

BEFORE THE MIDDLE BRONZE AGE RE-URBANIZATION AT THE HINTERLAND SITE OF TOPRAKHİSAR HÖYÜK (HATAY, TÜRKİYE)

KIRSAL YERLEŞİM TOPRAKHİSAR HÖYÜK'TE (HATAY, TÜRKİYE) ORTA TUNÇ ÇAĞI'NIN YENİDEN KENTLEŞME DÖNEMİ ÖNCESİ

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Murat AKAR* - Müge BULU - Demet KARA*****

ABSTRACT

This article explores the end of Early Bronze Age IVB (ca. 2300-2100 BC) and the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age I (ca. 2100-1800 BC) levels encountered during the research-rescue excavations conducted at Toprakhisar Höyük, a peripheral site located in the hilly landscape of the Altınözü district of Hatay. The archaeological remains exposed provided the possibility to explore research questions regarding the Early Bronze Age collapse and Middle Bronze Age re-urbanization from the stand point of the highland periphery in relation to the city centers of Tell Tayinat and Tell Atchana in the Amuq Valley of Hatay. The mixed corpus of the ephemeral Early Bronze IVB assemblage that includes elements from the Early Transcaucasian to North Syrian cultural horizon was followed by the appearance of a new local material culture in the early phases of the Middle Bronze Age. This allows us to contribute to current debates, including the expansion of the Amorites and Hurrians, and brings forward a hypothesis developed around climate change-induced long distance mobility patterns and cultural hybridization. The functional role of the site as an olive oil and wine producer has been suggested to be a strong economic aspect of the site in terms of its levels that witnessed environmental and anthropogenic stress followed by the subsequent urban expansion period.

Keywords: Early Bronze Age, Middle Bronze Age, Toprakhisar Höyük, Amuq Valley, Collapse, Re-urbanization

* Assoc. Prof. Dr., Hatay Mustafa Kemal University, Faculty of Science and Letters, Department of Archaeology, Hatay / Türkiye
e-mail: muratakr@gmail.com ORCID: 0000-0001-5485-8465.

** Asst. Prof., Ankara University, Faculty of Languages, History and Geography, Department of Archaeology, Ankara / Türkiye
e-mail: mbulu@ankara.edu.tr ORCID: 0000-0003-1118-7889.

*** Hatay Archaeology Museum, Archaeologist, Hatay / Türkiye
e-mail: demetkara19@gmail.com ORCID: 0009-0009-4926-2347.



ÖZ

Bu makalede, Hatay ili Altınözü ilçesinde yer alan ve kırsal bir yerleşim olan Toprakhisar Höyük'te yapılan araştırma-kurtarma kazıları sırasında açığa çıkarılan Erken Tunç Çağı IVB'nin sonu (yaklaşık M.Ö. 2300-2100) ve Orta Tunç Çağı I'in (yaklaşık M.Ö. 2100-1800) başına tarihlenen tabakaları değerlendirilmiştir. Açığa çıkarılan arkeolojik kalıntılar, Amik Ovası'ndaki Tayinat ve Aççana Höyük merkezleriyle ilişkili olarak yüksek kırsal üzerinden Erken Tunç Çağı'nın sonunda yaşanan çöküş ve Orta Tunç Çağı'nda yeniden kentleşme dönemiyle ilgili araştırma sorularını irdeleme fırsatı sunmuştur. Erken Tunç Çağı IVB dönemine ait Erken Transkafkasya ve Kuzey Suriye etkili karışık bir materyal kültürünü takip eden Orta Tunç Çağı'nın erken evrelerinde yeni bir yerel üslubun ortaya çıkması, Amurru ve Hurri yayılımı gibi literatürde yer alan tartışmalara da katkıda bulunmamızı sağlamakta ve iklim değişikliklerinin tetiklediği uzak mesafeli insan hareketliliği ve kültürel melezleşme hipotezini öne çıkarmaktadır. Çevresel ve antropojenik baskılar altında, yerleşimin zeytinyağı ve şarap üreticisi olarak kazandığı güçlü ekonomik rolünün, Orta Tunç Çağı yeniden kentleşme döneminde önemli bir etken olduğu sonucuna varılmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Erken Tunç Çağı, Orta Tunç Çağı, Toprakhisar Höyük, Amik Ovası, Çöküş, Yeniden Kentleşme

