) and remained in use until the final destruction of the palace in the Late Bronze Age IIA period, shortly after the mid 14th century BC.⁷ It consists of twelve rooms, arranged in three rows of four very small rooms. Tomb VII was discovered below Room DA, the south-eastern room of the North-West Wing, and its largest one. The grave is architecturally connected to the North-West Wing, as it was accessible from it.

The whole of the North-West Wing is perfectly preserved; walls up to five meters in height are still standing, with arches and doorways of rectangular outline connecting several of the rooms. The North-West Wing presents some other interesting architectural features. It contains an upper and a lower storey, the latter being in most cases covered by preserved or partly collapsed floors of the upper storey. The debris of the collapsed floors fell into the rooms below. Both floor levels are situated at a considerably lower level than the main floor of the central part of the palace. Some evidence indicates that, originally, there even existed a third storey in the North-West Wing. The latter corresponds to the ground floor level of the palace. Consequently, the two lower storeys of the North-West Wing have been labelled a 'lower ground floor' and a 'basement floor'.

Most of the rooms, both on the lower ground floor and on the basement level, were completely devoid of finds. This and the lack of installations currently make it impossible to determine the function of the rooms in both storeys. Only Room DK contained a larger number of objects. They form an accumulation of refuse which fell down into Room DK from above. It probably originated from a destroyed palace kitchen located in the storey above, which corresponds to the 'upper ground floor'.⁸ The debris contained hundreds of pottery vessels, several cuneiform tablets, as well as a large number of seal impressions, among them several impressions of the scarab of king Akhenaten of Egypt,⁹ further refining the date of the final destruction of the building.

Two other rooms of the North-West Wing, namely rooms DD and DF, are of special interest with regard to Tomb VII. Large elephant bones were discovered in these rooms.¹⁰ Room DD is a small room, which

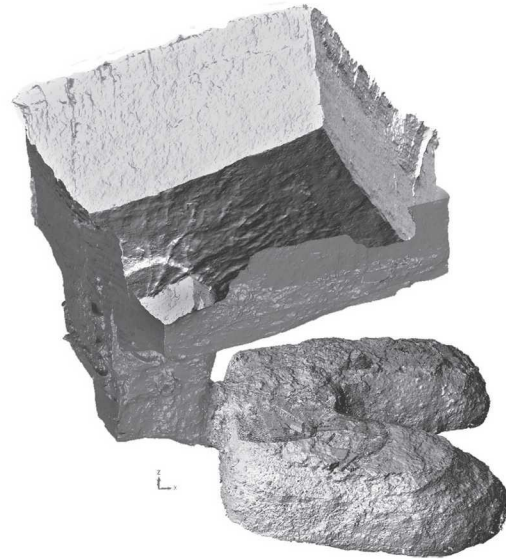


Figure 2: 3D model of Tomb VII below Room DA of the North-West Wing of the Royal Palace of Qatna; view from south (Tobias Reich).

is five meters deep. The enormous depth is caused by the lack of a floor between the lower ground level and the basement level. At the bottom of this room, there were several carefully deposited large elephant bones: a pelvis, a humerus, a scapula and several vertebrae. In Room DF, there was a tibia and two more vertebrae of an elephant. All bones probably belonged to one animal. The situation of the rooms with the elephant bones in regard to Tomb VII (and Room DA above it) is very peculiar: Room DD lies immediately to the north of Tomb VII, and Room DF is located directly to the west of it. This raises the question whether there was a connection between the deposition of the elephant bones and the funerary cult of Tomb VII.¹¹ This leads to the assumption that the North-West Wing of the royal palace was at least partially related to funerary rituals.

Tomb VII consists of a double chamber in kidney-shape, which was chiselled out of the bedrock below the palace (figure 2). It lies directly below Room DA of the North-West Wing, but was originally not accessible from it. The small ante-chamber of the tomb was once covered by a roof of wooden beams and mud, forming at the same time the floor of Room DA. This floor collapsed at some stage and fell into the ante-chamber. Thus, the ante-chamber was formerly not accessible from above. Instead, the entrance into it was from the west, from the basement level of the adjoining room DF. It led through a well-constructed doorway – equipped with a partly collapsed wooden lintel – situated in the dividing

2011: 10–28.

7 For the chronology of the Royal Palace see: Pfälzner 2007a: 36–43; 2011a: 55–59; Dohmann-Pfälzner – Pfälzner 2006: 60–78; 2007: 137–157, 164; 2008: 46–63.

8 Dohmann-Pfälzner – Pfälzner 2008: 43–45, figs. 18–19; 2011: 26, fig. 13.

9 See: Ahrens – Dohmann-Pfälzner – Pfälzner 2012.

10 For preliminary accounts on the elephant bones see: Pfälzner 2008; 2009a; Pfälzner – Vila 2009; Pfälzner – Dohmann-Pfälzner 2010; Dohmann-Pfälzner – Pfälzner 2008: 35–39, 41, fig. 13, 16; 2011: 27.

