

Northern Birecik (Southeastern Turkey) during the Middle Bronze Age. The Kingdoms of Uršu and Mamma in the Old Assyrian route during Kultepe Ib

El norte de Birecik (Sureste de Turquía) durante el Bronce Medio. Los reinos de Uršu y Mamma en la ruta del Asirio Antiguo durante Kultepe Ib

JESÚS GIL FUENSANTA
Universidad Autónoma de Madrid
LA SEI-ICFS (Instituto de Ciencias Forenses)
Campus de Cantoblanco - 28049 Madrid
Eurasia.icfs@uam.es
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6455-4470>

ALFREDO MEDEROS MARTÍN
Universidad Autónoma de Madrid
Facultad de Filosofía y Letras
Departamento de Prehistoria y Arqueología
Campus de Cantoblanco - 28049 Madrid
alfredo.mederos@uam.es
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0036-7940>

OTABEK UKTAMOVICH MUMINOV
Universidad Nacional Mirzo UlugBek
nominagi
Facultad de Historia
Tashkent, Uzbekistan
otabekmuminov@gmail.com

Abstract

The Uršu kingdom is one of the outstanding archaeological questions in the Middle Bronze Age I-II of the Middle-Upper Euphrates region, which connects with the Abarsal problem, more typical of the EB III/IV period in the same area.

The Uršu (Ur-šu) kingdom, cited in Ur III texts as an important kingdom, is traditionally placed in Samsat Höyük, Kazane Höyük, and in the Gaziantep area, on the right bank of the river. That is, it is located within a 40-50 km stretch around the middle Euphrates, from Carchemish to further north. Right in the middle lies the pass between Tilbes and Zeugma, where theories suggest there were two cities along the Anatolian route on either bank: *Abrum* on the left bank and *Zaqaria* (Zuqarru).

The point about Kazane Höyük is that this site is associated with both Uršu and Abarsal, as well as the Amorite leader Shamshi-Adad (c. 1808-1776 BC), who is thought to have conquered the area sometime during the Middle Bronze Age (MB).

Materials from MB I and MB II north of Birecik modern town (in special two cylinder seals found at Tilbes Höyük) do provide evidence of a link with the caravan route and its possible connection with the kingdom of Uršu and specially the kingdom of Mamma, and suggest the hypothesis that Tilbes Höyük was a *wabartum* during Kultepe Ib. The occupation of Tilbes Hoyuk during the Middle Bronze Age appears to be long-lasting, but it is interrupted before the Late Bronze Age, with no occupation until an early period of the Achaemenid presence in the region, during the Late Iron Age.

One of the seals from Tilbes Höyük is anepigraphic and could well date between 19th and early 17th centuries BC, connected to the *karum* of Kultepe, due to its style, and therefore prior to the time of Shamshi-Adad I. The other seal bears an inscription with Middle Babylonian ductus, characteristic of a period after the disappearance of Shamshi-Adad, that is, between the mid-18th and 17th centuries BC, and characteristic of a Middle Bronze II context.

Key words: Middle Bronze Age I-II, Old Assyrian Trade, Babilonian and Syrian cylinder seals, *wabartum*, Birecik

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Resumen

El reino de Uršu es una de las cuestiones arqueológicas más destacadas de la Edad del Bronce Medio I-II en la región del Éufrates Medio-Alto, que conecta con el problema de Abarsal, más propio del Bronce Antiguo III/IV en la misma zona.

El reino de Uršu (Ur-šu), citado en los textos de Ur III como un reino importante, se ha ubicado en Samsat Höyük, Kazane Höyük y, tradicionalmente, en la zona de Gaziantep, en la margen derecha del río. Es decir, se encuentra en un tramo de 40 a 50 km alrededor del Éufrates Medio, desde Carchemish hacia el norte. Justo en medio se encuentra el paso entre Tilbes y Zeugma, donde las teorías sugieren que había dos ciudades a lo largo de la ruta de Anatolia, a cada orilla: *Abrum*, en la margen izquierda, y *Zaqaria* (Zuqarru).

La cuestión de Kazane Höyük reside en que este yacimiento está asociado tanto con Uršu como con Abarsal, así como con el líder amorreo Shamshi-Adad (c. 1808-1776 a. C.), quien se cree que conquistó la zona durante el Bronce Medio.

Materiales del Bronce Medio I y II al norte de la ciudad moderna de Birecik (en especial dos sellos cilindros hallados en Tilbes Hoyuk) sí evidencian un vínculo con la ruta de caravanas y su posible conexión con el reino de Uršu y en particular con el reino de Mamma, lo que sugiere la hipótesis de que Tilbes Höyük fue un *wabartum* durante Kultepe Ib. La ocupación de Tilbes Höyük durante la Edad del Bronce Medio parece ser duradera, pero se interrumpe antes del Bronce Final, sin ocupación hasta una fase temprana de la presencia aqueménida en la región, durante la Edad del Hierro Final.

Uno de los sellos de Tilbes Höyük es anepigráfico y bien podría datar entre los siglos XIX y principios del XVII a. C., vinculado al *karum* de Kultepe debido a su estilo y, por lo tanto, anterior a la época de Shamshi-Adad I. El otro sello presenta una inscripción con un ductus babilónico medio, característico de un período posterior a la desaparición de Shamshi-Adad, es decir, entre mediados de los siglos XVIII y XVII a. C., y característico de un contexto del Bronce Medio II.

Palabras clave: Bronce Medio I-II, comercio asirio antiguo, sellos cilindro babilonios y sirios, *wabartum*, Birecik

Аннотация

Царство Уршум является одним из выдающихся археологических вопросов в среднем бронзовом веке I-II в регионе Среднего-Верхнего Евфрата, который связан с проблемой Абарсаль, более типичной для периода EB III/IV в той же области.

Царство Уршу (Ur-су), упоминаемое в текстах Ур III как важное царство, расположено в Самсат-Хуюке, Казане-Хуюке и традиционно в районе Газиантепа, на правом берегу реки. То есть, оно расположено на участке протяженностью 40-50 км вокруг среднего Евфрата, от Каркемиша дальше на север. Прямо посередине находится проход между Тильбесом и Зевгмой, где, как предполагают теории, на обоих берегах Анатолийского пути было два города: Абрум на левом берегу и Закария (Зукарру).

Суть Казане-Хуюка в том, что это место связано как с Уршу, так и с Абарсалом, а также с аморейским вождем Шамши-Адду (ок. 1808-1776 гг. до н. э.), который, как полагают, завоевал этот район где-то в период среднего бронзового века (МБ).

Материалы из МБ I и МБ II к северу от современного города Биреджик (в особых двухцилиндровых печатях, найденных в Тильбес-Хуюке) действительно свидетельствуют о связи с караванным путем и его возможной связи с королевством Уршум. Заселение Тильбес-Хуюка в период среднего бронзового века, по-видимому, было длительным, но оно прерывается до позднего бронзового века, и до раннего периода присутствия Ахеменидов в регионе, в период позднего железного века, оно не было заселено. Одна из печатей из Тильбес-Хуюка является анепиграфической и вполне может датироваться между 19 и началом 17 вв. до н. э., связана с карумом Кюльтепе из-за ее стиля, и, следовательно, до времени Шамши-Адду. Другая печать имеет надпись со среднеавилонским дуктусом, характерную для периода после исчезновения Шамши-Адду, то есть между серединой 18 и 17 вв. до н. э., и характерную для контекста МБ II.

Ключевые слова: Средний бронзовый век I-II, ранняя ассирийская торговля, вавилонские и сирийские цилиндрические печати, *вабартум*, Биреджик

1. The overland trade route between Assur and Anatolia

Between the reigns of Erishum I (1972–1933 BC) and Shamshi Adad I (1808–1776 BC) (Barjamovic et al., 2012: 29, 31, 25 fig. 9), stratigraphic phases of Kanesh-Kultepe II (1975–1835 BC), Middle Bronze I, dated his end by dendrochronology ca. 1835–1832 BC (Newton and Kuniholm 2004: 168; Manning et al., 2010: 1585–1586) and Kultepe Ib (ca. 1835–1700 BC), Middle Bronze IIA, — the last trees were cut in 1779 BC in Waršama Palace (Newton and Kuniholm 2004: 168) —, an important trade developed between the city of Assur and different cities and kingdoms in Anatolia — Kanesh, Purušhaddum —. Retaking some routes that must have existed in the Ebla period, when wool textiles were traded for Anatolian silver, at least since 1975 BC, during the reign of Erishum, the city of Assur, with about 40 ha, organized a commercial network based on the exchange of tin for silver and gold, which was complemented by textiles for copper. About 35 cities participated in this commercial network using caravans of donkeys or asses, usually separated by ca. 30 km or a day's walk, with main centers or *karum*, commercial neighborhoods outside the city and secondary centers or *wabartum*, where each city imposed a tax of 3% on tin and 5% on wool textiles, which allowed the circulation of an essential product, tin from Afghanistan and Iran, to reach Anatolia, the Levant and probably Egypt (Veenhof, 1972; Larsen, 1976; Beitzel, 1992; Michel, 2001; Forlandini, 2006; Bajamovic, 2011) (figure 1a–1b).

2. The Middle Bronze Age in Northern Birecik

In a previous study, we had described how historical events occurred around the local Early Bronze (EB) IVa period that led to the abandonment of Surtepe (Abarsal?) (Gil Fuensanta, Mederos and Muminov, 2023), but not to the discouragement of Tilbes Höyük, which continued to be occupied throughout the EB IV phase, and where at least some presence was linked to its use as a

potential sanctuary linked to fertility (Gil Fuensanta, Mederos and Muminov, 2019; Gil Fuensanta and Mederos, 2024) just as a section of the settlement had been used uninterruptedly from EB I–III.

There are elements specific to the Middle Bronze (MB) I that lead us to consider at least one occupation during this period only at Tilbes Höyük. We have no evidence of any MBI I occupation at Surtepe Höyük, Tilvez/Meteler, or Tilöbür, which did have extensive occupation in the Early Bronze Age (EB) IV.

Despite the significant occupation and administrative management, as well as the use of metals in the MB II period to the immediate north of the Birecik subregion, this is limited to Surtepe and Tilbes, so it appears that the population slowly increased, but not as exponentially as it did in the EB IV (Lawrence and Ricci, 2016: 50–52). This may be due to the displacement of a specific ethnic group, and its position as an outsider among the Late Bronze Age “winners” of the Middle Euphrates, which leads us to consider it a no-man's-land in this geographical area.

Materials from MB I and MB II, in special two cylinder seals found at Tilbes Höyük, do provide evidence of a link with the caravan route and its possible connection with the kingdom of Uršu. The occupation of Tilbes Höyük during the Middle Bronze Age appears to be long-lasting, but it is interrupted before the Late Bronze Age, with no occupation until an early period of the Achaemenid presence in the region, during the Late Iron Age.

North of Birecik is a V-shaped valley. Tilbes is in the middle reaches. It is also a distended gorge, and material accumulation is very easy. On the bank of the Tilbes Höyük, there is sediment accumulation; on the left bank, the river is narrower. It presents an alluvial plain very fertile for agriculture. On the left bank, there are apparently no clay outcrops; it is unknown how the river was crossed, perhaps with a pontoon bridge.