INTRODUCTION

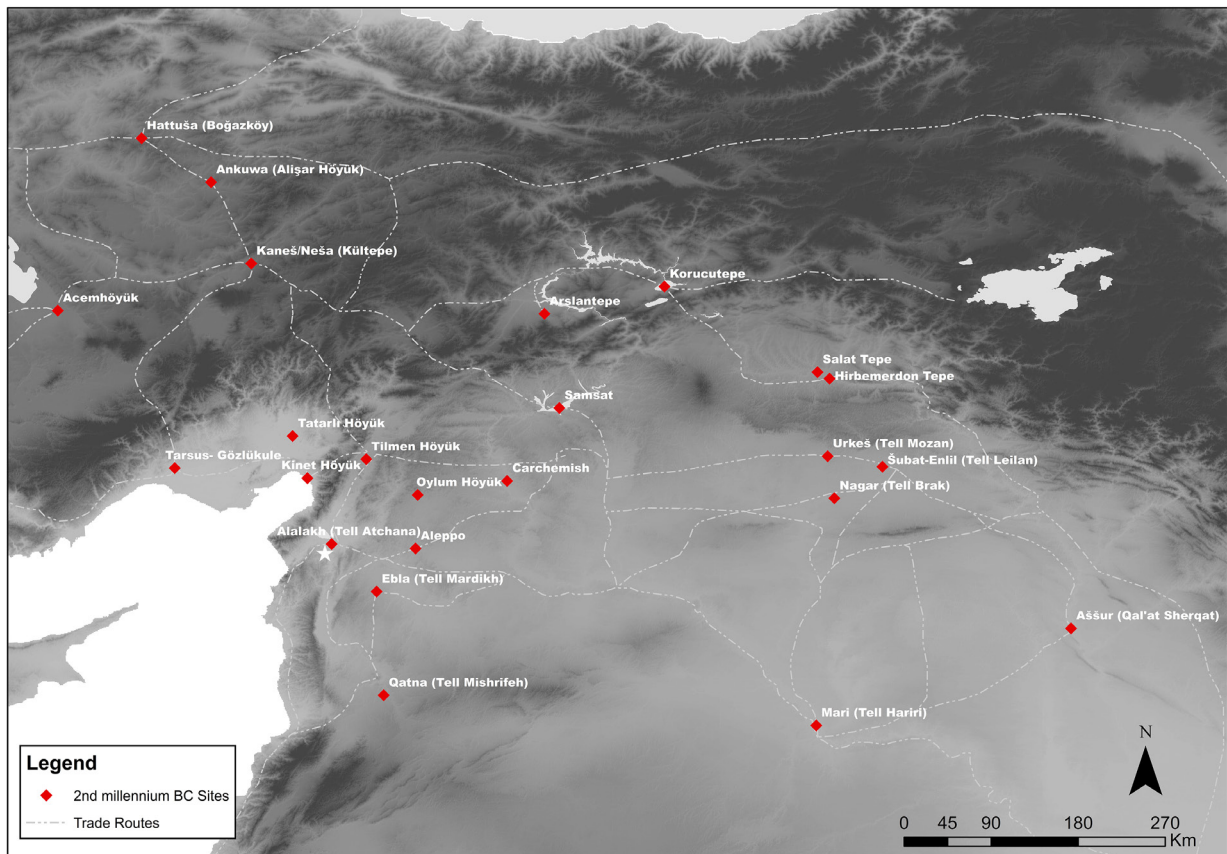
The Middle Bronze Age (ca. 2100-1600 BC, MBA, hereafter)¹ in Syro-Anatolia is marked by an urban expansion period following a collapse seen in diverse regional dynamics (Yoffee, 1988; Weiss et al., 1993; Schwartz, 2006). In central Anatolia, the changes are marked at Kültepe with the destruction of the Early Bronze Age (EBA, hereafter) citadel, which was followed by the establishment of the Assyrian Merchant town at Kanesh (Özgüç, 1986; Kulakoğlu, 2017; Öztürk, 2019). Emphasis has been given to the presence of Assyrians with their record keeping habits, leading to the exploration of one of the most complex long-distance trade networks (Kulakoğlu, 2011; 2017; Kulakoğlu et al., 2023). In Northern Mesopotamia, the same period witnessed the formation of new kingdoms structured around the rise of new political powers expressing Amorite and Hurrian identities (Klengel, 1992; Buccellati, 2013; Burke, 2021). Both regions, with diverse research agendas, give clues to long-distance mobility patterns, both regarding trade and exchange through textual evidence and also ethnicity and identity as expressed through material culture, leading to diverging narratives in the wider Syro-Anatolian landscape.

On the other hand, recent, growing interest in landscape archaeology has now begun to provide correlations in the context of human-environment interactions from the stand point of climate change-induced collapse and long-distance mobility patterns at the end of the EBA, taking advantage of constructing narratives freed from biblical or text-based ones (Weiss, 2017a; Lawrence et al., 2021; Hazell et al., 2022). Only a limited number of publications are concerned with a synthesis of the supra-regional framework addressing MBA re-urbanization, including those from the Amuq Valley, the targeted region in this article (Fig. 1; Yener, 2007; Bachhuber, 2012; Massa & Palmisano, 2018; Peyronel, 2015).

Increased cultural interactions in the wider Syro-Anatolian network from the second half of the 3rd millennium BC are evident through various media from distant and diverse locations (Şahoğlu, 2005; Çevik, 2007; Efe, 2007). The conceptual similarities between the metal finds from the Alacahöyük and Ur cemeteries, as well as the emphasis on social hierarchy from the Caucasus in the north down to Egypt and Mesopotamia in the south, can be seen in the general trends in mortuary and material culture-based practices throughout the millennia (Greaves, 2007; Bachhuber, 2013; 2015; Wilkinson, 2014).

Figure 1.

Map of 3rd and 2nd Millennium BC sites in Anatolia and the Near East / *MÖ 3. ve 2. binyıl Anadolu ve Yakın Doğu Yerleşimlerini Gösteren Harita* (Map by M. Akar & O. H. Kırman).



¹ Toprakhisar Höyük radiocarbon dates confirm the chronological attestation of the beginning of Middle Bronze I to ca. 2100 BC as proposed by Pfälzner (2017, p. 176, Table 7.2). See Fig. 12 of this article.