11 See: Pfälzner 2013.



Figure 3: View into Tomb VII upon discovery in 2009 with tomb inventory *in situ* (photo: Marc Steinmetz).



Figure 4: The south-western corner of Tomb VII with a deposition of bones and stone vessels and the niche for an oil lamp in the wall above (photo: Marc Steinmetz).

mud brick wall between Room DF and the ante-chamber.

The entrance into the burial chamber of Tom VII led down from the ante-chamber through a door in the bedrock and over four rock-hewn steps. Both parts of the double chamber are of equal size, each measuring approximately 5 m by 2.75 m. They were filled with large quantities of objects in undisturbed position, which formed a complete grave inventory. As in the case of the Royal Hypogeum, which was found in 2002, this tomb, too, had not been looted and shows no signs of vandalism or intruders' activities. The inventory consists of over 1000 individual items. These items of ceramic, metal, ivory and stone were accompanied by a staggering amount of human bones (figure 3).

As a result, excavating the tomb was not an easy task, as we were confronted with very difficult working conditions. It was not possible to actually step

on the floor, so that wooden planks had to be used to move and sit down during the documentation work. In total, two full excavation seasons (2009 and 2010) were required to finish the cleaning, documentation and retrieval of the inventory. Work necessarily had to take place in two or more shifts a day for seven days per week, throughout most part of the two seasons.

The last use of the tomb can be dated comparatively accurately. Next to the entrance was a small niche in the wall (figure 4). This contained a ceramic oil lamp, which provided the only lighting for the chamber. The charred wick of this lamp was preserved *in situ*. This has to be seen as reflecting the last use of the tomb, when the last person left the tomb and extinguished the lamp, with the wick remaining in place. Therefore the ^{14}C analysis of the wick, which provides a calibrated date of 1514–1436 BC, represents the time of the last use of the

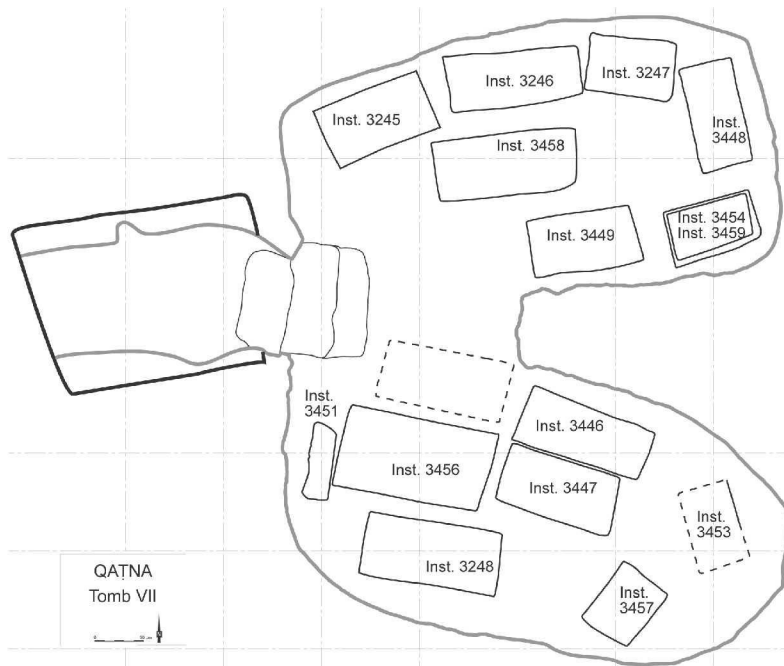


Figure 5: The localisation of wooden boxes in Tomb VII.



Figure 6: A skull surrounded by long bones in the south-western corner of Tomb VII (photo: Konrad Wita).

tomb. This date at the beginning of the Late Bronze Age, i.e. the Late Bronze I period, corresponds well with the latest pottery specimens and finds from the tomb and the ante-chamber. Nevertheless, by far the largest part of the inventory dates earlier, partly to the Middle Bronze IIA and in its majority to the Middle Bronze IIB period. While the eldest corpses and objects in the tomb can be attributed to the Middle Bronze IIA period, the highest amount of burial and ritual activities in the tomb occurred during the Middle Bronze IIB period. And the visitation of the tomb – probably to be interpreted as a continuity of ritual actions and care for the dead – was traceable into the Late Bronze Age period. Consequently, the grave chamber was in use over a long period of time. It is an impressive testimony of a continuity of funerary practices from the Middle to the Late Bronze Age.

