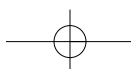
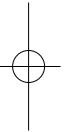
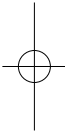


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– The Minor Arts for the Elite and for the Populace

Edited by
Piotr Bieliński, Michał Gawlikowski,
Rafał Koliński, Dorota Ławecka, Arkadiusz Sołtysiak
and Zuzanna Wygnańska

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BRONZE AGE DOMESTIC ARCHITECTURE IN EASTERN SYRIA: FAMILIAR, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

JULIETTE MAS¹

ABSTRACT

This paper deals with a PhD project on domestic architecture and society in the Syrian Euphrates region and in the Jezirah during the Bronze Age. The large geographical and chronological framework allowed for collecting an important corpus of houses. The analysis of statistical data on their different features allowed for interpretations, in particular concerning their functional characteristics. The attention is focused here on the crafts and industrial production of the house inhabitants. The contemporary economic system is well-known for Southern Mesopotamia, and was mainly based on official oikoi linked to the temples or to the palace. In contrast, the analysis of Northern Mesopotamian evidence shows that the economic system in this area was mainly based on private households, with state control probably being of lesser importance.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to present some of the results of a project dealing with domestic architecture and society in the Syrian Euphrates region and in the Jezirah.² Domestic architecture has already been widely studied, but previous research has mainly focused on Central or Southern Mesopotamia (e.g. Battini-Villard 1999; Castel 1992; Stone 1991 and 1996). Concerning Syro-Mesopotamia, the studies carried out so far have concentrated on specific sites, regions or periods (such as Lebeau 1993 or Pfälzner 2001). The choice of a wide chronological and geographical framework allowed us to improve our general knowledge of the shapes and structures of housing in the region, both in large urban centers and in more modest settlements, and to have a large amount of data at our disposal, thus enabling their classification into statistical series. The Bronze Age period, which covers more than a millennium, offers the opportunity to better understand the phenomena of discontinuity and evolution of socio-economic structures. The goal was then to insert the architectural analysis of dwellings into a global study of the social and economic systems of the region.

1 PhD Student, Université Lumière Lyon 2 – Maison de l'Orient et de la Méditerranée Jean Pouilloux – Archéorient UMR 5133, France.

2 PhD Dissertation carried out in Lyon 2 University under the direction of Professor O. Rouault.

A deductive approach,³ based on the constitution of a wide catalog of dwellings divided into sub-periods (Early, Middle and Late Bronze Age) and sub-regions (Upper Middle Euphrates, Lower Middle Euphrates, Balikh, Middle Khabur and Jezirah), was used. 375 buildings excavated in 35 sites have been indexed (Fig. 1). These houses have been exhaustively classified, focusing on all their features and finds, such as the technical aspects, layout, circulation systems, surface, installations, material found *in situ*, absence or presence of graves. These features have been classified into statistical series in order to be able to interpret the data from the socio-economic, functional and economic points of view. Even if the possibility of upper floors has been examined, the interpretations have been exclusively based on the remains and finds of the ground floor.⁴

THE CORPUS

Within the corpus, Early Bronze Age houses are widely represented, while Middle Bronze Age evidence is quite restricted (Fig. 2a). The Upper Middle Euphrates sites have provided the most analyzed remains, representing 43% of the corpus (Fig. 2b). Bronze Age houses from the Syrian Euphrates region and the Jezirah are all built in mudbricks, usually with beaten earth floors. Nevertheless, stones, plaster, lime and *djuss* are also commonly involved in their construction. The main building materials are homogeneously used in the different sub-regions, with the exception of stones, which could be easily explained by the availability of local natural resources. On the other hand, differences in the use of baked bricks, which are predominant in the Jezirah, and lime and plaster, which frequently occur also in the Jezirah as well as in the Middle Khabur, have nothing to do with this availability, but more probably with different building traditions or with the functions of the houses.

A new typology has been created to classify and to interpret the corpus (Fig. 3a). It consists of seven types: single-room, bipartite, tripartite, front or back room, linear and central space houses, and the seventh type corresponding to undefined layouts due

3 The previous studies on Syro-Mesopotamian architecture followed several kinds of approaches, such as ethnoarchaeology (e.g. Pfälzner 2001; Stone 1981), sociology (like Brusasco 1999/2000), mathematic ratio on circulation systems (e.g. Deblauwe 1998). Such research yielded important results, which are however still open to discussion, though they have already allowed for acquiring extensive knowledge of domestic architecture. The deductive approach seemed to be the most convenient to deal with an important corpus and has been chosen with the aim of being able to complete our comprehension focusing only on archaeological remains before reaching the interpretative level.

4 In fact, examining the global corpus I could observe that even if the thickness of the walls, the possible presence of buttresses or staircases represent good clues for reconstructing the presence of a previous upper floor, they were not sufficient to secure it (on this topic, see Margueron 1996 and 1999). The identification of collapsed floors seems to be the only unequivocal element to secure their restitution. Unfortunately, the disparity of the data at our disposal does not allow for identification in every case. Thus, I have decided not to consider this presence or absence in the evaluation in order to avoid interpreting the data on the basis of hypotheses. Anyway, this decision should not change the functional interpretation of the houses as it has been commonly assumed that the upper floors should have been dedicated to private matters like sleeping (Magueron 1996: 32).

to the bad preservation of some of the buildings or to their incomplete excavation.⁵ Nevertheless, the corpus amounts to 42% of complete layouts, while only 8% belong to the undefined category (Fig. 3b). All types are represented during the whole Bronze Age, with the exception of the tripartite one in the Middle Bronze Age. The central space type is the most attested form in the Early Bronze, while front or back room houses are more frequent in the Middle Bronze Age, and bipartite ones in the Late Bronze Age (Fig. 3c). The entire typology persists during the whole period and is homogeneously spread from a geographical point of view (Fig. 4, 5 and 6).