The potter's clay was apparently taken not from Tilbes itself, but from another part of the river, behind the Horun Höyük. Therefore, the ceramic pastes from Horun and Tilbes are identical, except for imports. The material of the mountainous hills is calcareous; this can be seen in the building stones (they come from there). Marls can be seen

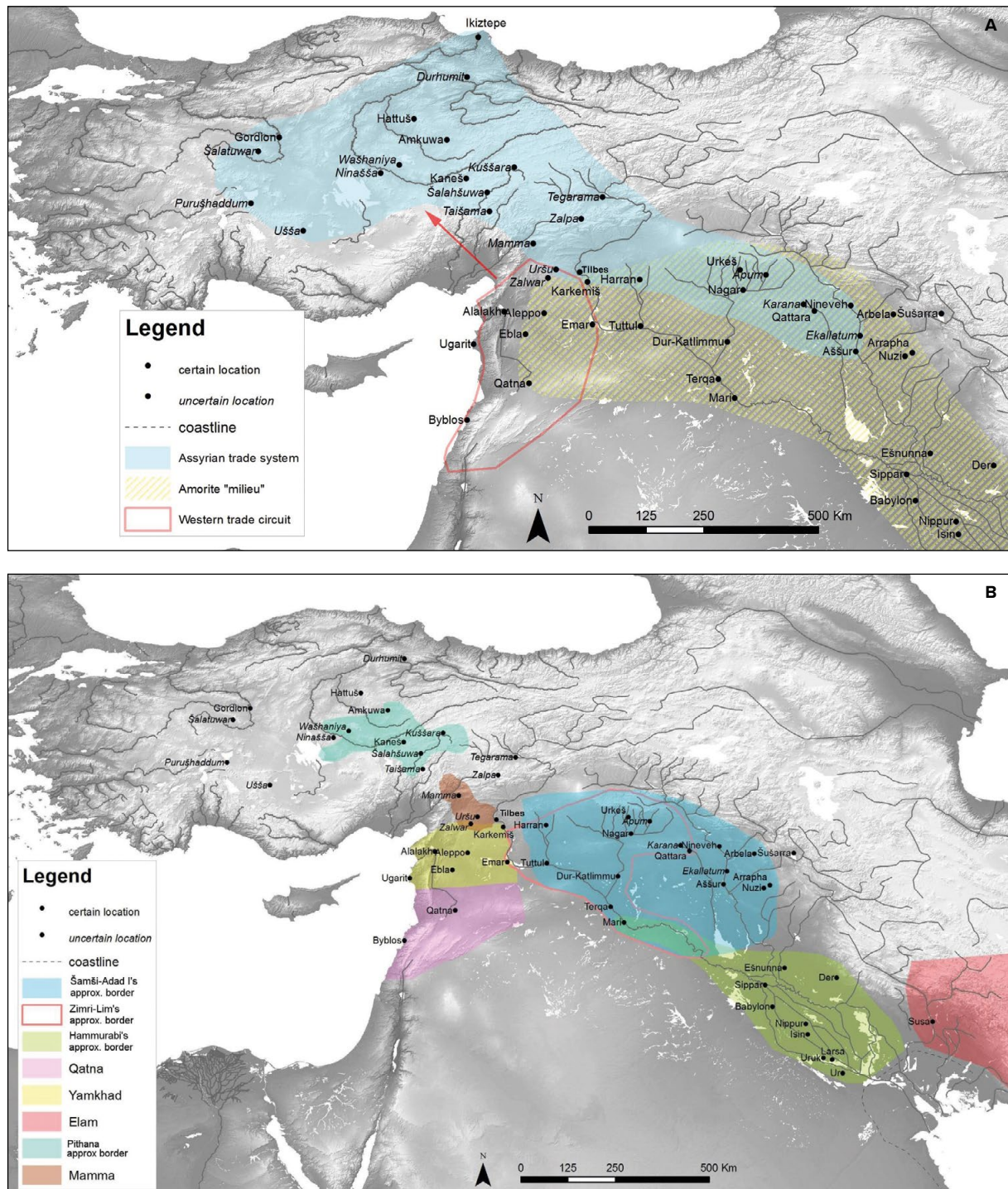


Figure 1. A. Trade network between Assyrian and Anatolia, 1900 BC (after Palmisano, 2015: 467, fig. 203). B. Near East Kingdoms during Kultepe Ib, with the kingdom of Mamma, c. 1800 BC (after Palmisano, 2015: 311 fig. 11)

Figura 1. A. Redes comerciales entre Asiria y Anatolia, 1900 AC (a partir de Palmisano, 2015: 467, fig. 203). B. Reinos del Próximo Oriente durante Kultepe Ib, con el reino de Mamma, ca. 1800 AC (a partir de Palmisano, 2015: 311 fig. 11)

on other hills located on the right side of the river. Marl-limestone, but a less compact material, which would have served as conglomerate. Sandstone, crushed limestone, and especially a lot of sandstone are evident in the ceramics.

3. Surtepe Höyük

To date, the presence of Middle Bronze Age (MB) levels at Surtepe Höyük has been limited to the northern and southern sectors of this large mound,

although surface features suggest the possible existence of a “low zone” outside the mound to the north, in the direction of Tilvez/Meteler Höyük.

The nature of the remains differs in both areas. In the northern area, sector B of the excavation, these are remains associated with a walled area, a reuse and reconstruction of a deep wall apparently erected during the Early Bronze Age I. In part of the southern sector of the site, excavation sector E, remains from two burials were found, of them a Middle Bronze Age II burial even appeared in section E42 (Gil Fuensanta and Crivelli, 2008: 246-247). In the southern sector, closer to the main course of the Euphrates, Middle Bronze Age remains were found in situ in sections E42 and 43 (Gil Fuensanta and Crivelli, 2008: 245).

Ceramics were discovered at Surtepe that appear to date from the Middle Bronze Age II. This period saw the use of a wall whose first construction appears to date back to at least to the Early Bronze Age Ia. Despite the use of highly monumental structures in its military architecture, there is nothing to indicate occupation of the site until the Late Iron Age, with Achaemenid tombs that may well date back to the 6th century, as well as the presence of monumental architecture typical of the late 5th century, as indicated by a specific seal from that period and its association with a *farvabar* from a similar period.

The ceramic bulk found at Surtepe Höyük is a simple, mass-produced plain pottery, with a predominance of well-fired surfaces and pastes, and a beige-yellowish color range. There are jars and open forms, where the only decorations we can see are parallel lines, resembling grooves, on the surface of the belly or on the rim. In other cases, they are wavy. Regarding the beakers, a reference point is the specimens found in the Karababa area, at the Kurban Höyük Period III site (Algaze, 1990: Ware Group I, Plate 97). The globular jars refer us to the same site as close parallels (Algaze, 1990: Plate 107). Throughout the Middle Bronze Age, we find more potter's marks, in percentage terms, than in any previous period, perhaps as a sign of mass production.

Surtepe has yielded a considerable amount of metals from the northern sector, but their contexts date from the Achaemenid period. Some small corroded fragments are likely to date from MB II.

Animal bones from Surtepe are very scarce in the non-secondary contexts of the northern sector of the höyük, where the MB Is concentrated. We barely see any pig bone remains; but in other periods of the höyük, most of the bones are from bovids and especially sheep and goats in the southern sector. There are equines there, also from Iron Age contexts. This contrasts with Tilbes Höyük, where the contexts around the Big Building, but at an earlier date, from the EBIV, seemed to offer a greater number of pigs than sheep and goats.

4. Tilbes Höyük

The archaeological site of Tilbes Höyük is situated on the left bank of the middle course of the Euphrates river, where a historical ford has once crossed the watercourse, 22 km North of the town of Birecik in the province of Sanliurfa, SE Turkey. In the month of August 2000 it vanished under the waters of the Birecik dam (figure 2a-2b).

Archaeological excavations at Tilbes Mound, located within the borders of Keskince (Tilmusa) Village, which is affiliated to Birecik district and located on the west bank of the Euphrates River, were initiated in 1996 within the framework of Birecik Dam archaeological rescue excavations. In the digging, that continued until year 2000, because a Dam completion, grave remains and small findings belonging to all these periods were unearthed in this mound, which consists of nine layers; after the Medieval Islamic period (Tilbes I), Roman (Tilbes II), Hellenistic (Tilbes III) and Iron Age (Tilbes IV) periods, and a long centuries occupation hiatus, due place the Middle Bronze period occupation (Tilbes V), the focus of this study (figure 3a-3c).

Thus, the Tilbes site has been occupied in two major periods. The first one reaches from somewhere in the early 4th millennium (Late Chalcolithic) down to about the 17th century BC (Middle Bronze Age II). Basal layers of the tell dating, to the Late Chalcolithic I epoch, bear the weight of Early- and Middle Bronze Age strata, making up most of the tell and representing remains of a small but well-articulated community. This boasted a large