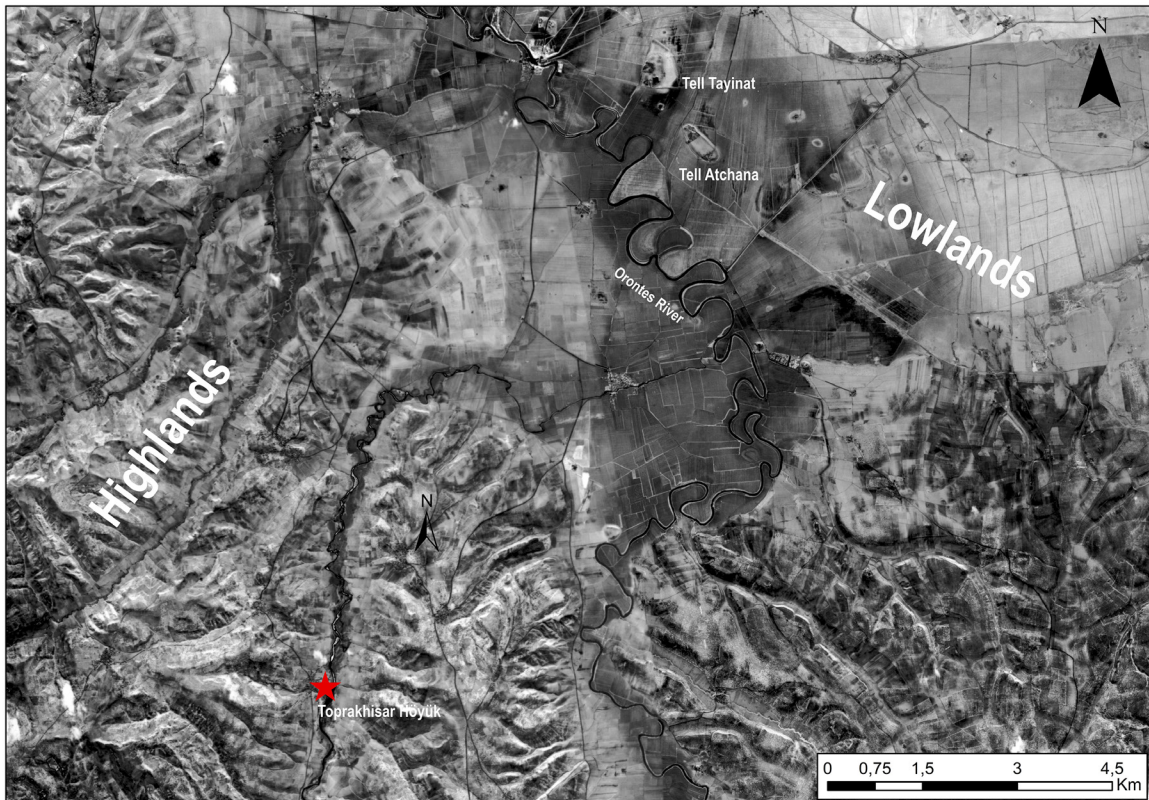
This is amplified by the presence of index fossils of the Early Bronze Age trade network in forms of raw and finished products from Western Anatolia to Mesopotamia, leading to an understanding of intensified regional interactions (Şahoğlu, 2005; Zimmermann, 2005; Efe, 2007). The vividness of the data particularly allows us to explore the consequent impacts of technological advancements and shared knowledge in the use and exploitation of metallurgical sources through regional contributors (Batiuk & Harrison, 2017; Yener et al., 2015; Massa et al., 2017; Özdoğan, 2023). This period was followed by the Assyrian merchant settlements in Anatolia, particularly at Kültepe Kanesh and Achemhöyük, directing research towards the exploration of the trade networks built along the route between Assur and Kültepe, often excluding other regional contributors (Barjamovic, 2011). The evidence pertaining to Ebla's merchants in the Kültepe texts and iconography (Bilgiç, 1992; Genç & Yanar, 2019), the circulation of Cilician and North Syrian pottery types in Anatolia (Özgüç, 1955; Hrouda, 1989; Öztan, 2008), as well as the increased production and consumption of ivory with Egyptian influences (Yener, 2007; Simpson, 2013) at the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC testify other well-established but less explored trade routes from Anatolia along the Levantine corridor down to Egypt (Yasur-Landau et al., 2021).

Fernand Braudel's (1949, 2002) model of studying the Mediterranean world as a complex whole over the *longue durée* has been one of the most influential and long-lasting

conceptions that directly affects the social sciences in establishing a historical narrative, adopted in archaeological research to explore the dynamics of early literate societies. His work has since been challenged, amplified and built upon by many researchers, and Horden & Purcell (2000) have initiated a countermovement, advocating for a need to return to a more fine-grained analysis focusing on micro-regions. In this article, we see the value of both approaches and explore 2nd millennium BC urbanization patterns through the lens of the EBA-MBA transition, a transformative period that witnessed environmental stress, long distance human mobility patterns and intensified cross-cultural interactions following a period of collapse (Mellaart, 1958; Schwartz & Nichols, 2006; Laneri & Schwartz, 2011; Richard, 2024). But in many ways, this big picture lacks details mainly hidden in the micro-regional narratives, which are absent in the current literature. The regional patterns are often and mainly explored from their centers and exclude views from their peripheries, which are crucial for reconstructing the socio-political structure of the rising state kingdoms (Hayden, 1994). This can be followed within the territories of the former EBA Alalahum and MBA Alalakh (for toponyms see Archi, 2006) by presenting the current evidence we have in hand from the small-scale site of Toprakhisar Höyük, located in the high hills surrounding the Amuq Valley to the southwest, roughly 10 km away from the major centers of Tell Tayinat and Tell Atchana (Fig. 2).

Figure 2

Corona Satellite Image of the Amuq Valley / Amik Ovası'nın Corona Uydu Görüntüsü.