EXPLAINING HOUSE DIVERSITY

A lot of hypotheses have already been suggested to explain the type differences observable in Mesopotamian dwellings. The new data yielded by the catalog offered the opportunity to test some of them and to build new ones. In this perspective, it has been observed that the surface, number of rooms, circulation systems, tombs and luxury finds are not reliable features for the interpretation of the typological diversity of the corpus.⁶ Furthermore, the occurrences of these features within the corpus has shown that the typology could not be explained by the number of house inhabitants.⁷ The differences in dwellings, which do not seem to be related to the number of their inhabitants, also seem to have nothing to do with their wealth. In fact, the statistical analysis of the presence of luxury finds discovered in the houses shows that this is not connected to their type or to their size. It is the same with the special care dedicated to the

5 Even if this typology has been created for the purposes of the project, all the types had already been identified by previous studies on Near Eastern domestic architecture. The single-room type constitutes the simplest architectural form and the most ancient one (Aurenche 1981: 185-190), while the roots of the bipartite and tripartite types go back to the Obeid period and their main period of development occurred during the Uruk period (see Breniquet 2000). The front or back room type is attested since the Early Bronze Age in Upper Mesopotamia, but was also recognized in the Diyala region (Hill 1967: 146), and would continue to be in use through time in Syria, in Anatolia and in the Levant (Lebeau 1993: 102). Its predominance in the Upper Middle Euphrates region has already been pointed out (see McClellan 1996). In contrast, the linear type, already recognized during the 3rd millennium, especially in the Syrian Euphrates and Middle Khabur regions (Pfälzner 2001: 373), seems to have been exclusively used in Upper Mesopotamia. Finally, the central space house type has been commonly considered as the archetype of the Mesopotamian house following the work of Heinrich who defined this kind of layout as *Hofhaus* (Heinrich 1975: 213). This type is attested since the 3rd millennium BC and is still in use in the present-day Near East. Its central space has usually been restored as an open courtyard, even if this was not always the case (Margueron 1996: 22-24). We decided not to prejudge the presence or absence of covering, thus defining this type as the 'central space' house.

6 Observing these features in the corpus, and with the exception of the single-room type, even if the bipartite, tripartite and central space houses are the largest ones (the main part of the complete buildings varying between 101 and 200 m²), and front or back room and linear houses are the smallest (their typical size varying between 31 and 80 m²), the buildings composing the corpus show a large variability of size. The same applies to the number of rooms (except for the single-room and linear types).

7 The occurrence of tombs, which could be expected to have been related to the number of the inhabitants of the houses, was in fact not related either to the type of houses or to their size.

construction (e.g. the presence of vaulted covering, paintings, niches, etc.). Furthermore, the distribution of the types both from geographical and chronological points of view demonstrates that this diversity cannot be attributed to building traditions or ethnic origins (Fig. 4, 5 and 6).

By studying the data yielded by the catalog, and mainly focusing on the installations and material found *in situ*, several functions for the houses could be defined, besides the most common ones which are necessary for basic daily family life, such as housing, cooking and sleeping (Fig. 7, 8 and 9). Even if the function of some installations such as benches, fireplaces or basins could be related to domestic tasks as well as crafts, in many cases a specific function could be defined for the main part of them. Other ones could be clearly identified as work installations related to crafts, metallurgy, pottery production, jewelry fabrication, etc. This analysis shows that houses served as workshops throughout the whole Bronze Age. Examining the occurrence of the workshop function in connection with the typological units, a large occurrence of central space houses is visible for the Early and the Middle Bronze Age (Fig. 7 and 8). On the other hand, for the Late Bronze Age, bipartite houses clearly dominate, while central space houses are absent (Fig. 9).

LIVING AND PRODUCING

It could then be tempting to attribute the main type differences of the houses to the level of stratification of the households which occupied them, the upper of which could be assimilated into private enterprises. In fact, central space houses during the Early and Middle Bronze Age and bipartite ones during the Late Bronze Age would be the architectural formula chosen by groups having private means of subsistence, being less or not at all dependent on the State. Moreover, the analysis of finds shows that these are the ones which provided us with the highest quantity of weights, seals and seal impressions, all objects which had clearly been involved in commercial activities.⁸

The subsistence activities of the inhabitants who occupied these houses were mainly connected to craft or industrial production, but their activities were diversified and granted them a kind of autarky. In fact, these types of domestic units are also the ones which show the most numerous evidence of textile activities and brewery (Fig. 7, 8 and 9). These private economic entities, practicing a diversified economy, could have belonged to extended families linked by kinship or legal arrangements,⁹ such as

⁸ The presence of weights, seals and seal impressions could mean that the production and the commercial transactions involving these produced goods were both taking place in the houses themselves.