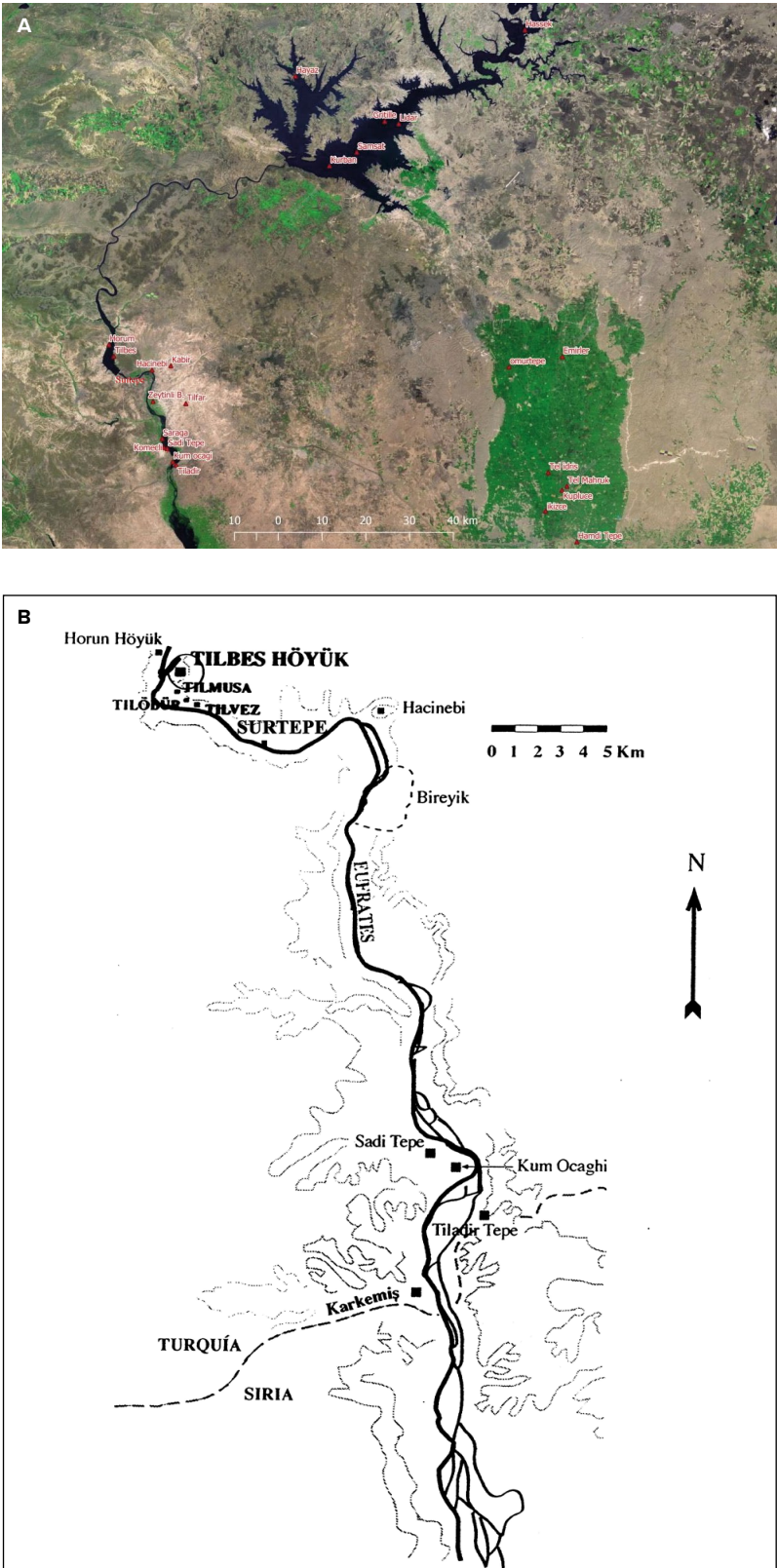
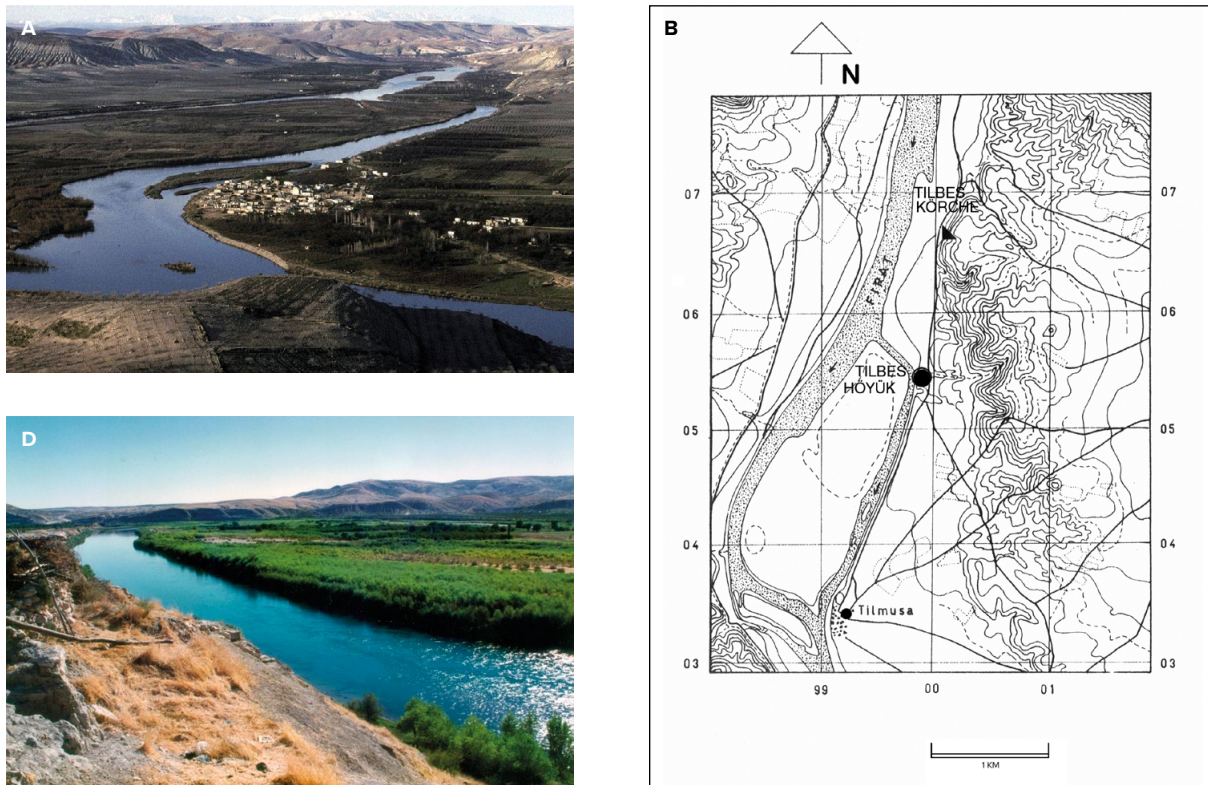


Figure 2. A. Harran plain and Tilbes Höyük in Syro-Turkish Middle Euphrates, northern Mesopotamia (after Can, 2018: 115 fig. 8). B. Map with Tilbes Höyük, Bireyik and Karkemish (drawing by Ben Claasz Cockson)

Figura 2. A. Llanura de Harran y Tilbes Höyük en el Medio Éufrates sirio-turco, Mesopotamia del Norte (a partir de Can, 2018: 115 fig. 8). B. Mapa con Tilbes Höyük, Bireyik y Carchemish (dibujo por Ben Claasz Cockson)



TILBES HÖYÜK
TOPOGRAPHIC PLAN
1999 EXCAVATIONS

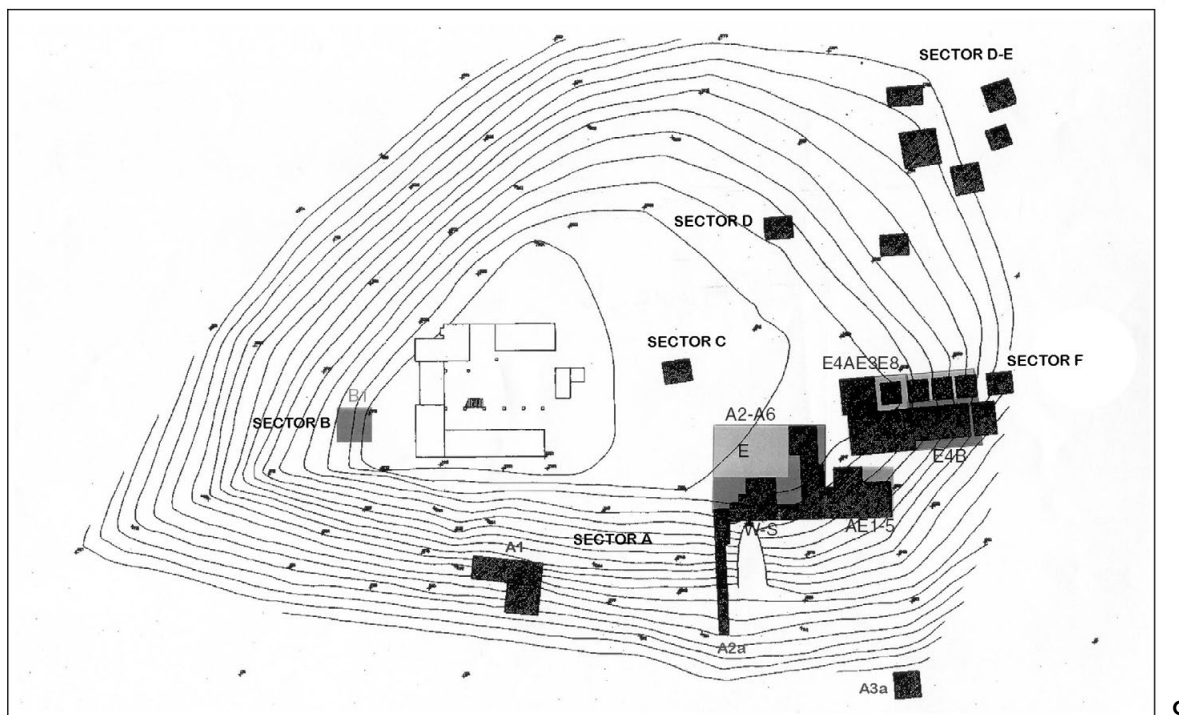


Figure 3. A-B. View and plan of Timusa and Tilbes Höyük in the Euphrates river. C. Topography of Tilbes Höyük, 1999 Season, with Squares E4AE3E8 and A2A6. D. View of the Euphrates river from Tilbes Höyük, 1997 Season

Figura 3. A-V. Vista y plano de Tilmusa y Tilbes Höyük en el río Éufrates. C. Topografía de Tilbes Höyük, campaña de 1999, con los cortes E4AE3E8 y A2A6. D. Vista del río Éufrates desde Tilbes Höyük, campaña de 1997