THE SIGNIFICANT VALUE OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH IN THE PERIPHERY

Unlike the limitations arising from performing research at a capital city, where a coherent understanding of the settlement relies on excavations and analysis of multiple different contexts, including palaces, defense systems, households and cemeteries, as in the case at Tell Atchana and Tell Tayinat, the ability to perform research excavations at a village-sized settlement has the benefit of data acquisition and analysis from a limited space. The excavations at Tell Tayinat exploring the end of the EBA and at Tell Atchana revealing the full spectrum of the 2nd millennium BC in the Amuq have immensely contributed to research questions structured around Anatolian, Mesopotamian and Levantine archaeologies, yet still fail in providing a coherent picture of the time period that they represent due to their disconnected nature and stratigraphy (Welton et al., 2011; Akar et al., 2021). This is due in many ways to the size of the settlements, constituting different functional and symbolic sectors that all require wider exposures to get a coherent understanding of the socially and functionally structured components of a Bronze Age megacity represented by two proxies that were occupied in different time periods due to the shifting river bed of the Orontes River (Yener, 2005, p. 4; Akar et al., 2021, p. 76).

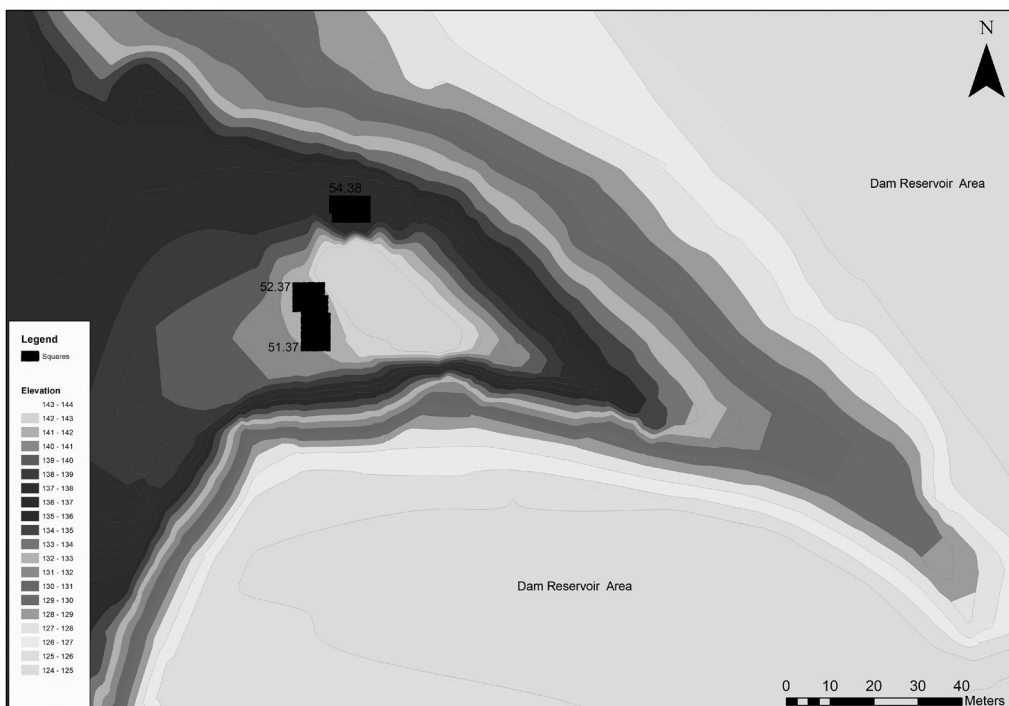
In contrast to the challenges of archaeological research at a city, the advantages to exploring a village site rely on the small size of the settlement, as well as the indistinct nature of the public, private, industrial or ritual spaces in a compact area with much smaller dimensions. In a

simplistic fashion, a 10 x 10 m exposure from a palatial context at a capital city, as observed at Tell Atchana (Bulu, 2016), although invaluable for a chronological framework, is certainly not enough to create a contextual understanding of the space and therefore requires broader horizontal exposures that result in enormous effort and decades of archaeological fieldwork due to the nature of tell sites in the Near East. We suggest that the peripheries are a kind of cheat code, where much smaller undertakings can provide tremendous impact due to the manageable size of the occupation and archaeological deposition (Rowlands, 1987; Schwartz & Falconer, 1994; Liverani, 1996; Schwartz, 2015). Yet, unfortunately, this view has not found much space in our discipline due to human nature and the expectations in academia and amongst a public concentrated on “great discoveries” (Carver, 2011; Moro-Abadía, 2006; Trigger, 1984). The authors admit that their case is not so different, as evidenced by their choice to establish their research agendas under the umbrella of the Tell Atchana Excavations, but stress the high value of exploring a peripheral site within the framework of a research-rescue excavation and integrating the results into a regional and supra-regional understanding.

Peripheries may allow us to follow regional trends in material culture and to understand tiered hierarchies to get a better understanding of socio-political dynamics, contributing to a holistic view of the society as a complex whole (Hall & Chase-Dunn, 1993; Kardulias & Hall, 2008).

Figure 3

Topographic plan of Toprakhisar Höyük with Excavation Squares / *Kazı Alanlarını Gösteren Toprakhisar Höyük Topografik Haritası* (Map by M. Akar).