⁹ On adoption, see notably Jankowska 1986: 34-35. It seems that during the Ur III period the official *oikoi* were mainly based on kinship, while private households often included members who did not belong to the family *sensu stricto* (Yoffee 1995: 295).

adoption, and not necessarily living together, according to the Southern Mesopotamian model notably identified by Foster's study on the Gasur archive (Foster 1982: 12).¹⁰

According to Maisels, the largest of these private economic units should have included at least one member who had mastered writing and counting (Maisels 1993: 178-179).¹¹ In fact, the houses identified in our corpus as the ones potentially corresponding to this specific kind of production unit were also the ones which attested the most administrative activities, since they provided us with economic tablets and *bullae* finds. Furthermore, they are also the types which show the most important occurrence of storage activities and animal keeping (Fig. 7, 8 and 9).¹² We could therefore assume that part of these families, based on ties of kinship or not, should include members practicing pastoralism and agriculture (Renger 1990: 25). This would not be surprising as Northern Mesopotamian societies seem to have been based on a complex and articulated structure, since the history of the region had always been largely dimorphic (Rowton 1976).¹³

The Syrian Euphrates region and Jezirah seems to perfectly fit the model described by Pollock, following Renger and Gregoire (1988: 219), as 'principally oriented toward the satisfaction of their needs, the various households or production units being responsible for the production of goods for their own use, storage of raw materials and goods, and the manufacture of indispensable exchange goods' (Pollock 1999: 118). Nevertheless, if our documentation really fit into this household socio-economic system, it seems that in most of the cases, the production and the several economic activities should have been centralized in one main house in opposition to the Southern Mesopotamian model (Fig. 10a and b).

From this perspective, the other types of houses could have been those of people who did not work in their own house, that is, either they worked as civil servants in Palaces or Temples or in other households as craftsmen employees. In fact, the most important *oikoi* increased their workforce by hiring non-kin employees in order to develop their production (Pollock 1999: 117). Nevertheless, these houses also offered less attestations of crafts related to a second activity aimed at bringing a second income or the possibility of producing some basic goods themselves, thus avoiding the need to get them from another source of production.

10 On this topic, see also Jankowska 1986: 33-41 and Van de Mieroop 1992: 215.

11 See notably the case of the 'great household', the archive of which shows that it benefited from a larger workforce. Furthermore, 'the orientation of the large households away from primary [is oriented] towards much more "value-added" and specialist production' (Maisels 1993: 178, after Foster 1982: 11).

12 On the differentiation of the modes of storage, see Pfälzner 2002.

13 Subsisting by agriculture in Mesopotamia meant being dependent on climatic instability. Being involved in a diversified economic system based on kinship networks was thus a way to secure the household members' livelihood in times of hardship. This security and interdependence was improved by creating a network involving different households (Maisels 1993: 185; Marzahn 2002: 270; Pollock 1999: 117). The epigraphic and archaeological evidence demonstrates that Northern Mesopotamian cities were based on a diversified economic system including four main sectors: dry farming, production of pastoral products derived from herding, production of textiles and metal objects and trade, possibly long-distance (Stein 2004: 67).

PRIVATE VERSUS OFFICIAL ECONOMY

Studies on Southern Mesopotamian epigraphic documentation have demonstrated the importance of the entanglement of state structures in its economic system. In fact, it has been stated that in Early Dynastic Southern Mesopotamia craft production was highly controlled by temples, while the Palace seems to have taken over this role during the Ur III period. Ur III archives expose how the craftsmen were rallied under a unique administrative supervision, the role of which was to hire and control the workforce, to supply the economic units with raw materials, and to dispose of the produced goods (Moorey 1994: 229-232).

Examining the distribution of the functions attested in the houses of the corpus in connection with the type of settlements where they have been discovered, and sorting them into the ones which offered Palace or Temple remains and the ones which did not, we can see that the attestation of crafts in the houses corresponds in proportion more or less to the global sample, at least concerning Early and Late Bronze Age evidence. The workshop function is still mostly represented in central space houses during the Early Bronze Age and in bipartite ones during the Late Bronze Age. On the other hand, Middle Bronze Age evidence is more contrasted. In fact, the workshop function is always mostly attested in central space houses, but it is clearly predominant at sites where official buildings are attested. However, the scarcity of the Middle Bronze Age evidence within the corpus (representing only 18% of the total sample, Fig. 2a) forces us to interpret this data with caution.¹⁴ Finally, concerning the Late Bronze Age, even if the proportion of craft activities also corresponds to the total sample and are mostly represented in bipartite houses, by examining the corpus more carefully, we can observe that this production activity is not attested in the same way if the sites were under Mitannian, Hittite or finally Assyrian hegemony. In fact, it seems notable that the sites under Hittite control did not offer the same opportunity to their households to develop private economic means of subsistence.

From a general point of view, the analysis results¹⁵ could either mean that the private production units were not dependent on political authority concerning production, supplying of raw materials and distribution of the produced goods,¹⁶ or that at least only some of them were involved in official *oikoi* linked to the Palace or to the Temples.¹⁷ The origin of the raw materials involved in the craft production could be a clue to differentiating private productive units from official *oikoi*. In fact, the first ones should have mainly used local resources, easy to get, while imported material should have

14 Anyway, the existence of the extended families is still attested during the Old-Babylonian period in Southern Mesopotamia, even if their importance seems to have declined (Leemans 1986: 20).

15 As it has already been suggested by L. Bachelot (1999: 334-345).

16 A possible independence of crafts production has already been pointed out by E. N. Cooper concerning 3rd-millennium Upper Middle Euphrates settlements (Cooper 2006: 200).