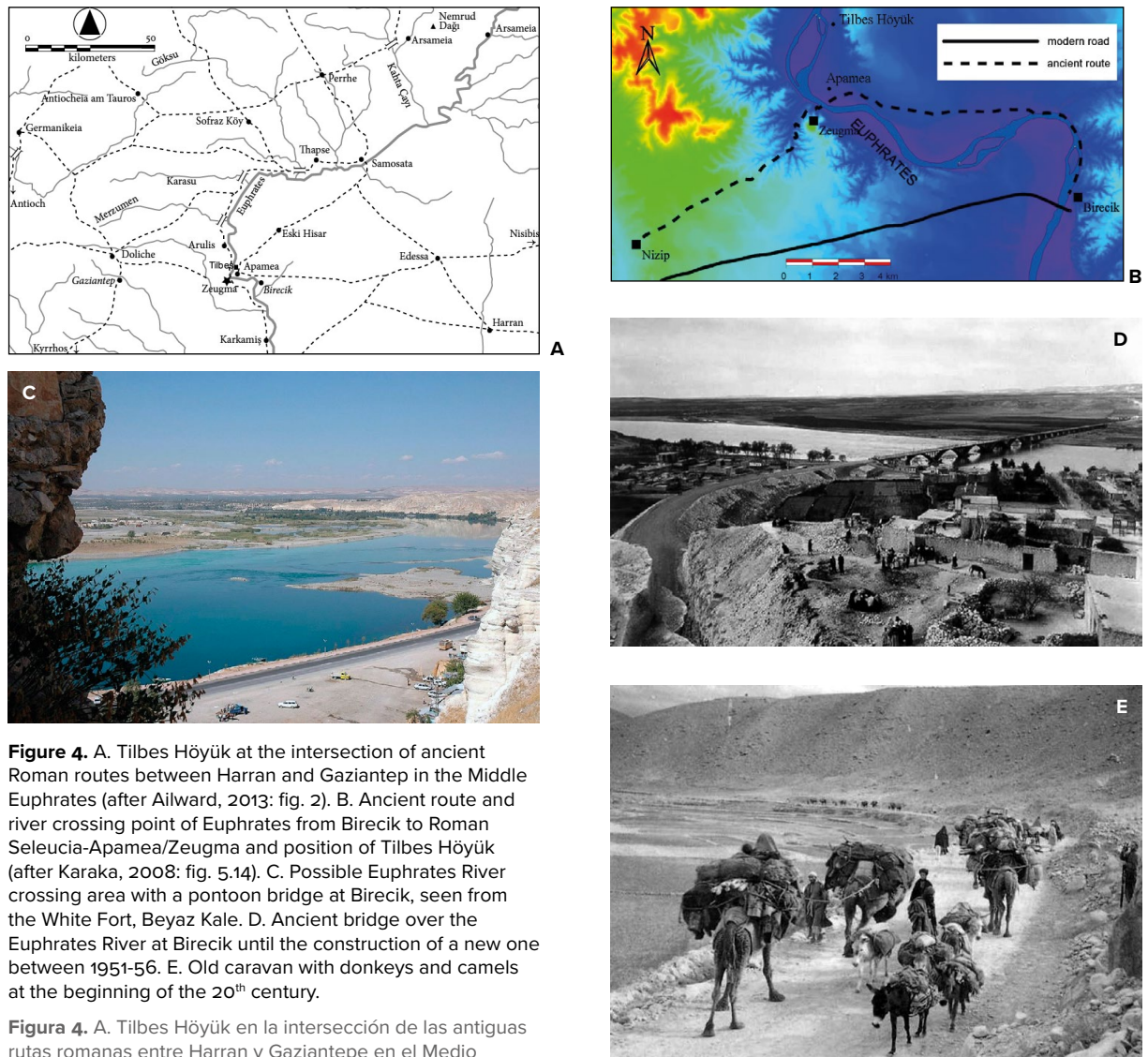


Figure 4. A. Tilbes Höyük at the intersection of ancient Roman routes between Harran and Gaziantep in the Middle Euphrates (after Ailward, 2013: fig. 2). B. Ancient route and river crossing point of Euphrates from Birecik to Roman Seleucia-Apamea/Zeugma and position of Tilbes Höyük (after Karaka, 2008: fig. 5.14). C. Possible Euphrates River crossing area with a pontoon bridge at Birecik, seen from the White Fort, Beyaz Kale. D. Ancient bridge over the Euphrates River at Birecik until the construction of a new one between 1951-56. E. Old caravan with donkeys and camels at the beginning of the 20th century.

Figura 4. A. Tilbes Höyük en la intersección de las antiguas rutas romanas entre Harran y Gaziantep en el Medio Éufrates (a partir de Ailward, 2013: fig. 2). B. Antigua ruta y punto de cruce del río Éufrates entre Birecik y la ciudad romana de Selucia-Apamea/Zeugma y posición de Tilbes Höyük (a partir de Karaka, 2008: fig. 5.14). C. Zona de posible paso del río Éufrates con un puente de pontones en Birecik, vista desde el fuerte blanco, Beyaz Kale. D. Antiguo puente construido sobre el río Éufrates en Birecik, hasta la construcción del actual entre 1951-56. E. Antigua caravana con burros y camellos a inicios del siglo XX

rectangular architecture at the site's very top, extensive habitation-building layout, sacred spaces with evidence for cult and offerings, and tombs of prominent personages.

The narrow settlement flourished again doubtlessly in view of the Euphrates ford and thanks to Achaemenid policy of guarding the empire's vital communication points. From about 300 BC Tilbes must have come within the orbit of 'Greater' Zeugma-Apamea, the Seleucid capital of Syria

(Desreumaux, Gaborit and Caillou, 1999: 75-77). This site survived the desertion of the Seleucid capital in the first pre-Christian century and remained settled throughout the Roman, with some evidence of contact with the Parthian empire, and Byzantine ages down to the Early Islamic period. A small fortified point might have been erected on its top in the 13th or early 14th century AD as a bridgehead of the power of Mamluk sultans of Egypt (figure 4a-4e).

Tilbes displays extensive management of the site during the Middle Bronze (MB) period, which extends at least throughout the MB II period. To date, we are unable to determine whether the entire site was used during the complete MB I sequence, although there are indications that this is the case, primarily the presence of some ceramic reference

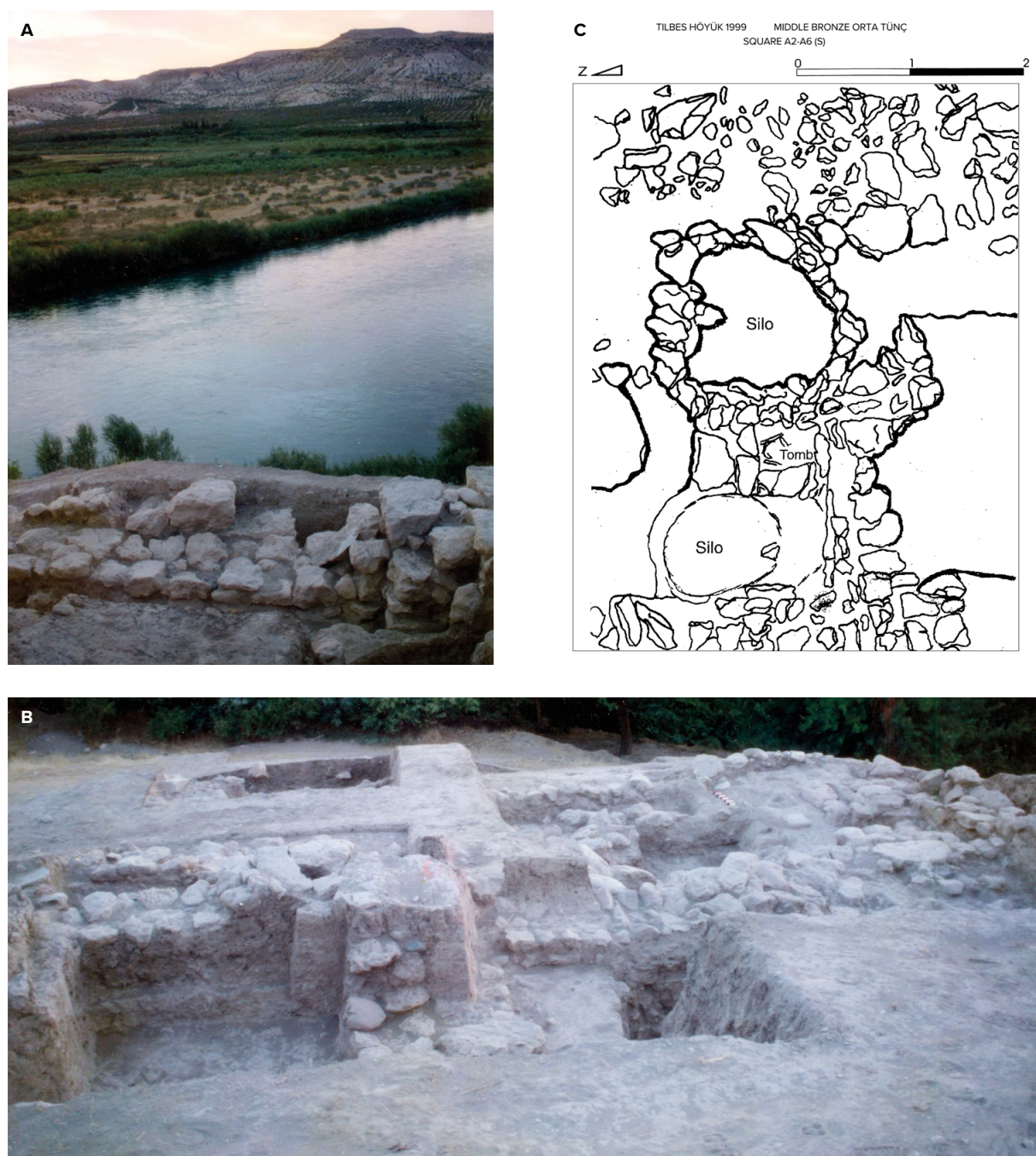


Figure 5. A. Tilbes Höyük 1997 Season. Walls of the “Big Building”, MB I/II phases built on the EB IV. Sector A2-A6. B. Tilbes Höyük 1997 Season. Walls of the external sector to the south of the “Big Building”, MB I/II built on EB IV. Sector A2-A6. C. Tilbes Höyük 1997 Season. Plan of silos of the external sector to the south of the “Big Building”, MB IIA and B built on EB IV. Sector A2-A6

Figura 5. A. Tilbes Höyük, campaña de 1997. Muros del gran edificio, construido en el Bronce Antiguo IV, fases del Bronce Medio I/II. Corte A2-A6. B. Tilbes Höyük, campaña de 1997. Muros al exterior del sector sur del gran edificio, construido en el Bronce Antiguo IV, fases del Bronce Medio I/II. Corte A2-A6. C. Tilbes Höyük, campaña de 1997. Plano de silos al exterior del sector sur del gran edificio, construido en el Bronce Antiguo IV, fases del Bronce Medio I/II. Corte A2-A6

fossils and the absence of a hiatus in the acclimatization of buildings throughout the MB.

To understand the MB at the site, the excavation sectors E4a and especially A2A6, the former center of the höyük, are again a key. The western half of

A2-A6W is particularly interesting due to its explicit continuity with Early Bronze (EB) IV and MB I (Locus 6010) (figure 5a-5c).

There are clear tombs with MB III date on the site (v.gr. locuses 6032, 6037), due to their high-quality,



Figure 6. A. Tilbes Höyük 1998 Season. Walls and structures of the external sector to the south of the “Big Building”, MB I/II built on EB IV and collective chamber tomb. MB III. Sector E4aE3E8. B. Tilbes Höyük 1997 Season. Remains of kilns, MB II. Sector AE1-5

Figura 6. A. Tilbes Höyük, campaña de 1998. Muros y estructuras al exterior del sector sur del gran edificio, construido en el Bronce Antiguo IV, fases del Bronce Medio I/II, y tumba colectiva del Bronce Medio III. Corte E4aE3E8. B. Tilbes Höyük, campaña de 1997. Restos de hornos del Bronce Medio II. Corte AE1-5

simple plain pottery vessel fossils, produced in the Birecik region, with a temporal arch prior to the mid-16th century. These tombs were made early into the remains of the western sector of the site, what we call the “Big Building”, a stone structure that occupied the central part of the höyük during at least the MB I-II period, and whose original construction have been in at least since the EB IV times.

There are more metal fragments and slags in this “Big Building” area, than in other sectors of the höyük. This is a large building made up of numerous rooms, the western half of which was eroded and cut by the river at some point in antiquity. Remains of kilns were found in A2A6W. One of the rooms in this large stone building (locus 6059), in the southwest sector, was larger (at least 40 m²

preserved) and had flat stone slabs; it also had an intentional blockage (locus 6063) due to human action, to prevent access from other, smaller, adjoining rooms or corridors (locus 6046 and 6066). This room contains a large concentration of pottery fragments, in varying states of breakage, found at floor level. The southwest end also featured a small column, locus 6078, and the north wall, locus 6072, of the room was in the cyclopean style (figure 6a-6b).

There are many pits in this area (locus 6035, for example) that reveal its abandonment for a long time after the MB II period, and whose contents reveal different uses of the höyük of Tilbes at the end of the Iron Age (Period Tilbes IV) and the beginning of the Classical period (Hellenistic/Seleucid of the late 4th and 3rd centuries BC) at the site (Period Tilbes III), which can be explained by the presence of the Seleucid dipolis of Zeugma, of which Surtepe and Tilbes or Tilvez were part, as well as a large Achaemenid Persian city (Tipsah?, see Gawlikowski, 1996) that covered the same territory before the end of the 4th century BC. Tilbes had buildings of solid Seleucid masonry (e.g., loci 9001 and 9002), later than the Achaemenid silos and burial sites of the 5th-4th centuries BC, a time when the cult of Mitra/Anahita was omnipresent in the höyük.