The enormous quantity of bones in Tomb VII, being attributable to a minimum of 79 individuals¹² and probably even summing up to some 100 individuals, is very striking, particularly in comparison to the large and spacious Royal Hypogeum, where a minimum number of 19–24 individuals has been recorded.¹³ Thus, the much smaller chambers of Tomb VII contained a much larger number of burials than the Royal Hypogeum. How can such a large amount of burials be explained?

Many of the skulls were completely, or to a large extent, preserved. In total, more than 50 skulls were recorded. Many of them were not directly connected to a skeleton. The skulls were often deposited in unusual positions: laid face-up on the floor or on a pile of bones, on a pottery plate, or surrounded by long-bones in a rectangular arrangement (figure 6). It is obvious that the skulls received a special treatment.

Also, the way in which the bones of the post-cranial skeleton were deposited is very peculiar. Many of them were piled up in precisely delineated rectangular areas, with piles of 30 to 40 cm in height. A thorough investigation of these depositions brought to light that the piles of bones were embraced by thin brown lines in rectangular layout. The brown, powdery material constitutes the remains of decayed wood. Thus, it became clear that the bones were deposited in wooden boxes. All in all, 16 boxes were

¹² Witzel – Flohr – Degenhardt 2011; Flohr – Witzel 2011: 32; and: S. Degenhardt and C. Witzel, presentations on the latest state of the anthropological research on Tomb VII at a workshop in June 2013.

¹³ Witzel – Kreuz 2007; Witzel 2009; 2011.



Figure 7: View into the northern chamber of Tomb VII with the places of wooden boxes after removal of the bone deposits in them (photo: author).



Figure 8: Two wooden boxes (installations 3247 and 3448) with bone depositions at the eastern end of the northern chamber of Tomb VII (photo: author).

recorded in the double chamber of Tomb VII, most of them in an average size of ca. 150 cm by 70 cm (figure 5). Nearly the whole area of the chambers was at one time filled with wooden boxes standing side by side, so that movement between them would have been difficult in ancient times (figure 7). All the boxes were filled up with densely packed human bones. The bones within one box always belong to several individuals. For instance, the box Inst. 3248 contained the bones of at least ten individuals.

The grave goods were deposited in groups beside the boxes, with only occasional smaller goods deposited within the boxes. Therefore, the bones could be packed very close to each other with the clearly visible intention of fitting as much bones as possible in every box (figure 8). One of the most densely packed boxes (Installation 3248) was stand-

ing in the southern chamber in front of the middle part of the south wall, where a compact succession of bone layers could be distinguished (figures 9 to 11).¹⁴ Mostly, there were single bones, which were not in anatomical order, suggesting that most of the bones were placed in the boxes after the skeletons had become disarticulated. Complete skeletons were rare. In the lower part of the above-mentioned box were three complete skeletons, and these must have been deposited when the skeletons had not yet decayed entirely and, therefore, the bones were still held together by the tendons and muscles. It allows the conclusion that, in this case, the deceased had not been dead for a long time prior to being packed into the box.

14 Pfälzner – Dohmann-Pfälzner 2011: 86–88, figs. 18–21.



Figure 9: The wooden box (installation 3248) in the southern chamber of Tomb VII: upper level deposition of bones and pottery (photo: Marc Steinmetz).



Figure 10: The wooden box (installation 3248) in the southern chamber of Tomb VII: middle level deposition of bones (photo: Marc Steinmetz).



Figure 11: The wooden box (installation 3248) in the southern chamber of Tomb VII: lower deposition of bones (photo: Marc Steinmetz).