17 The official *oikoi* institution was first described by Schneider (1920) and Deimel (1931), on the basis of a 'temple-state model' later replaced by the 'palace-totalitarian' one (Yoffee 1995: 289), though later criticized by Diakonoff (1969) and Gelb (1969; 1979). On the centralizing role of Temples and Palaces in Southern Mesopotamia, see Marzahn 2002: 271.

been dispensed by official organizations able to gather the necessary funds and contacts allowing for these exchanges (Moorey 1994: 225). Even if these private enterprises were probably in general independent from the state, they were likely rallied into some kind of corporations or subjected to some form of supervision (by a person or a kind of assembly), thus reducing risks, developing their productivity, their cooperation and networks (Fig. 10b).¹⁷ The well-known 'elders' institution perhaps played a decisive role in this system (Yoffee 1995: 290; Diakonoff 1996: 58; Gelb 1979: 14-16; Seri 2005: 188-192).

CONCLUSION

This project has offered the opportunity to clearly define house diversity throughout the Bronze Age in a large region. The choice of this large framework has granted the opportunity to test hypotheses and theoretical models on a large corpus and to offer a sound reliability to the results. Nevertheless, the disparity of available data, especially concerning material found *in situ*, represent a real limitation in this respect. Anyway, the historical context allowed us to situate these series of data within the general historical framework of the region. The beginning of the period was marked by the emergence of complex and stratified societies, organized by state structures within the framework of urban settlements. The spread of urbanization was on an equal footing with the reorganization of the economy. The economic system in Northern Mesopotamia was already strongly articulated: beyond palatial organizations, it was also largely based on private group activities, often structured by kinship. Moreover, though our knowledge of private and official *oikoi* systems in Central and Southern Mesopotamia is quite extensive, the economic systems of Northern Mesopotamia still have to be examined. A better understanding of the domestic units can thus represent a first step in this direction. In fact, several kinds of comparisons, deduced from the recovered material, with the regional political and economic features, analyzing them from both a synchronic and a diachronic perspective, have been drawn between the Early, Middle and Late Bronze Age. This approach has yielded interesting results concerning the daily lives of Syro-Mesopotamian households, the possibility of categorizing the types of dwellings according to their inhabitants' means of subsistence and the ability to recognize the evolution of existing links between these buildings and the particularities of the households which occupied them.

17 Especially to provide them with the needed raw materials and for the distribution of goods, even if the main part of the production was designated for the use of the households members themselves. In fact, according to 3rd-millennium textual documentation, households were the main production force as well as the main consuming entities. But, in addition to providing household members with the needed goods for their own subsistence, their production activities in favorable times also yielded surplus goods, which were then available for trade (Maisels 1993: 187).

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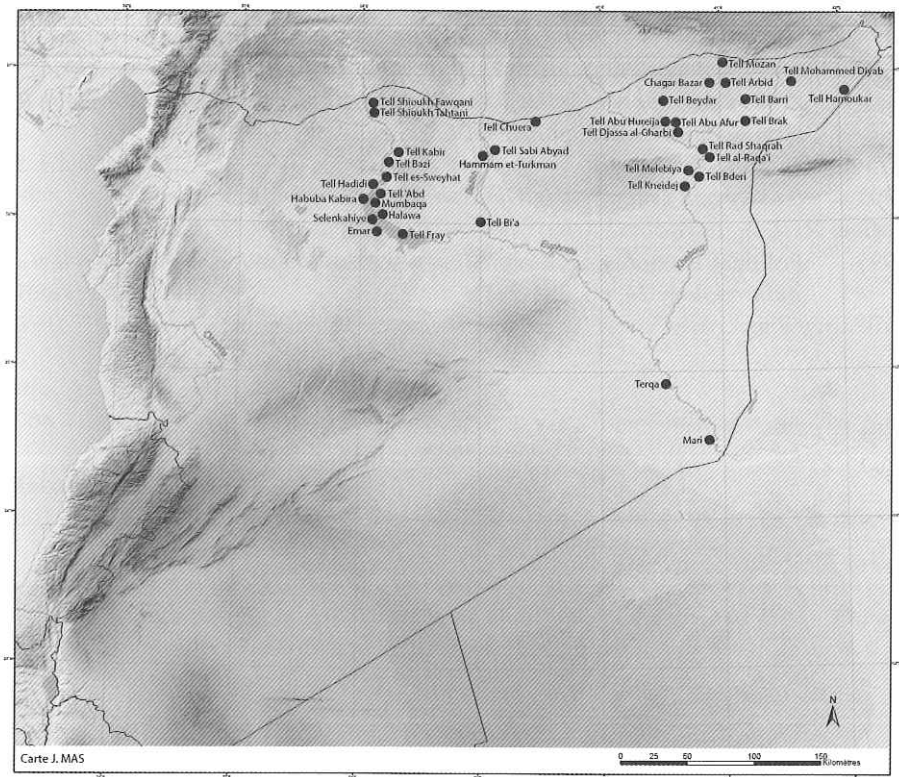


Fig. 1: Considered sites.