We are clear that the BM (I?-II) period had benefited from a restructuring in the site's E4aE3E8 area, with a greater presence of silos in the earlier stages of a second phase, MB IIA. At locus 610a, we figured out the MB IIA silos built on EB IVA and EIV B periods walls and a corridor that divided this building from others, with stone paving of different sizes from the neighbour "Big Building" to the north and at a higher position. There were used animal horns, bone antlers as a foundation for the silo on the pavement; this links with the idea of fertility, seen previously by the FUAM in the burials of unborn children. These silos were abandoned after MB IIB period, because there are no traces of fire in any of them, nor were there any in later silos in the upper part of the pit, coming from the Persian period, centuries V-IV beginnings BC (which is A2A6, the area of the Middle Bronze Age's "Big Building") (figure 7a-7c).

Large, mass-produced vessels are present in the northern area of Birecik during the Middle Bronze Age, in phases A and B of the local MB period. On the other hand, the ceramic sequence at Tilbes Höyük shows greater diversification in its provenance during this time frame, including a coarse, polished local pottery, which we were unable to distinguish in situ at Surtepe. The Middle Bronze Age ceramics framework reflects a change in culinary tastes and perhaps the mentality of the elites of the period (a different group from the dominant one in the previous period?). The metallic ceramic vessels typical of the Early Bronze Age III-IV culture gave way to larger vessels, better suited for storage and transport.

At Tilbes Höyük we found an individualized type of locally made pottery, together with other similar vase fragments imported from a probable territory northwest of the Syrian arc, according to previous analysis in the University of Alicante archaeometry laboratories (R. Seva, pers. comm.), the globular flask, which has been linked to the transport of wine to other places in this geographical arc, such as Zincirli Höyük, Kültepe or Sippar. The coetaneous texts speak of this trade with the kingdom of Mamma, as its centralized place (Morgan and Richardson, 2020: 192, 181 fig. 1) and are presented in Kültepe Ia (Emre, 1995: 183) and the destruction level of Zincirli Höyük, 1632-1610 BC and the final of the Middle Bronze Age II ca. 1600 BC (Herrmann et al., 2023: 664, 663 fig. 6). This type of vessel was located at specific points inside and on the exterior of the "Big Building" of MB II in Tilbes, and no apparent presence of it was found outside these scenes, where fragments of it abounded (figure 8a-8d).

The EB IVb buildings in the E4aE3E8 sector also feature various burials, with temporal dilation, and tombs prepared in a predicted manner, as in the so-called "Big Building."

Two different traditions can be seen among the burials at Tilbes Höyük throughout MB IIB, in chamber or in a pit, without being able to distinguish the precedence of one or the other in time, although apparently those in a pit paradoxically seem to have been more careful in avoiding destroying the previous architecture of EB IVb or



Figure 7. A. Tilbes Höyük 1997 Season. Walls and structures of the external sector to the south of the “Big Building”, MB I/II built on EB IV. MB III. Sector E4aE3E8. B. Tilbes Höyük 1997 Season. Silo and ritual deposit of the outer sector to the south of the “Big Building”, MB IIB built on EB IV walls. Sector E4aE3E8. C. Tilbes Höyük 1997. Jar of locus 611a, south of the “Big Building”, MB IIA. Sector E4aE3E8

Figura 7. A. Tilbes Höyük, campaña de 1997. Muros y estructuras al exterior del sector sur del gran edificio, construido en el Bronce Antiguo IV, fases del Bronce Medio I/II. Corte E4aE3E8. B. Tilbes Höyük, campaña de 1997. Silo y depósito ritual al exterior del sector sur del gran edificio, construido sobre muros del Bronce Antiguo IV, fase del Bronce Medio IIB. Corte E4aE3E8. C. Tilbes Höyük, campaña de 1997. Jarra del locus 611a, al sur del gran edificio, fase del Bronce Medio IIA. Corte E4aE3E8

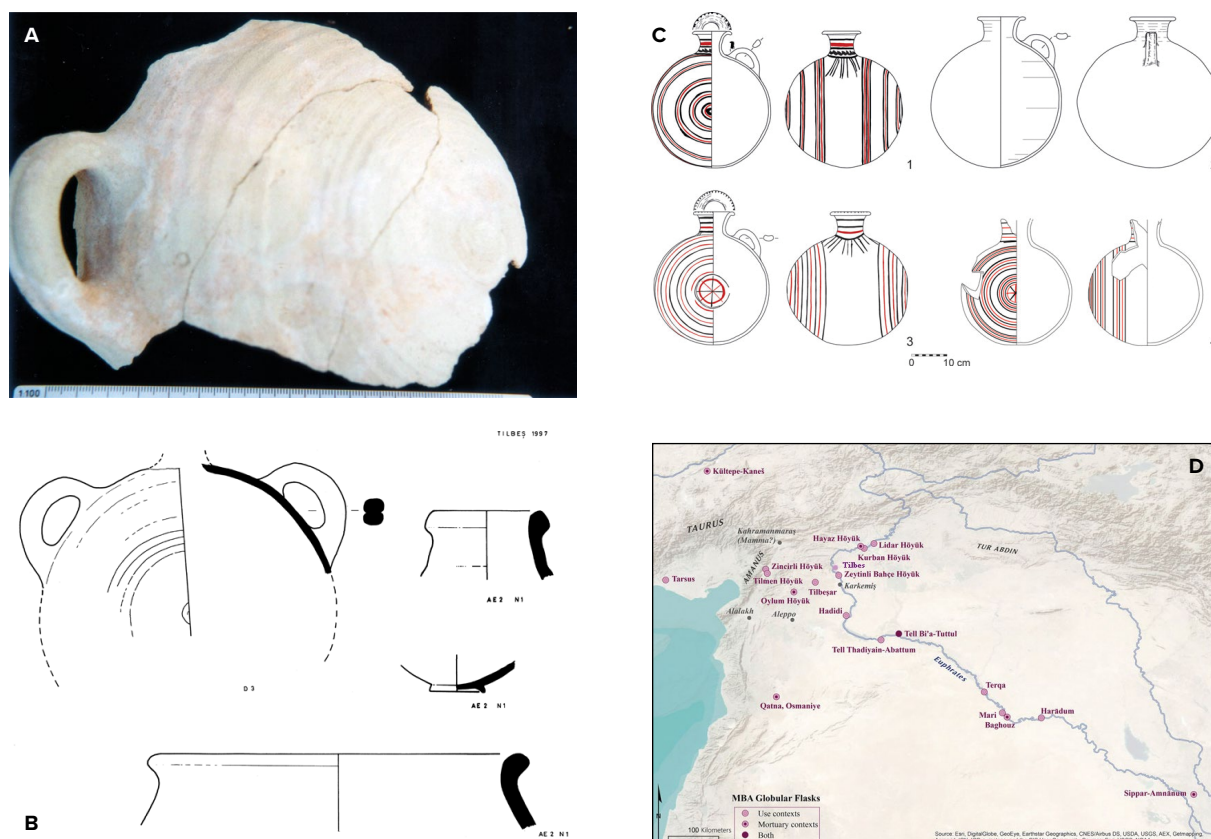


Figure 8. A. Tilbes Höyük 1997. Jar, locus D3, MB IIA. Sector E4aE3E8. Wheel. Light buff clay; dense white grits; slightly greenish/buff on exterior. B. Globular Flask. Wheel. Light buff clay; dense white grits; slightly greenish/buff on exterior. MB IIA. Locus D3. Bowl. Wheel. Brownish-buff clay; dense white grits; slightly buff on exterior. Locus AE2 N1. Small Jar. Wheel. Light buff clay; dense white grits; slightly buff on exterior. Locus AE2 N1. Open jar. Wheel. Light buff clay; dense white grits; slightly buff on exterior. Locus AE2 N1. C. Painted and unpainted globular flask from Zincirli, ancient Samal, from a destroyed level during the Middle Bronze Age, ca. 1630-1610 BC (Morgan and Richardson, 2020: 183 fig. 3). D. Distribution map of globular flasks for wine during Middle Bronze Age (after Morgan and Richardson, 2020: 181 fig. 1)

Figura 8. A. Tilbes Höyük, campaña de 1997. Jarra globular, locus D3, MB IIA. Sector E4aE3E8. A torno. Arcilla de color beige claro; desgrasantes blancos abundantes; ligeramente verdoso/beige en el exterior. B. Jarra globular, locus AE2 N1. MB IIA. Sector E4aE3E8. Arcilla de color beige claro; desgrasantes blancos abundantes; ligeramente verdoso/beige en el exterior. Cuenco a torno. Arcilla de color marrón amarillento; desgrasantes blancos abundantes; color beige claro en el exterior. Locus AE2 N1. Pequeña jarra a torno. Arcilla de color marrón amarillento; desgrasantes blancos abundantes; color beige claro en el exterior. Locus AE2 N1. Jarra abierta a torno. Arcilla de color marrón amarillento; desgrasantes blancos abundantes; color beige claro en el exterior. Locus AE2 N1. C. Jarras globulares con decoración pintada y sin pintar de Zincirli, la antigua Samal, de un nivel de destrucción durante el Bronce Medio, ca. 1630-1610 BC (Morgan y Richardson, 2020: 183 fig. 3). D. Mapa de distribución de las jarras globulares para vino durante el Bronce Medio (a partir de Morgan y Richardson, 2020: 181 fig. 1)

MB IIA periods; perhaps the biggest MB chamber burial, of the place corresponds to locus 607, excavated in 1997, with several individuals, where we distinguish at least two adults and two children (Gil Fuensanta, 1999: 272-273; Gil Fuensanta and Bucak, 2000: 34 photo) (figure 9a-9c).

In 1996 another tomb excavated at level 1 of the A2C square, delimited on its sides by stone and adobe walls 1.85 m high, where an almost complete skeleton and remains of several individuals were found, including as grave goods of the complete individual a bowl, a pot and a Syrian bottle without external decoration, in

addition to a needle placed near the head, a necklace and a shell (Gil Fuensanta et al., 1999: 215 n. 16, 209 fig. 2, 220 fig. 8) (figure 10a-10c).

The burials at Tilbes Höyük are more abundant than at Surtepe during the Middle Bronze Age II. They fall within the most recent phase of the local BM, which we can consider BM IIC; the one that at Lidar Höyük in Karababa area is preferred to call BM III. That is, they would fit within a range of dates from the 17th century or the first half of the 16th century BC. At Lidar Höyük, there is a greater tendency towards chamber tombs (Kaschau, 1999).