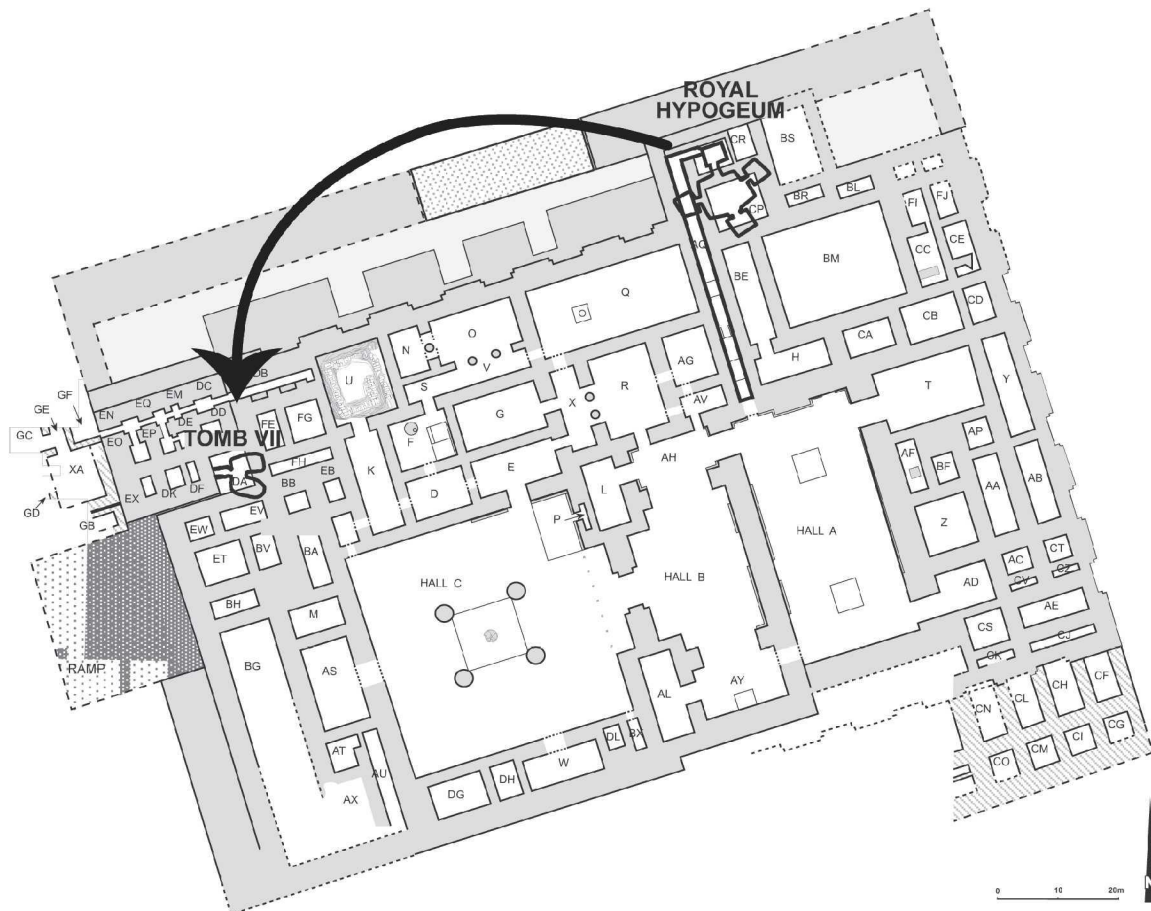


Figure 12: The Royal Hypogeum and Tomb VII below the Royal Palace of Qatna: the reconstructed transfer of burials.

This unusual situation can best be explained by the assumption that the bones in Tomb VII do not present primary burials, but some sort of re-burial. They are the remains of individuals who had been previously buried at another place – the location of their primary burial. In search of their place of primary burial, the most plausible candidate – in the authors view – is the Royal Hypogeum of the Palace of Qatna, which was demonstrably in use for a very long period of 400 years.¹⁵ Therefore, the Royal Hypogeum necessarily needed to be cleared and cleaned from time to time in order to create space for new burials. In these circumstances the bones were packed into boxes and transferred to another place. Tomb VII can be seen as the place where the bones were brought in order to be stored away for eternity.

Thus, the observable activities with regard to Tomb VII can be related to the sequence of funerary rituals reconstructed for the Royal Hypogeum.¹⁶ After a certain amount of time following their primary burial – and after a sequence of rituals had taken place – the human remains were transferred



Figure 13: Deposit of pottery vessels in the south-western corner of Tomb VII, west of the wooden box installation 3248 (photo: Marc Steinmetz).

to another place for final burial. This final burial is referred to as ‘quaternary burial’, because three preceding burial stages could be distinguished in the Royal Hypogeum of Qatna.¹⁷ For this final burial they were densely packed into boxes and transported to Tomb VII (figure 12).

15 See: Pfälzner 2011a: 55–65, tab. 1.

16 Pfälzner 2012 (see also S. Lange in this volume).

17 Pfälzner 2012: tab. 2.

Lab-Nr.	Qatna field-nr.	Material	Uncal. ¹⁴ C date BP	δ13C	Cal. date ¹⁸ 1σ	Cal. date ¹⁸ 2σ
MAMS-10932	MSH09G-q0689	human bones	3444 ± 31	-22,1	calBC 1867- 1691	calBC 1878- 1684
MAMS-10933	MSH09G-q0690	human bones	3461 ± 28	-23,4	calBC 1873- 1699	calBC 1879- 1692
MAMS-10939	MSH09G-q1484	human bones	3382 ± 30	-25,2	calBC 1732- 1633	calBC 1750- 1563
MAMS-14199	MSH10G-q1904	human bones	3409 ± 24	-30,1	calBC 1743-1687	calBC 1766-1633
MAMS-14201	MSH10G-q1906	human bones	3493 ± 19	-13,2	calBC 1878-1772	calBC 1883-1753
MAMS-14202	MSH10G-q1907	human bones	3415 ± 18	-3,5	calBC 1740-1691	calBC 1765-1645
MAMS-14203	MSH10G-q1908	human bones	3949 ± 23	-25,9	calBC 2558-2360	calBC 2565-2348
MAMS-14205	MSH10G-q1912	human bones	3548 ± 25	-17,6	calBC 1938-1790	calBC 1955-1774
MAMS-14206	MSH10G-q1913	human bones	3422 ± 30	-26,0	calBC 1766-1685	calBC 1873-1632
MAMS-14210	MSH10G-q1919	human bones	3556 ± 26	-18,9	calBC 1944-1836	calBC 2009-1777
MAMS-14212	MSH10G-q1924	human bones	3519 ± 26	-19,1	calBC 1891-1776	calBC 1919-1757