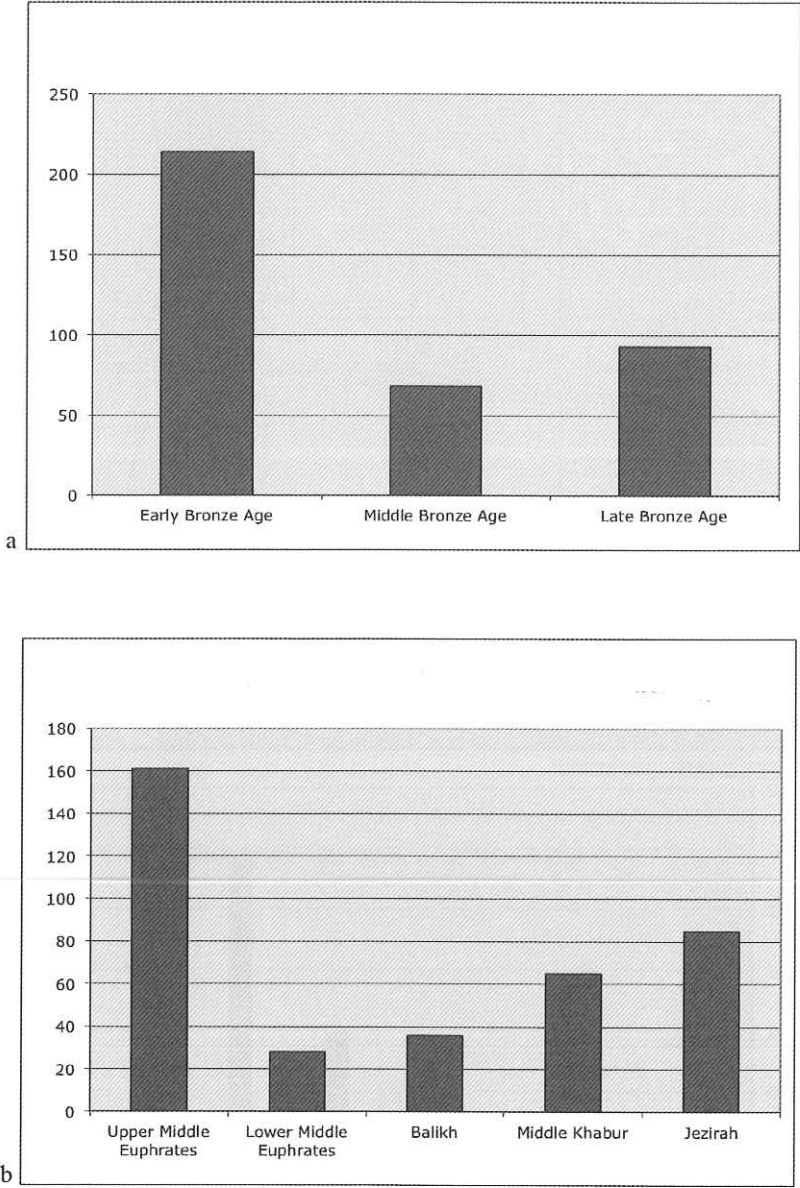


Fig. 2: Distribution of the corpus by periods and regions.