Figure 9. A-C. Tilbes Höyük 1998 Season. Collective chamber tomb and detail. MB III. Locus 807. Sector E4aE3E8

Figura 9. A-C. Tilbes Höyük campaña de 1998. Tumba colectiva del Bronce Medio III. Locus 807. Corte E4aE3E8



Figure 10. A-B. Tilbes Höyük 1996 Season. Detail of individual grave in pit with a bronze needle, near the head. MB III. Locus T1/2. Sector A2c. C-D. Ceramics associated with pit tomb T1/2. Tb25-96. Bowl. Wheel. Light buff clay; dense white grits; slightly buff on exterior. Tb26-96. Jar. Wheel. Light buff clay; dense white grits; slightly buff on exterior. Tb19-96 Jar. Very fine pottery; Dense dark grayish clay; dark horizontal ring burnish on exterior

Figura 10. A-B. Tilbes Höyük campaña de 1996. Detalle de una tumba individual en fosa con un alfiler de bronce cerca de la cabeza. Bronce Medio III. Locus T1/2. Corte A2c. C-D. Cerámicas asociadas con la tumba en fosa 1/2. Tb25-96. Cuenco. A torno. Arcilla de color marrón amarillento; desgrasantes blancos abundantes; color beige claro en el exterior. Tb26-96. Jarra. A torno. Arcilla de color marrón amarillento; desgrasantes blancos abundantes; color beige claro en el exterior. Tb19-96 Jarra. Cerámica muy fina. Arcilla gris oscura muy densa; Anillo horizontal oscuro bruñido en el exterior

5. The Middle Babylonian cylinder seal

Archaeological excavations at Tilbes mound also yielded two cylinder seals belonging to the MB II period. One of them, from a secondary context, was discovered by Tilbes dwellers close to A2-A6 square, in a garden off the south mouth (Gil Fuensanta et al., 1999: 160). It is an inscribed cylinder seal, height 17 mm, diameter 12.8 mm, black haematite. The central motif of this seal now consists of a panel filled in by an inscription of two lines. On the right side of the panel stands an apparent male figure looking left. He wears a high conical head-gear of which it cannot be said presently whether it could be a horned crown of a divinity. His left hand is pressed to the chest and he may be holding an indistinct object, perhaps an animal figure. In his right hand he holds a long pointed object, his right leg is slightly bent as he lays it on a higher pedestal or podium while his left leg rests on the ground. His right leg and foot emerge from

the folds of a long robe reaching down to his ankle. On the other side of the panel he is confronted by a figure of a goddess, likely Lama, turned right in a classical imploring posture with both hands raised before her face. Of the inscription, written in Middle Babylonian ductus, we believe that it is to be read as follows:

1. ^dNergal (Ne₃-iri₁₁-g[al]) 2. u₃ ^dMa-mi-tum (Gelb, 1977: 115 [Chart, type III]; von Weiher, 1971: 3, 41) (Charvat y Gil Fuensanta, 2001: 560) (fig. 11a-11c).

Between both figures there is an empty space bearing traces of vertical rulings which may have originally contained an inscription removed later. The male figure holding an animal and a pointed object appears to be a god depicted on seals of Babylonian origin. Parallels have been dated generally to the First dynasty of Babylon (Frankfort, 1939: 164, 180, pl. XXVI 1, XXVII d and XXX g [identification as Šamaš]). The current dates are 1894-1595 BC



Figure 11. A-C. Tilbes Höyük 1998 Season. Area A2-A6, surface. Black haematite Middle Babylonian cylinder seal with the inscription:

1. ^dNergal (Ne₃-iri₁₁-g[al]) 2. u₃ ^dMa-mi-tum (drawing by Funda Genç)

Figura 11. A-C. Tilbes Höyük campaña de 1998. Sello cilindro en hematite negro con la inscripción:

1. ^dNergal (Ne₃-iri₁₁-g[al]) 2. u₃ ^dMa-mi-tum (dibujo de Funda Genç)

(Sollberger and Kupper, 1971: 211; Reade 2001/1: 9–10, favouring low chronology) and more particularly to the time of Hammurabi and his successors (Matouš and Matoušová-Rajmová, 1984: 173 no 60, 93 [assignment to the Babylonian style and origin], III [identification as Šamaš holding a saw]). An impression of a cylinder seal showing this deity was buried with other precious objects in a hoard hidden in a corner of the court of the Ebabbar temple in Larsa, probably to protect its content from the pillage after conquest of the city by Samsuiluna's troops in 1738 BC (Arnaud, Calvet, and Huot, 1979: 14–16 (Empreinte A, identified as Šamaš), 37 fig. 53). This divinity seems to have been particularly popular at Alalakh level VII, dating to about 1720–1650 BC, though depictions of him appear also in the level IV, dating to the 15th century (Collon, 1975: 183–184, pl. XXIII [identified as the Sun-god but other equations cited as well – e.g. Amurru]). The figure on our Tilbes Höyük original seal is thus likely to have originally represented the Sun god and to date between the 19th and early 17th century BC.

The protective goddess Lama is one of the most omnipresent figures of Near Eastern glyptic (Arnaud, Calvet and Huot, 1979). She appears frequently with the onset of widespread popularity of the presentation scene, that is, from Ur III times (Collon, 1975: 18 fig. 8, the Kirikiri-Bilalama seal, c. 2000 BC) until the end of the First dynasty of Babylon (Collon, 1975: 181–182), surviving in peripheral glyptic styles until the first pre-Christian millennium (Collon, 1975: 181). One of the vassal treaties of Esarhaddon was impressed with a seal bearing her image (Larsen, 1977: 92 fig. 12). She was known in Anatolia in the 19th–18th centuries (Matouš and Matoušová-Rajmová, 1984) and remained in vogue at Alalakh both in times of layers VII and IV (Collon, 1975: 181–182, pl. XVII and XVIII).

The original seal thus appears to be a product of a Babylonian-trained seal-cutter, working in his homeland, Northern Syria or South-Eastern or central Anatolia, between the 19th and early 17th century BC.

Sometime during the period of its use the original inscription was removed and the seal received a new text, reinterpreting the divinities depicted as

Nergal and his consort Mammitum.¹ Similar seal inscriptions of the Old Babylonian period are published (von Weiher, 1971: pl. II–IV). Nergal is also known from texts found at the Middle Euphrates site of Emar (van der Toorn, 1995: 48) but he is missing both from Old Assyrian texts (von Weiher, 1971: 89) and from inscriptions of the Alalakh seals of both levels VII and IV (Collon, 1975).

The ancient Tilbes Höyük seal is unlikely to have been made much later than c. 1650 BC and its inscription certainly not too long after that date, as implied by the inscription's orthography. On the other hand, Karkemish and her dependencies were conquered first at the close of 17th century by the Hittite king Hattušiliš I and later on by the restorer of the glory of the Hittite state, Šuppiluliumaš, and raised by him to the status of a seat of the Hittite viceroy for Syria sometime in the late 14th century BC (Hoffner, 1997: 85). The recutting and inscribing of the seal would thus date between, say, 1650 BC and, at the very latest, 1340 BC.; thus the MB IIC period at Tilbes Höyük, the likely times of the site burials. Here Dominique Collon's observation that older seals were esteemed as antiquities in times of Alalakh IV, that is, in the 15th century, may be of relevance (Collon, 1975: 198). Most probably, however, both the manufacturing and the recutting of our Tilbes seal took place at the very end of the Old Babylonian period — say in the 17th century — and within the Babylonian sphere of influence. How did it get as far as Tilbes is most difficult to say though the regnal periods of Hammurabi, conqueror of Mari, and Samsuiluna the troops of whom operated in the Khabur region are the most likely candidates (Haas, 1985: 38). Nergal rises from the Underworld at winter solstice. It is to be noted that the image of Nergal, lord of midnight, winter and the north is well-placed at Tilbes which must have represented the northernmost range of expansion for Old Babylonian sovereigns (von Weiher, 1971: 89).

¹ The reading MI for the middle sign of the Ma-X-tum sequence was first suggested to Petr Charvát by Tomáš Mašik of the Institute of the Ancient Near East, Charles University, Prague. On these (Deimel, 1914: no. 2332, 191–193, no. 2043 and 2044, 172; Tallqvist, 1938: 358–359, 389–396; von Weiher 1971; Reiner, 1973: 99 n. 20a; Krebernink, 1987–1990: 330–331).

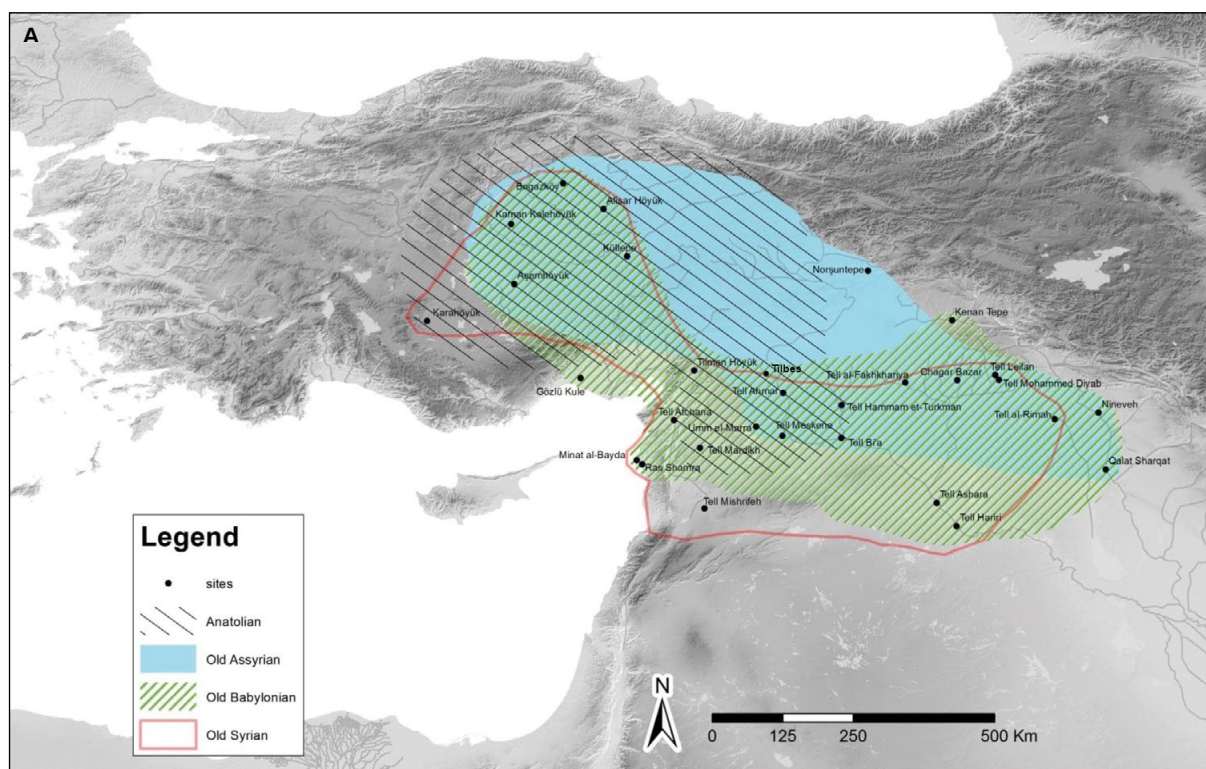


Figure 12. A. Distribution of Babylonian, Syrian and Assyrian cylinder seal styles (after Palmisano, 2015: 380, fig. 86). B. Tilbes Höyük 1998 Season. Anepigraphic Syrian Group cylinder seal, sector E4AE3E8, locus 831.