Thus, rather than treating each site as distinct habitational units, we value the integration of datasets from multiple sites. This brings the case of Toprakhisar Höyük into the setting as a village settlement occupied from at least the Chalcolithic onwards in the hilly landscape of Altınözü, where earlier research in the region was mainly concentrated on the exploration of the Classical Era and Antioch's countryside, with limited information regarding the earlier parts of the human past (Tchalenko, 1953; Şenyürek & Bostancı, 1958). Recent archaeological surveys conducted show the intensity of settlement activity patterns and allow us to reconstruct and argue for specialized industries at the sites located in the region (Pamir et al., 2020; Karataş Yüksel & Pamir, 2021). In accordance with the natural habitat of olive trees and now lost vineyards, Altınözü has been referenced as one of the localities where the economy was mainly based on horticultural practices related to olive oil and wine production in Classical times (Pamir, 2010). As apparent, and discussed below, this regional specialization is evident from at least the Early Bronze Age onwards within the framework of the Toprakhisar Höyük excavations (Fig. 3).

THE SITE AND CURRENT RESEARCH

The archaeological research conducted in 2016-2019 encountered well-defined and stratified contexts dating to Early Bronze IVB (EB IVB, hereafter) and early Middle Bronze I (MB I, hereafter) contexts, providing the possibility to explore general trends and points of discussions that dominate the literature on the Bronze Age, including re-urbanization, migrations, acculturations, trade and exchange. This corresponds to Phases J and K in the Amuq, Phase 8/7 at Tell Tayinat and the Mardikh IIB2 and IIIA1 phases of Ebla (Welton et al., 2011; Welton, 2014; D'Andrea, 2018). Due to the location of the Amuq Valley, subject to cultural contacts from various directions, long and short distance mobility patterns, the vibrant material culture of the late EBA and early MBA in the Amuq is also evident at Toprakhisar Höyük, rich in terms of its variety with local adaptations and persistent assemblages including the Red Black Burnished Wares of the Early Transcaucasian and North Syrian traditions. In this article, we focus on the final ephemeral EB IVB occupation and the beginnings of the MB I, defined by the exposure of Local Phase 4 (a, b) contexts preceding previous publications (Akar & Kara, 2018; 2020; 2022) of the mature MB I phase at Toprakhisar Höyük (Fig. 4). All levels discussed below revealed significant amounts of olive stones and grape seeds, and the study of the archaeobotanical assemblage is underway (personal communication, Evangelia Pişkin; Sinmez, 2022).

THE EARLY BRONZE-MIDDLE BRONZE AGE TRANSITION AT TOPRAKHISAR HÖYÜK

LOCAL PHASE 4 IN SQUARE 52.37

The 2016-2017 field seasons at Toprakhisar Höyük were mainly concentrated on the exposure of an extremely well-preserved burnt MB I building. This was followed by the exposure of the short-lived Local Phase 4, laid over the burnt ruins of the Local Phase 5 (EB IVB) building complex that provided a striking difference with its fragmented nature and shallow archaeological deposition.

Local Phase 4 is characterized by two subphases. The majority of the architectural remains were found in the eastern extension of the exposure, though they were disconnected and disturbed by pitting activity. Due to the different orientations of the stone foundations uncovered (Local Phase 4b), there seem to have been two different buildings. Local Phase 4b marks the end of the EBA, with the majority of the assemblage revealing well-known EB IVB material culture from the region, as discussed below. Local Phase 4a is the succeeding short-lived occupation defined by an open space with pyrotechnological installations and a small semi-enclosed space in the north. The majority of the assemblage is dominated by MB I markers.

Local Phase 4b

Much of the exposure from Local Phase 4b is defined by the presence of the open-air activity spaces of two buildings defined by abutting stone foundations in different orientations (Building 2018-2 and Building 2018-3). Although highly disturbed, a reconstruction can be provided due to the presence of wall foundations along the southern limits of the excavation area (Fig. 5, 6). A drainage canal (L.76) bordered by a stone wall and three pyrotechnological installations are the main features excavated. None of the installations are cooking related, judging by their size and heat signatures which indicate their industrial usage. Although absent of metals finds, the presence of a crucible from the fill level confirms this assignment. Highly burnt and vitrified, the circular hearth (L.71) in the open space of Building 2018-2 was likely used for smelting. Confirmation awaits further analysis. Within the perimeter of Building 2018-3, another installation was partially exposed along the eastern section, and it was likely used as a pottery kiln (L.70), due to the concentration of ceramics found inside and the vitrification observed along the inner surfaces of the installation. The drainage canal along the northern section was densely packed with discarded ceramics in which a high number of Red Black Burnished Ware fragments were found, including two anthropomorphic andiron fragments representing the Early-Transcaucasian component of the assemblage from Local Phase 4b.

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Figure 4

Plan of Local Phase 3, MB I Building 2016-2 at Toprakhisar Höyük / *Toprakhisar Höyük 3. Evre Bina 2016-2'nin çizimi* (Plan by O. H. Kıрман).