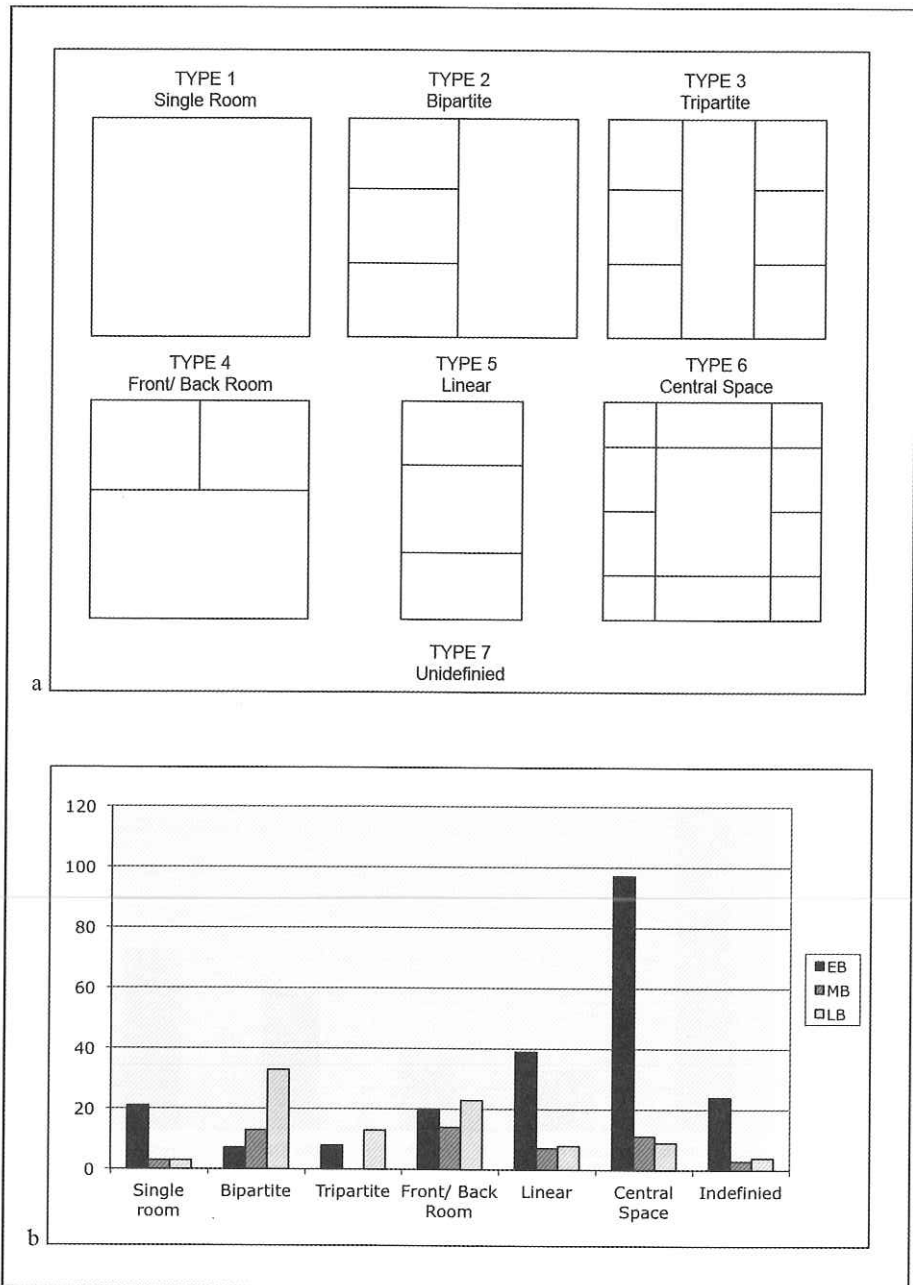


Fig. 3: Typology and distribution of house types by periods.

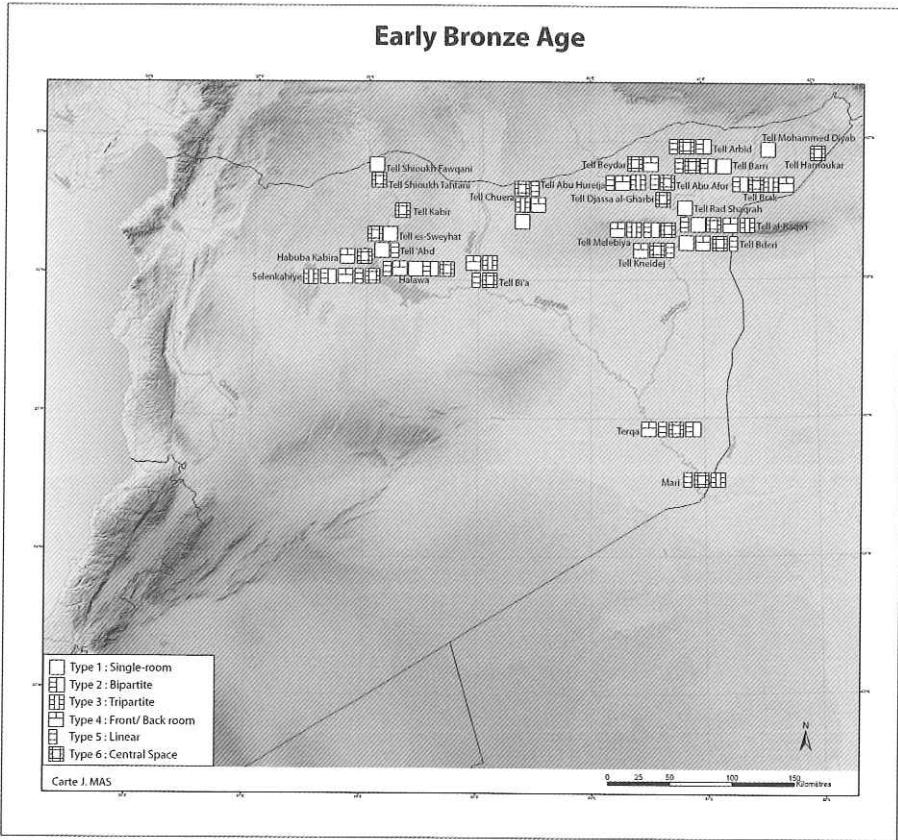


Fig. 4: Geographical distribution of house types, Early Bronze Age.

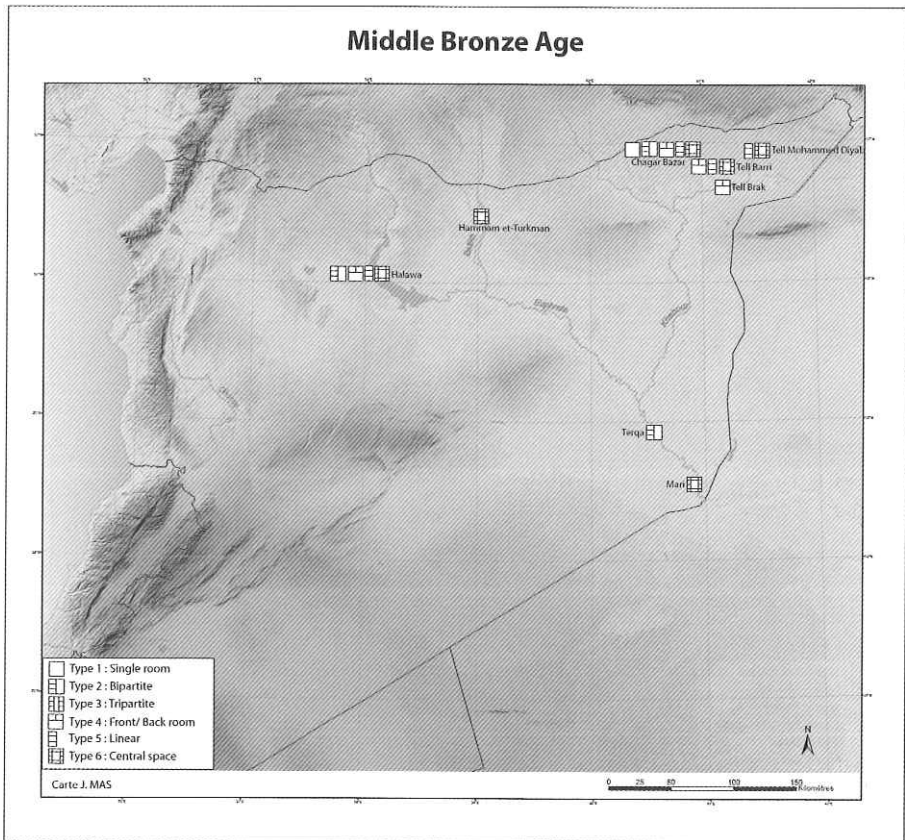


Fig. 5: Geographical distribution of house types, Middle Bronze Age.