Table 1: ¹⁴C dates from human bones deposited in Tomb VII (analysed by Bernd Kromer, Curt-Engelhorn-Centre Archaeometry).

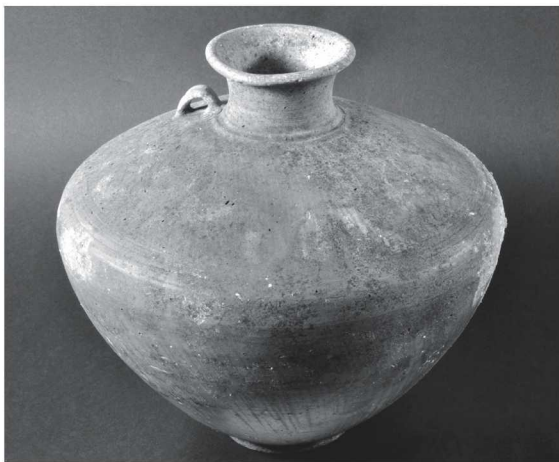


Figure 14: A jar of the ‘Orange Burnished Ware’ of Middle Bronze IIB date from Tomb VII (photo: Konrad Wita).

The grave goods accompanying the original burials were brought along with the bones into Tomb VII. They were placed in groups beside the boxes containing the bones. This demonstrates that it was not only the bones, but also the grave goods which received a reburial. The grave goods were not separated from the dead but accompanied them. This highlights the fact that the dead were still highly honoured in this stage of their afterlife existence.

This is particularly true for the pottery, of which large amounts were found in Tomb VII. Several concentrations of pottery were found, one large group in the south-western part of the southern chamber (figure 13). This pottery is particularly important for the chronology of Tomb VII as most of the shapes can be dated to the Middle Bronze Age IIB period, i.e. ca. 1650–1530 BC. Some types, as for example a large number of specimens of the so-called Orange Burnished Ware, are closely comparable to similar

vessels from the royal tombs of Ebla, where they are dated to the Middle Bronze Age IIA and IIB.¹⁹ This ware appears in a characteristic shape: the ovoid jars have a flat shoulder and one small handle attached to the nearly horizontal surface of the shoulder below the narrow neck (figure 14). Based on the pottery finds, the majority of the original burials can be dated to the Middle Bronze IIB period. They were probably transferred to Tomb VII at the end of the Middle Bronze Age II period. It can also not be excluded, however, that the skeletons were partly equipped with a new set of pottery when transferred to Tomb VII. This leaves the theoretical possibility of a slightly older date of the primary burials.

In this respect the ¹⁴C dates retrieved from the human bones in Tomb VII are significant (table 1). Various bones from different individuals and different boxes were tested and the majority of them, with some exceptions, have a date range between approx. 1850 and 1650 BC, i.e., they fall into the Middle Bronze Age II A period. This discrepancy between the ¹⁴C dates and the archaeological date of many of the objects in the inventory needs further investigation. There is the theoretical possibility of a later addition of some of the objects. From a ritual point of view this would be a very interesting process. Nevertheless, a general methodological difficulty in correlating ¹⁴C and archaeological dates still exists and should warn of a premature over-interpretation of these results.

Besides pottery, the stone vessels form the largest group of objects within the grave goods of Tomb VII. They are probably all Egyptian imports.²⁰ The majority among them are calcite-alabaster vessels, mainly of an alabastron shape type (figure 15).²¹ They date to the Middle Kingdom, which is equivalent to the Syrian Middle Bronze Age I period. Thus, they are

18 Calibrated with INTCAL09 (Reimer *et al.*, 2009) and SwissCal 0.5 (MAMS-10932-10939), resp. SwissCal1.0 (L. Wacker, ETH-Zürich).

19 Compare: Nigro 2002: 320–321, 326, figs. 21, 22.5–6.

20 See: Köster in this volume.

21 Similar types have been recovered in the Royal Hypogeum of Qatna (see: Ahrens 2011a: 264–265; with comparisons).



Figure 15: Calcite-alabaster vessels in the north-western corner of Tomb VII (photo: Konrad Wita).