Figura 12. A. Distribución de sellos-cilindros de estilos babilonio, sirio y asirio (a partir de Palmisano, 2015: 380, fig. 86). B. Tilbes Höyük campaña de 1998. Sello cilindro anepigráfico del grupo sirio, sector E4AE3E8, locus 831

On this seal matters, it would, in fact, be most interesting to consider to a greater detail the relation between Tilbes and a town called Uršu, conquered after repeated sieges by the troops of Hattušiliš I and situated “in der Gegend von Urfa” (Haas, 1985: 39) and Horst Klengel puts it “zwischen Gaziantep und Birecik” and says that after the Hittite conquest it was not repopulated but gave its name to the surrounding district (Klengel 1965: 258-268; Beckman, 1995: 23).

6. The anepigraphic Syrian Group cylinder seal

The other Tilbes Höyük cylinder seal was anepigraphic seal, and found in sector E4AE3E8, locus 83I, a secondary context in a well, and height 15 mm, diameter 12 mm, white to creamy stone or hard paste. The chief object in this seal is clearly a shelter or a canopy, semicircular in section and perhaps woven of organic materials, as is indicated by a series of short strokes protruding into its interior from the outline of the structure. The shelter contains a central pole-like object topped by what appears to be a human (female?) or a bird's head and flanked by two

smaller poles with spherical upper terminals. From the right side, two human figures approach this shelter. On the left side, closer to the structure, stands a kilted male with a tight-fitting cap, rising his right hand towards the canopy while his left hand remains by his hip. To the right of him follows a female figure, also greeting the shelter with her right hand, who may well be the interceding goddess Lama. Behind her can be seen two superimposed filling motifs most difficult to interpret. Both of them may be stars but the lower one appears to be situated on top of a vertical handle or short pole (Charvat and Gil Fuensanta, 2001: 563-564 fig. 2).

As to the shelter or canopy, the most ancient case of its occurrence known to me comes from a terracotta cylinder seal found in the Ishtar-Kititum temple at Ishchali, Diyala basin, dating thus probably into the 19th century BC (al-Gailani Werr, 1988: 4); for such seals it has been suggested a date “at the beginning of 2nd millennium” (Mazzoni, 1992: 39, pl. XLII: 5). It appears to be a typical feature of what Henri Frankfort once called a “Second Syrian glyptic group” (Frankfort, 1939: 270-271, fig. 87, pl. XLIVd and j). Such depictions seem to allude to Ishtar or some other fertility goddess. Human or divine figures under arches which may be composed of the Egyptian ankh symbols appeared in the glyptic of Alalakh level VII (Collon, 1975: 79, no. 145). The Second Syrian group seals are now apparently dated into the 18th and early 17th century BC (Collon, 1975: 197-198). The two filling motifs are rather hopeless for dating purposes.

It can thus be concluded that this Tilbes seal, depicting most probably a scene linked with the worship of some fertility goddess, is likely to have been made by a Syrian-trained cutter, sometime during the 18th (or early 17th?) century (figure 12a-b).

7. A cylinder seal impression

Interesting in the context of MB II is also the appearance of a cylinder seal impression, which reveals a serpentine motif and part of an anthropomorphic individual, a likely hero, fighting against it. This once again places the location of Tilbes Höyük

during the period with the caravan route with Mesopotamia and Central Anatolia. An example of a cylinder seal impression from a similar period was discovered at Kültepe, with the same iconography and referring to the hero's fight against the serpentine monster (Yashenovskaya, Shellestin and Nemirovsky, 2021: 405 fig. 1-2). This representation has been considered rare in Ancient Eastern imagery, but which always refers to the idea of the serpent as a symbol of rebirth and fertility; it is, moreover, a theme related to the symbol of the tree. Motifs related to the tree and the “hero” defending the site has been found at Surtepe Höyük (Gil Fuensanta, Mederos and Muminov, 2021: 58 fig. 9a-b).

8. Conclusions

The Uršu (Ur-šu) kingdom, cited in Ur III texts as an important kingdom as Mari, Tuttul and Ebla, and later in 23 Old Assyrian texts, was one of the three Old Assyrian karums or colonies outside of Anatolia, with Khakkhum and Nihriya. Uršu has been located in Samsat Hoyuk (Miller, 2001: 75; Charpin, 2003: 276; Sallaberger, 2007: 437), Kazane Hoyuk (Michalowski, 1998: 53 n. 4-5), and traditionally in the Gaziantep area (Astour, 1995: 1409; Richter, 2004: 281 n. 77; Palmisano, 2018: 29 table 3.3; Morgan and Richardson, 2020: 185), on the right bank of the river. The fact that the king of Uršu detained the boat on its way to Carchemish implies that Uršu controlled a stretch of the Euphrates River between Carchemish and Zalpa (Barjamovic, 2011: 197). That is, it is located within a 40-50 km stretch around the middle Euphrates, from Carchemish to further north. Carchemish is not mentioned a single time in the 11.000 texts from Kültepe (Barjamovic, 2011: 202). Right in the middle lies the pass between Tilbes and Zeugma, where theories suggest there were two cities along the Anatolian route on either bank: *Abrum* on the left bank and *Zaqaria* (Zuqarru), the sequence *Balikhim-Zaqaritum* in a tablet (Astour, 1995: 1410) (figure 13a-13b).

The point about Kazane Höyük is that this site is associated with both Uršu and Abarsal (Michalowski and Misir, 1998), as well as the Amorite leader

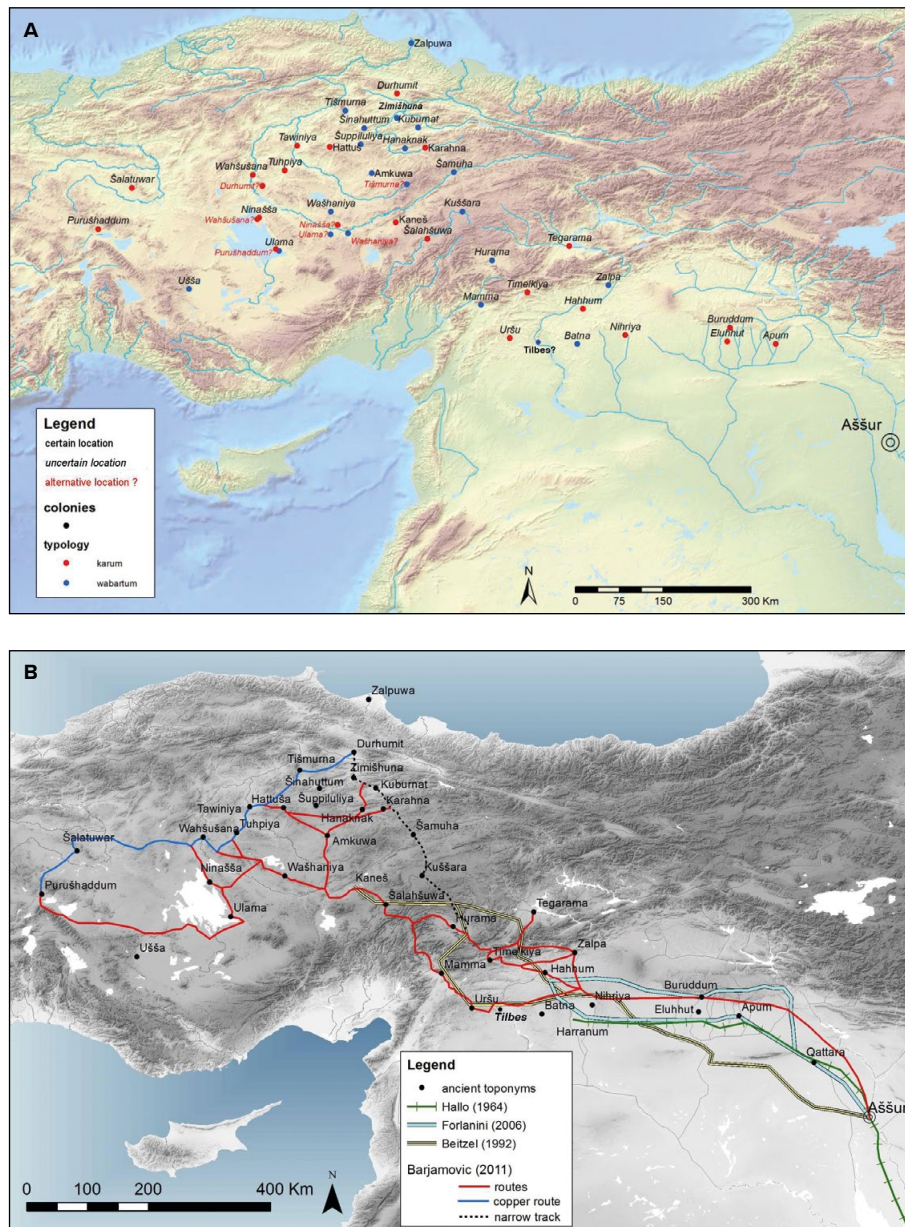


Figure 13. A. Old Assyrian *karum* — commercial neighborhood outside the city — and *wabartum* — station — during Kultepe II, 1770-1835 BC (after Palmisano, 2015: 312, fig. 12). B. Different proposals of Old Assyrian routes from Assur to Anatolia (after Palmisano, 2015: 430, fig. 152)

Figura 13. A. *Karum* —barrio comercial fuera de la ciudad— y *wabartum* —estación— durante Kultepe II, 1770-1835 AC, with the hypothesis of Tilbes Höyük as *wabartum* (a partir de Palmisano, 2015: 312, fig. 12). B. Diferentes propuestas sobre las rutas durante el Asirio Antiguo entre Assur y Anatolia (a partir de Palmisano, 2015: 430, fig. 152)

Shamshi-Adad (c. 1808-1776 BC), who is thought to have conquered the area sometime during the Middle Bronze Age.

Perhaps one solution is for these various names to reflect a single one, that is, that both Uršu and Abarsal could refer to a single place-territory, in the writings of various peoples who knew the area; a solution similar to that proposed by Gawlikowski (1996) regarding

the Tipsah-Zeugma question referring to our area in the Iron Age and early Classical period. We recall that there is even an attribution of Late Roman Urima to the territory north of Birecik (Wagner, 1976).

The kingdom and city of Mamma, a former Old Assyrian *wabartum* or station, was in the road between the Uršu and Mamma, via Bulbulhum, and onwards to Unipsum. Mamma and Kaneš bordered directly

onto one another during the Kultepe Ib period, maybe separated by two vassal kingdoms of Taišama and Sibuha (Barjamovic, 2011: 204, 207). Mamma rose to control the traffic and maybe Uršu declined in the Assyrian trade network (Barjamovic, 2011: 199-200), probably under military conquest of the kingdoms of Uršu, Zalwar and Haššum ca. 1775 BC (Miller, 2001; Barjamovic, Hertel y Larsen, 2012: 49-50, 86 map 2) (figure 14a-b).