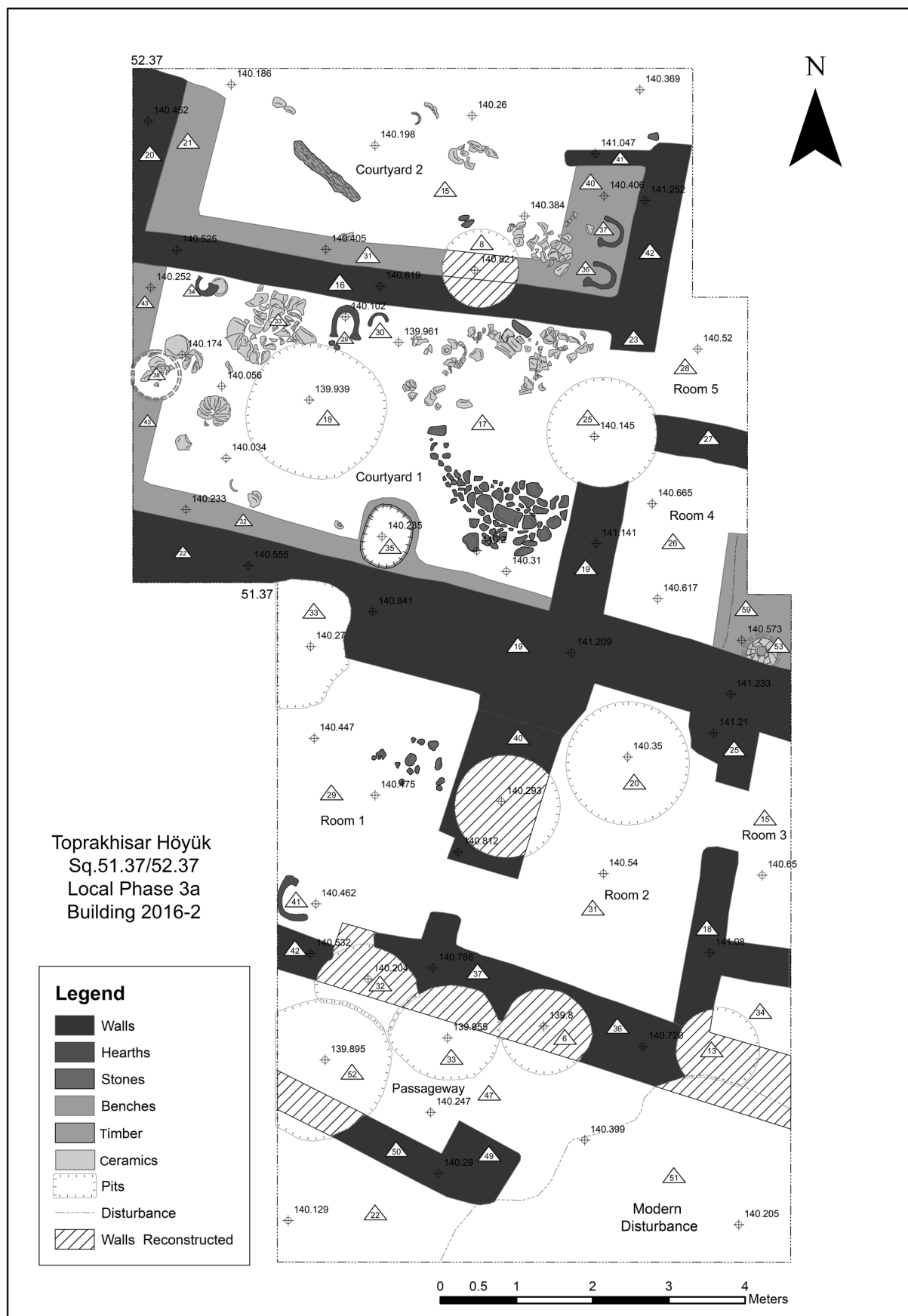
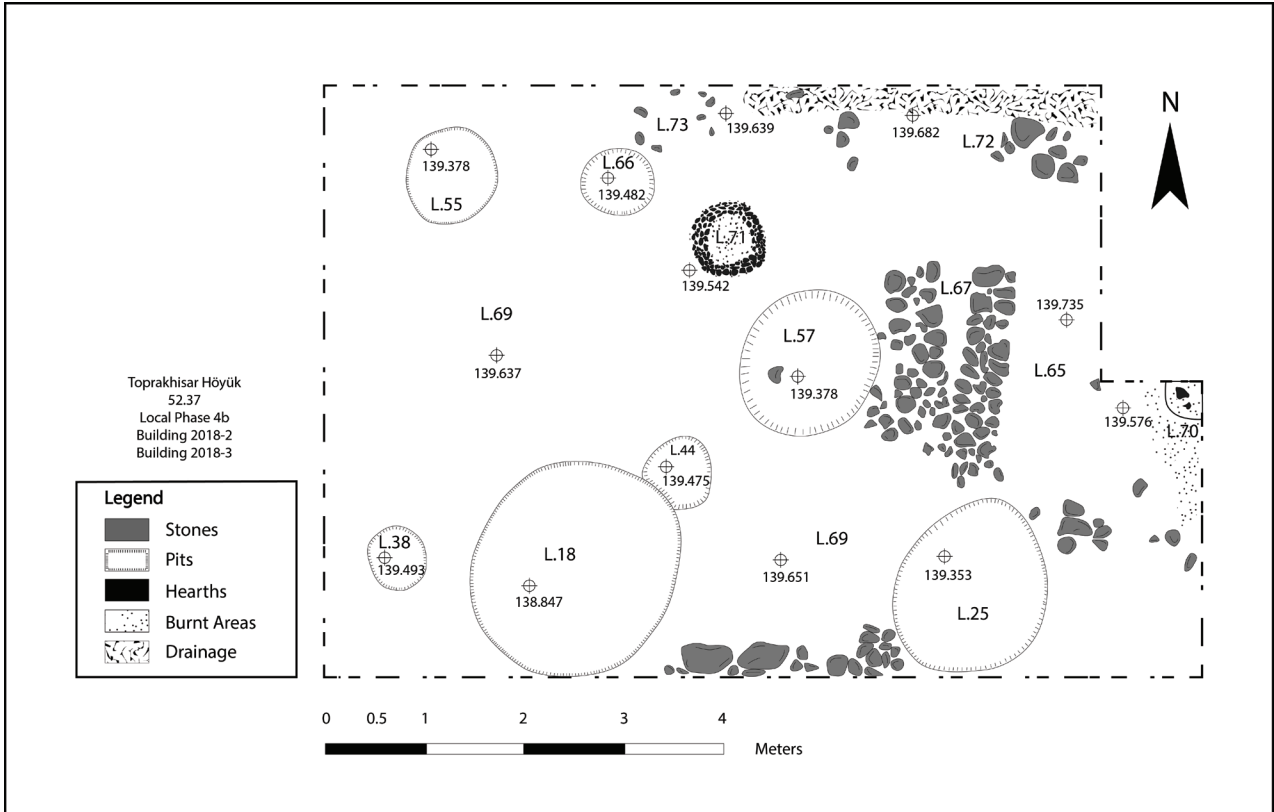