Figure 16: Two predynastic Egyptian jars of magmatic stone (centre and bottom), the diorite jar with the inscription of Itakayet (right) and a group of calcite-alabaster vessels in the south-western part of Tomb VII, with the ivory figurine (centre) *in situ* (photo: Konrad Wita).

earlier than most other objects of the inventory. Yet they were surely imported at a later date – probably during the Hyksos-period, i.e. the Middle Bronze Age IIB period. There are also flat vessels made of black igneous stone with roll-handles, which are typical for Early-Dynastic Egypt (figure 16). They can be dated to the first and second Dynasties of Egypt, approximately 2900–2700 BC.²² Thus, being more than 1000 years old, they were real antiques when they were deposited as grave goods at Qatna. This demonstrates that these Egyptian vessels were highly appreciated in Syria during the second millennium. In the same group of grave offerings was a vessel made of diorite, which dates to the Middle Kingdom

(Middle Bronze Age I period). It carries a hieroglyphic inscription mentioning Princess Itakayet, the daughter of Senwosret II or III of the twelfth Dynasty (figure 16).²³ Smaller stone vessels in different shapes, all of them very accurately manufactured, were also retrieved, among them a flat bowl of greenish-black stone. They also seem to be Egyptian imports. All these objects demonstrate that there was a high frequency of Egyptian stone vessel imports in Tomb VII, even considerably higher than in the Royal Hypogeum of the Late Bronze Age IIA.²⁴ This illustrates the great popularity of Egyptian stone vessels during the Middle Bronze Age IIB in Syria.

22 The same kind of vessels has been found in the Royal Hypogeum of Qatna (see: *ibid.*: 261, 263; with comparisons).

23 Published by Ahrens 2010.

24 Compare Ahrens 2011a for the Egyptian stone vessels inventory of the Royal Hypogeum.



Figure 17: A *kohl*-container in the form of a monkey from the northern chamber of Tomb VII, height: 5.7 cm (photo: Konrad Wita).



Figure 19: Obsidian beaker with gold foil, from the southern chamber of Tomb VII, height: 5.3 cm (photo: Julia Gergovich).

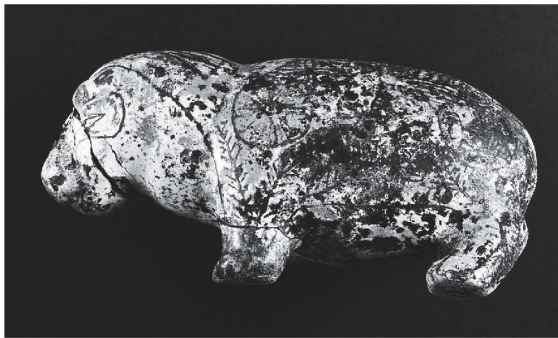


Figure 18: The Egyptian hippopotamus figurine, discovered in two wooden boxes in the northern chamber of Tomb VII, length: 18.4 cm (photo: Julia Gergovich).



Figure 20: The seal scarab with the inscription of Ahmes-Nefertari, top and bottom view, length: 17.5 mm (photo: Julia Gergovich).

But imported Egyptian products also comprise other kinds of objects. Some of them shall receive a special mention. A very small vessel of rock crystal was carved in very fine craftsmanship, highlighting the shiny aspect of the transparent stone.²⁵ Two vessels were found, which were used for perfumes or makeup. The first is a small *kohl*-container which is held by a sitting monkey in its arms (figure 17).²⁶ The piece is made of frit and covered by a glaze, and is surely an Egyptian import dating to the late Hyksos or early New Kingdom Period of Egypt, which corresponds to the end of the Middle Bronze Age II period in Syria. This suggests that there was a direct exchange between Qatna and Egypt in the 16th cen-

ture BC. The other vessel is a perfume jar in the form of a flask made of frit with a multi-coloured glaze.²⁷ Its lid was found close by and, once again, the vessel is an Egyptian import.

Other Egyptian objects include the figurine of a hippopotamus which is again made of frit with a glaze painted with various floral and faunal motives, such as the papyrus, the lotus, flying birds and a grasshopper (figure 18).²⁸ These are illustrations representing the natural environment of the hippos. This piece dates to the Middle Kingdom of Egypt.²⁹ Closely comparable parallels for this figurine come

25 See: Pfälzner – Dohmann-Pfälzner 2011: 125–126, fig. 50.

26 Ibid.: 107–109, fig. 38.

27 Ibid.: 115–116, fig. 44.

28 Ibid.: 122–125, figs. 48–49.

29 For comparisons see: Ahrens 2011b: 124.

from the Obelisk Temple at Byblos.³⁰ A beaker made of obsidian is most probably also of Egyptian provenience; its top and base are covered in gold foil (figure 19).³¹ It originated from the Middle Kingdom in Egypt.³² Its only parallel in the Near East was found in the Royal Tombs of Byblos.³³ The two obsidian beakers with gold rim from Byblos and Qatna are very similar to each other, and these rare objects suggest a strong link of both Byblos and Qatna with Egypt during the Middle Bronze Age II.