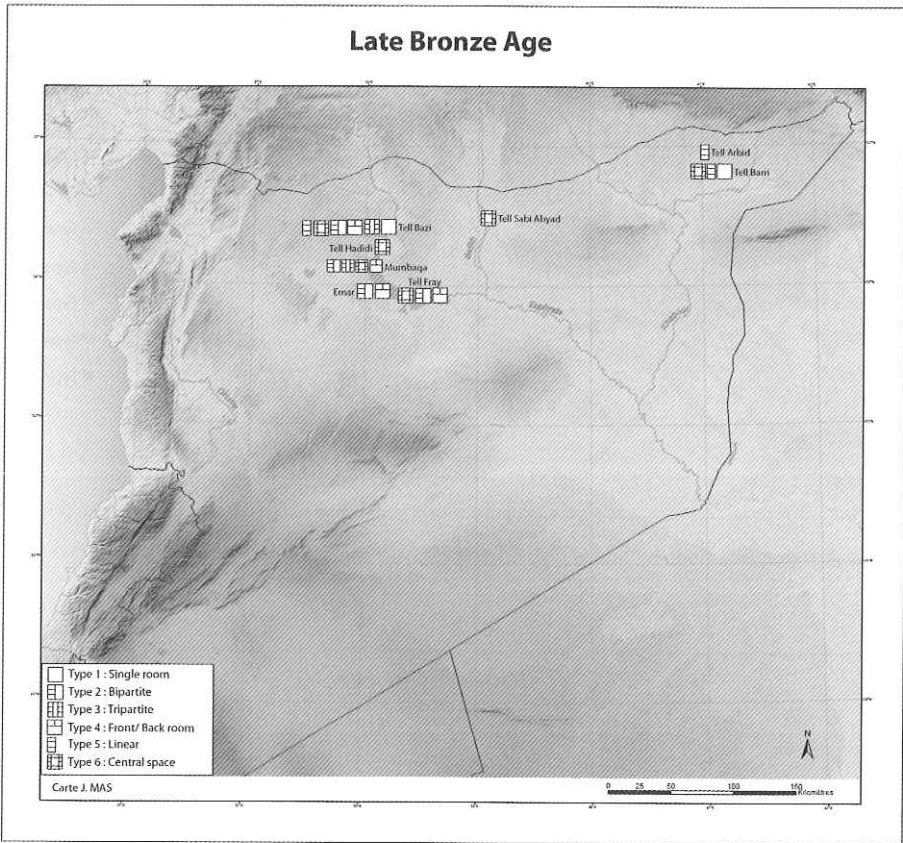


Fig. 6: Geographical distribution of house types, Late Bronze Age.

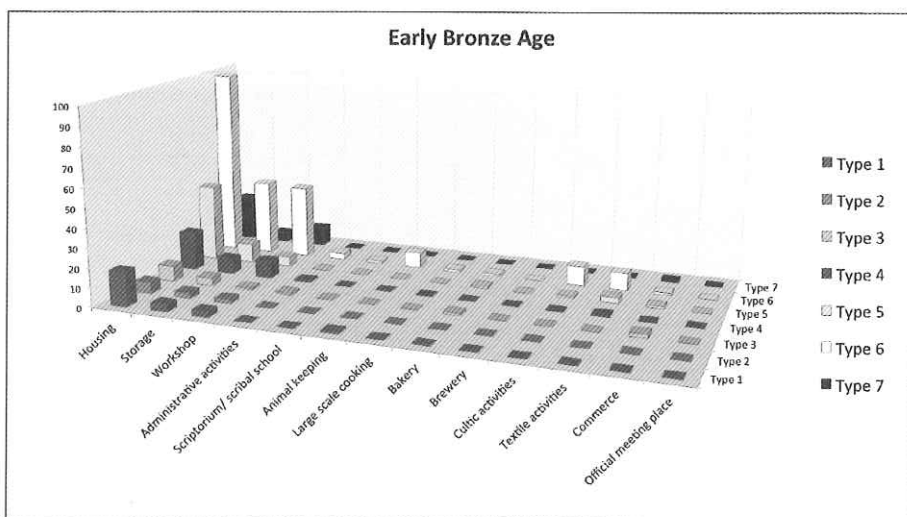


Fig. 7: Attested functions by house types, Early Bronze Age.