Figure 5

Plan of Local Phase 4b EB IVB Building 2018-2 and Building 2018-3 at Toprakhisar Höyük / *Toprakhisar Höyük Erken Tunç Çağı IVB, 4b Evresi Bina 2018-3 ve Bina 2018-2'nin çizimi* (Plan by O. H. Kırman).

**Figure 6**

Aerial image of Squares 51/52.37, Local Phase 4b / 51/52.37 plan-karelerinin 4b evresi hava fotoğrafı (M. Akar).

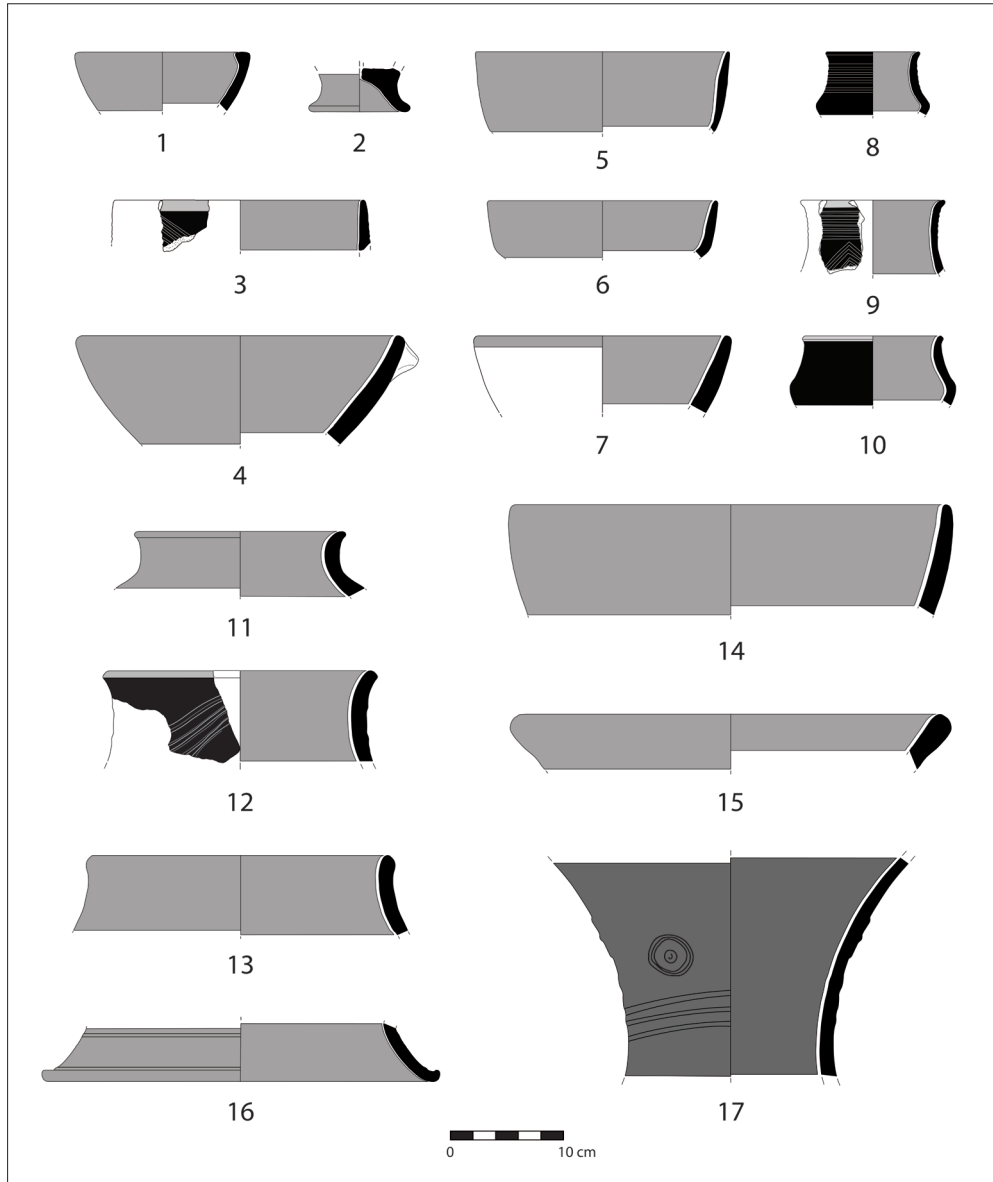


The Local Phase 4b ceramic repertoire represents the typical EB IVB vessels known from Phases I and J of the Amuq (Braidwood & Braidwood, 1960; Welton, 2014; Welton et al., 2011) and Phase Mardikh IIB2 of Ebla (Mazzoni, 1985; D'Andrea, 2017; 2018). The presence of higher quantities of Red Black Burnished Ware vessels is rather unusual for this period, which is a result of their presence in a secondary context in the drainage (Fig. 8). The retrieved examples of Red Black Burnished Ware² include bowls (Fig. 7: 1-7), *cyma-recta* cups and bowls (Fig. 7: 8-10), basins (Fig. 5: 14-15), jars (Fig. 5: 11-13) and pot stands (Fig. 7: 16-17), parallels of which are already known from various settlements in the Amuq (Hood, 1951, Figs. 7-8; Braidwood & Braidwood, 1960, pp. 362-367, 400-403, Figs. 281-285, 304-307; Batiuk, 2005, pp. 419-443, Pls. I-XII; Welton, 2014, p. 354, Fig. 9: 6-9).