Of particular importance is the Egyptian import of a scarab seal made of lapis lazuli (figure 20). The seal bears the inscription of Ahmes-Nefertari, the wife of Ahmose, the founder of the New Kingdom of Egypt, and the mother of pharaoh Amenhotep I of the early 18th Dynasty.³⁴ Ahmes-Nefertari lived for a long time (1562–1495 BC), so that the manufacture of this piece must date to the second half of the 16th century, which corresponds to the turn of the Middle Bronze IIB to the Late Bronze IA period. The transfer of this piece from Egypt to Syria must have taken place in roughly the same period of time, as it is one of the youngest objects within the Middle Bronze IIB inventory of Tomb VII. This hints at direct contacts between Qatna and Egypt in the second half of the 16th century BC.

Besides the overwhelming preponderance of Egyptian objects there were also objects of a Near Eastern provenance in Tomb VII. Among them is a gold arm ring with a cylinder seal made of lapis lazuli.³⁵ The seal carries Egyptianising *Ankh* signs inserted between columns of birds and caprids in an Oriental style. Another cylinder seal, which was found among a pile of bones in the eastern part of the southern chamber, is of the 'classical' Old-Syrian style³⁶. The design shows an adoration scene with a sitting king and a combat scene of a hero and a lion, executed in a very fine craftsmanship of the highest quality. The seal dates to the 18th or 17th century BC.

Among the ivory objects the most remarkable piece is the figurine of a standing male person dressed in a skirt (figure 21).³⁷ It probably depicts the god Baal. The crown, which had been worked separately and was once attached to the head, has been lost. The well executed and accurately carved figurine is of high quality Syrian craftsmanship and can be dated to the Middle Bronze Age.

In one of the boxes with human bones in the eastern part of the northern chamber, the remains of a



Figure 21: Ivory figurine of a deity from the south-western corner of Tomb VII, height: 17.1 cm (photo: Konrad Wita).

small wooden box with ivory inlays was found next to the nearly complete skeleton of a child. The wood of the small container has decayed but the bitumen, that was used as glue, is still preserved and keeps the ivory inlays together. The inlays show, for example, a double lion-headed eagle, as well as a grazing caprid.³⁸ The details of the bodies were rendered by incisions on the front of the plaques. The exceptionally well-preserved piece is rather extraordinary due to its Middle Bronze Age IIA or IIB date, which can be deduced from its association with the grave inventory.

Jewellery was found in large quantities within the grave inventory. There was a diadem of gold, decorated with pointed impressions, which is typical for the Middle Bronze Age.³⁹ A golden girdle in the shape of a snake attached with gold rings to tie the girdle was found in association with bones in one of the wooden boxes in the southern chambers. In one of the calcite-alabaster vessels in the western part of the northern chamber was a deposit of gold jewellery objects (figure 22). It consisted of 17 pieces which had been forced into the vessel when the grave

30 Dunand 1939: fig. 876.15155; Jidejian 1968: 35–36, figs. 81–91; Matoian (ed.) 1998: 90–91.

31 Pfälzner – Dohmann-Pfälzner 2011: 127–130, fig. 52.

32 For comparisons see: Ahrens 2011c, 129–130.

33 Matoian (ed.) 1998: 72.

34 Ahrens 2011d: 131–132.

35 See: Pfälzner – Dohmann-Pfälzner 2011: 130–131, fig. 53.

36 On this group of seals see: Otto 2000.

37 See: Pfälzner – Dohmann-Pfälzner 2011: 119–122, fig. 46–47.

38 Ibid.: 126–127, fig. 51.

39 Ibid.: 111–112, fig. 40.

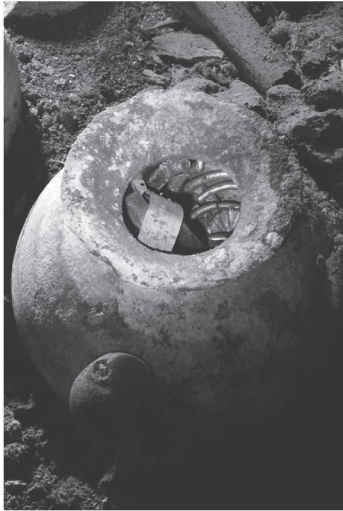


Figure 22: Calcite-alabaster jar in the north-western corner of Tomb VII with a deposit of gold jewellery (photo: Marc Steinmetz).