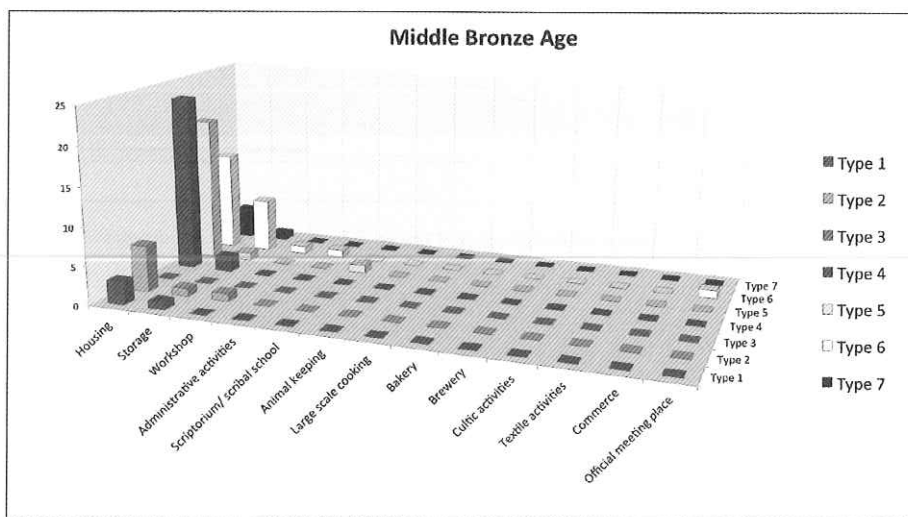


Fig. 8: Attested functions by house types, Middle Bronze Age.

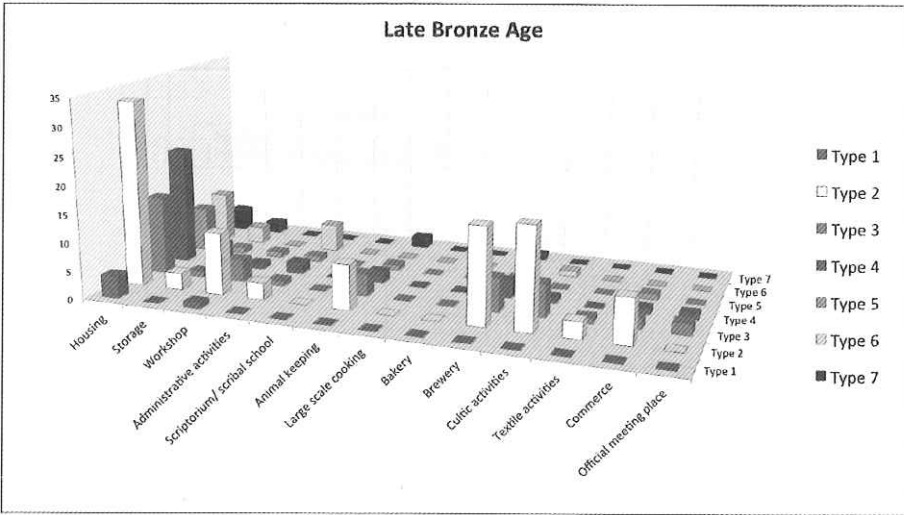


Fig. 9: Attested functions by house types, Late Bronze Age.

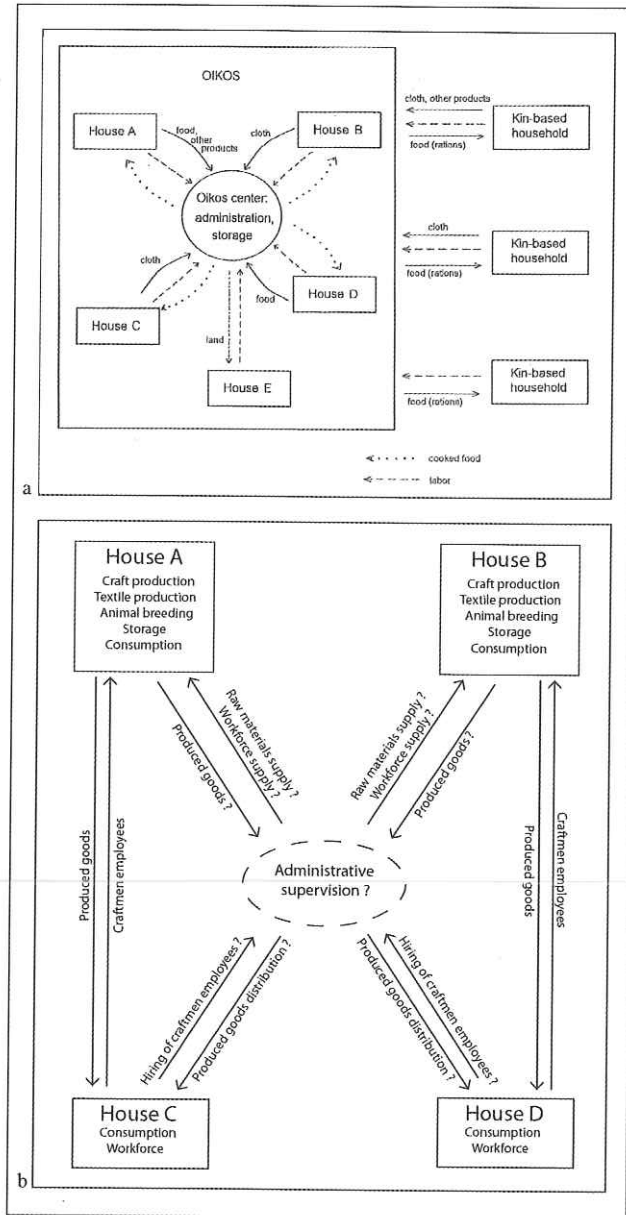


Fig. 10: Economic systems and networks:
 a – Southern Mesopotamian oikoi system, after Pollock 1999: fig. 5.1;
 b – Possible reconstruction of Northern Mesopotamian private economic system.