The city of Mamma is located between Göksun and Maras (Miller, 2001: 70), although other researchers suggest the Kahramanmaraş plain (Barjamovic, 2011: 208; Palmisano, 2018: 29 table 3.3), at two mounds in the vicinity of Hasancık(lı) (Morgan and Richardson, 2020: 185; Carter, 2025).

The discovery of these cylinder seals, contemporaneous with a series of discoveries of MB II ceramics in the southern and southeastern sector of the “Big Building”, links Tilbes Höyük to caravan traffic from Central Anatolia (e.g., Kültepe) to northern Syria and north-central Iraq (e.g., Babylon) during the first half of the 2nd millennium BC, especially during the 19th and 17th centuries BC. This ties in with the long-standing theory of our colleague, Petr Charvát (pers. comm.), that Tilbes Höyük was a *wabartum*, at least during that period.

The fact that in the different alloys of Bronze objects found at Surtepe and Tilbes, a 100% similarity is seen, and suggest the existence of the same production center located in one of these places, and that could well be in Tilbes.

This speaks in favor of the long existence of a commercial station and metallurgical workshop and other products that could well be explained by belonging to an old trade network between several territories and city-states, possibly older than the dawn of the Bronze Age, and that it would reach at least the center and south of Mesopotamia and in another sense even inner Anatolia.

The finding of different traditions of a range of burials not only refers to the existence of different cultural traditions in Tilbes Höyük, but also reinforces the interpretation of a *wabartum* in this place during the Bronze Age, probably during the Kultepe Ib period, when the kingdom of Mamma rose to control the traffic.

On the other hand in Surtepe only the presence of the phases MB IIA and a MB III is apparent. There is a clear hiatus in the occupation from the EB IVB; but it is possible that there would be between the MB II and the MB III. However, we have no very conclusive evidence in this regard.

The evidence of all these places located on the left bank north of Birecik demonstrates two very tumultuous episodes, with several centuries of difference, which put an end to two important segments of the Bronze Age: the Early and Middle Bronze Ages. Moments of the end of each stage show that different cultural influences had been present, living in each place. We would see a main difference in the apparent minor population in North Birecik area in the MB that during the EB IV, because neither in Tilvez/Meteler nor in Tilöbür remains appear that speak of an occupation after an abandonment at the end of the Early Bronze Age.

Another issue is the presence of the stone “Big Building” of EB IV and MB I/II periods in Tilbes Höyük. Why it was preferred to use a stone architecture instead of earth architecture, being a place where there was a long tradition of the use of the mudbrick from the local Late Chalcolithic? It could well have been due to environmental changes, a change in architectural traditions or for a mere desire to highlight the importance of the location, seen that there was already this tradition in the place during the EB IV. We must insist, however, that the Birecik area is very abundant in the work of stone objects during the Early Bronze Age.

The search for other potential MB II sites in the Turkish-Syrian Middle Euphrates region with significant or large buildings similar to the “Big Building” of Tilbes Höyük leads us to Tell Hammam et-Turkman, where appeared a singular MB II building, dated c. 1750-1550 BC (Meijer and van Loon, 1988).

The seals remind us of the role that administration must have played in the daily life of Tilbes Höyük during the MB. Such artifacts in this context point to individuals with specific roles, perhaps each with a different origin and cultural background. This also supports the theory, which we defend here, of the site's use as a small trading post during this period, a fact reinforced by its geographical position at a very narrow crossing point of the Euphrates.

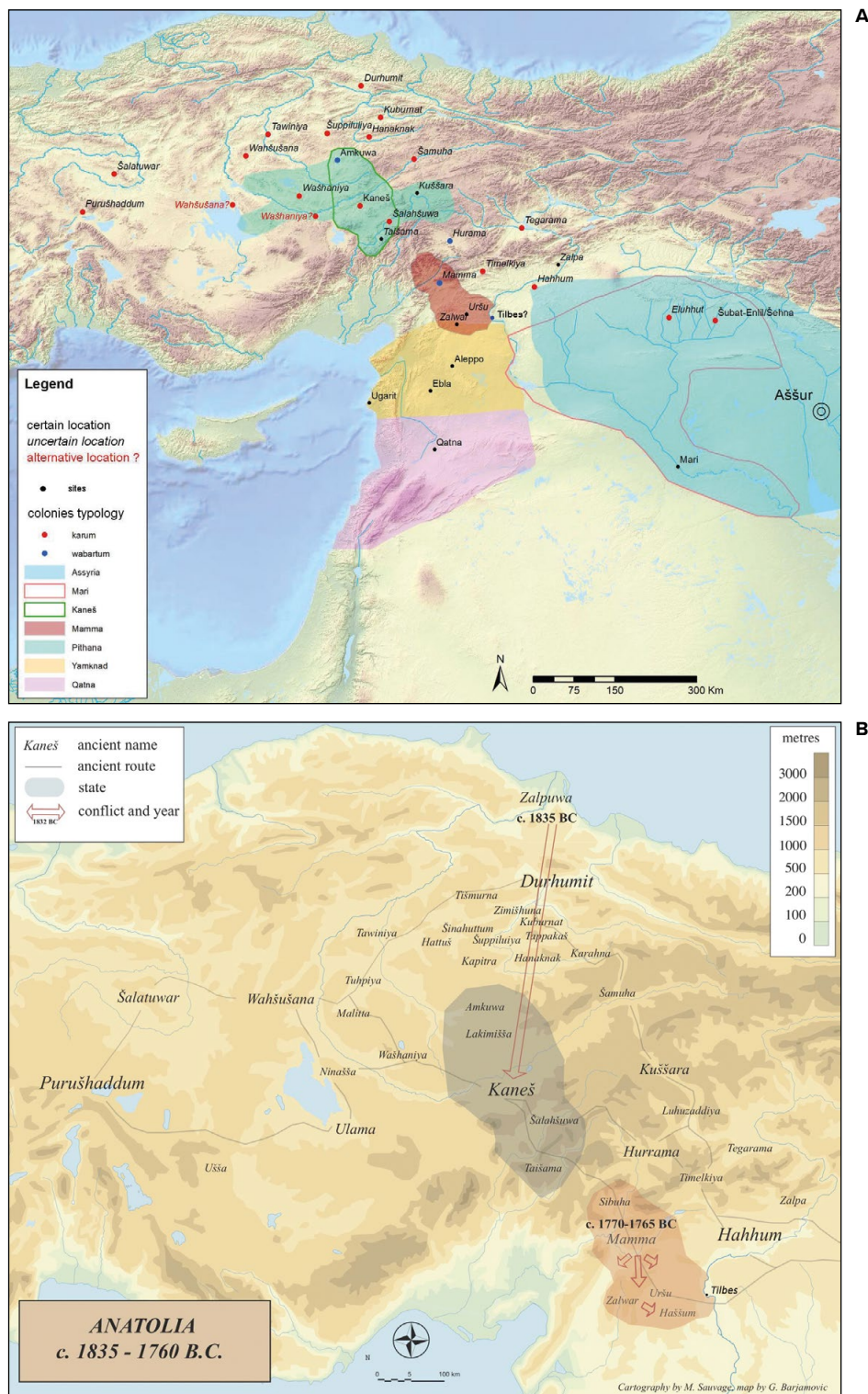


Figure 14. A. Near East Kingdoms and Old Assyrian *karum* — commercial neighbourhood — and *wabartum* — station — during Kultepe Ib, 1835-1700 BC, with the hypothesis of Tilbes Höyük as *wabartum* (after Palmisano, 2015: 313, fig. 13). B. Southern expansion of the Kingdom of Mamma ca. 1770-1765 BC till the Euphrates river and Tilbes Höyük (after Barjamovic, Hertel and Larsen, 2012: 86 map 2)

Figura 14. A. Reinos del Próximo Oriente y *Karum* —barrio comercial— y *wabartum* —estación— del Asirio Antiguo durante Kultepe Ib, 1835-1700 AC, con la hipótesis de Tilbes Höyük como *wabartum* (a partir de Palmisano, 2015: 313, fig. 13). B. Expansión meridional del reino de Mamma ca. 1770-1765 AC hasta el río Éufrates y Tilbes Höyük (a partir de Barjamovic, Hertel and Larsen, 2012: 86 map 2)

The absence of impressions or cylinder seals during the excavations at Surtepe Höyük would send us to the excavated areas are not typical of an administrative neighborhood during the time. However, the presence of such activities in Tilbes Höyük, with a lower dimension in several hectares, is another test to support the *wabartum* thesis at Tilbes.

The question of seals is key to understanding the likely commercial and religious “orientation”, purpose and importance of Tilbes Höyük for its key position in a caravan passage zone both this-west and north-south, during the first half of the 2nd millennium BC, with very prominent and clear influences of certain territories, although there is an increase in the regulation towards the 17th century. We do not know to what extent the collapse of this commercial chain could have been gradual.

Furthermore, both seals were not found within the “Big Building” and, on the contrary, are possibly echoes of later phases of the Middle Bronze Age at Tilbes. This is evidenced by the later date of their use. However, we rule out any use of the site of Tilbes Höyük and territory during the Late Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age. Internal dissensions, “palace revolutions”, more specific in Birecik, as we can infer from the change in the inscription on the seal of Old Babylonian origin; in a certain way, these disputes would have been an additional contribution to the region’s decline at the beginning of the Late Bronze Age, under the conquest of the Hittite kings.

Given the small size of the Tilbes Höyük during the MB II, but its clear presence of imports and objects reminiscent of caravan traffic between central Anatolia and the heart of southern Mesopotamia, it is increasingly clear that it falls under the concept of a *wabartum* (Meijer, 2000), a kind of small commercial central station for caravan traffic, evidenced by its strategic position at a narrow river crossing between Horum and Tilbes, which would explain its existence for many centuries.

The presence of Babylonian and North Syrian seals at Tilbes Höyük, consistent with the later presence of Neo-Babylonian administrative elements at the neighboring site of Horum Höyük (Classical Urima?) in the Middle Iron Age, may be a clue to the type of cultural and ethnic relations in the Birecik area during the MB II.

Given the extensive Middle Bronze Age II occupation at Tilbes Höyük, we distinguish at least two major occupation phases. The MB IIA phase of Tilbes Höyük refers to an architecture with walls made of stone, and of greater thickness in the former central part of the höyük, the A2A6 squares, which apparently has concentrated a greater diversity of activities than other sectors such as AE1-5 or E4a-E3E8 of the höyük during the MB period. There appears to have been a difference in use among the various buildings at the site during this MIIB phase.

The most recent, MB IIB, is composed of burials of various types, both in pits and chambers. This could suggest the possibility of its use as a cemetery by two different ethnic groups or clans during that period. However, the anatomical characteristics of both suggest a common North Mesopotamian-North Syrian cultural group.

The MB tombs refer to local families with some access to finished metals (one of them contained a mould for making pieces), and presumably access to their trade or sources. Perhaps they were relatives or servants associated with the “Big Building” from the MB IIA phase. There are infants of both sexes in the Tilbes burials, and all of them died of natural causes, analysis is ongoing. There are individuals close to the silos; something that has already been reported in the Iron Age as well. Perhaps due to an idea of rebirth and fertility linked to a local goddess because the presence of a potential sanctuary linked to fertility? A cult that persisted at least until the Late Iron Age (Gil Fuensanta and Mederos, 2024).

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