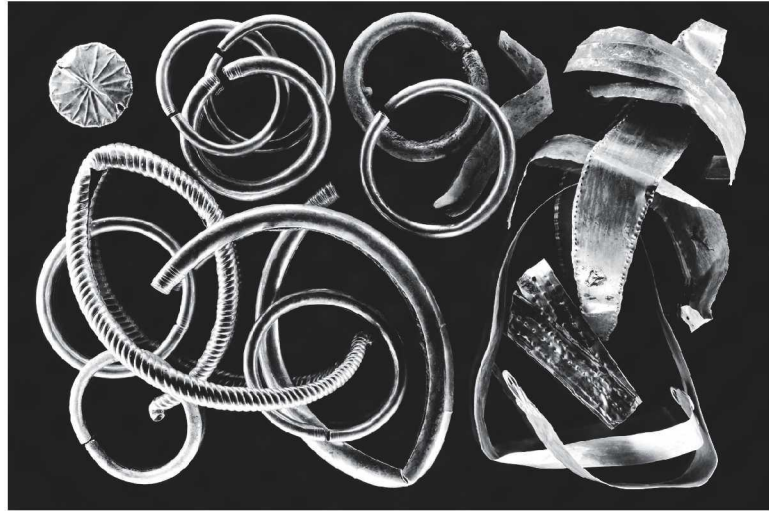


Figure 23: Gold jewellery from a calcite-alabaster jar after having been recovered from the vessel (photo: Marc Steinmetz).

inventory was transported to Tomb VII (figure 23).⁴⁰ Some of the objects had been crudely bent to fit them through the small mouth of the vessel. This implies that the jewellery accompanied the dead when the burials were moved from the primary to the secondary burial place. The deposit consists of arm rings, torques, diadems and golden bands. It also contained a small girdle with spiral loops used as a fastening mechanism.

Summary

To summarise, Tomb VII is the second tomb directly connected to the Royal Palace of Qatna. It reveals some differences to the Royal Hypogeum, which was discovered in 2002 below the eastern part of the palace, not only with regard to its size. The inventory of Tomb VII clearly dates to the Middle Bronze Age IIA and IIB periods, thus the burials are older than those in the Royal Hypogeum. There is still a discrepancy between the ¹⁴C dates of the human bones, predominantly falling in the Middle Bronze IIA period, and the grave objects which date both to the Middle Bronze IIA and the Middle Bronze IIB period. On the other hand, the evaluation of the grave inventory unites the two chamber tombs in status. Judged by the valuable and prestigious objects found in Tomb VII, it is a very rich tomb, and the status indication of the objects is comparable to those from the Royal Hypogeum. This hints at a strong connection between Tomb VII and the Royal Hypogeum. Both seem to contain elite burials from the dynastic context of the Kingdom of Qatna.

Two main conclusions from the study of the inventory of Tomb VII need to be highlighted:

First, it allows us to reconstruct the royal funerary practices of the second millennium BC. There is a high plausibility for the hypothesis that the human remains in Tomb VII originate from another place, the Royal Hypogeum. They were probably transported from their primary place of burial in the main tomb of the Royal Palace, where a number of successive funerary rites had also been carried out, to Tomb VII, where their final burial took place. This occurred out of practical necessity in order to create space and enable new burials within the main burial chambers of the Royal Palace. It can be observed that the human remains were transported in a state of decomposition, mostly only single bones, but sometimes also partial skeletons. Interestingly, they were kept together with their grave goods. Wooden boxes were utilised to transport both the human remains and some of the smaller grave goods. Bones and grave goods were all deposited together in Tomb VII. This is the first attested archaeological example of such a practice of moving burials from one tomb to another. It was not an accidental action but seems to have been part of the royal funeral rites of Qatna. This ritual activity is not yet known from anywhere else in the Ancient Near East, but probably this was a practice at other royal sites as well.

Second, the grave goods in Tomb VII allow us to study the inter-regional relations and links of Qatna. The high amount of Egyptian objects used as grave goods reveal close contacts and an intensive exchange with Egypt during the Middle Bronze Age. The Egyptian objects even outnumber the Syrian ones. This is in clear contrast to the Royal Hypogeum of the Late Bronze Age IIA period, where consider-

⁴⁰ Ibid.: 91, figs. 23–25.

ably fewer Egyptian objects have been found. This demonstrates that Egyptian objects were held in high esteem in Syrian palatial contexts, especially during the Middle Bronze Age IIB period. Egyptian objects were acknowledged as highly prestigious and thus preferably entered royal grave inventories. This clearly demonstrates a cultural dominance of Egyptian items for constructing the ideology of Syrian kingdoms in the Middle Bronze Age II period. Egyptian objects were symbols of prestige both for the living and for the deceased members of the royal elite. The comparison between Tomb VII and the Royal Hypogeum suggests that this dominant role of Egyptian objects as prestige items had changed by the Late Bronze Age period, as the quantity of Egyptian imports had decreased.

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