The other most common ware type is Simple Ware, mainly represented by conical cups (Fig. 9: 1) and goblets (Fig. 9: 2-3), both undecorated and corrugated, and small-sized (Fig. 9: 4) and medium-sized jars (Fig. 9: 5, 9). For comparative material, see Braidwood & Braidwood, 1960, p. 404, Fig. 308: 5, 16, p. 405, Fig. 309: 2; p. 434, Fig. 334: 10, 13, 17, 23; Welton et al., 2011, p. 181, Fig. 9: 3, 11). A single sherd of a pattern combed closed vessel (Fig. 9: 8) was also found in the drainage, parallels of which are known from the Amuq (Braidwood & Braidwood, 1960, p. 442, Fig. 341: 6) and Ebla (D'Andrea, 2017, p. 141, Fig. 8: 9, 2018, p. 247, Fig. 5: 5-7).

Figure 7

A selection of Red Black Burnished Ware ceramics from the drainage / *Drenaj kanalında bulunan Kırmızı Siyah Açıklı seramik grubundan bir seçki* (Illustrations by S. Ün).



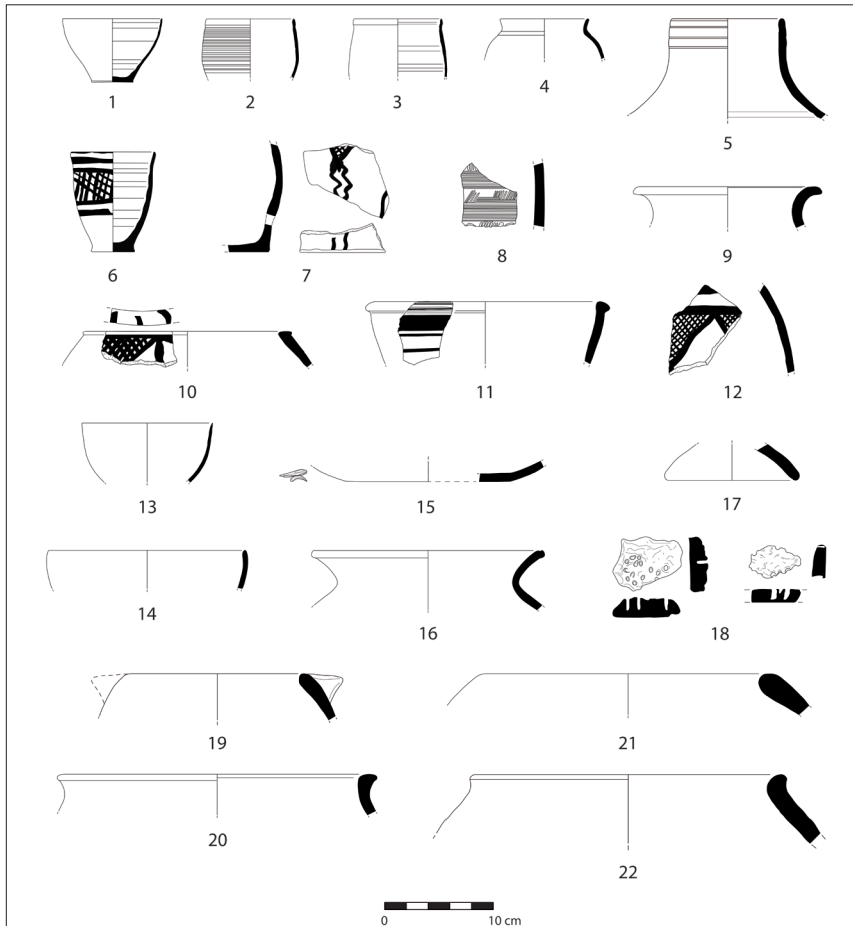
² For the descriptions of the Red Black Burnished Ware shapes, see Batiuk (2005), the typology of which is followed here.

Figure 8
Red Black Burnished Ware ceramics from the drainage / *Drenaj kanalında bulunan Kırmızı Siyah Açıklı seramik grubu* (M. Akar).



Figure 9

A selection of Square 52.37 Local Phase 4b ceramics from Toprakhisar Höyük / *Toprakhisar Höyük 52.37 plan-karesi 4b Evresi seramiklerinden bir seçki*. Nos. 1-5, 8-9: *Simple Ware*; Nos. 6-7, 1-12: *Painted Simple Ware*; Nos. 13-16: *Smeared Wash Ware*; Nos. 17-22: *Coarse Ware* (Illustrations by S. Ün and M. Bulu).



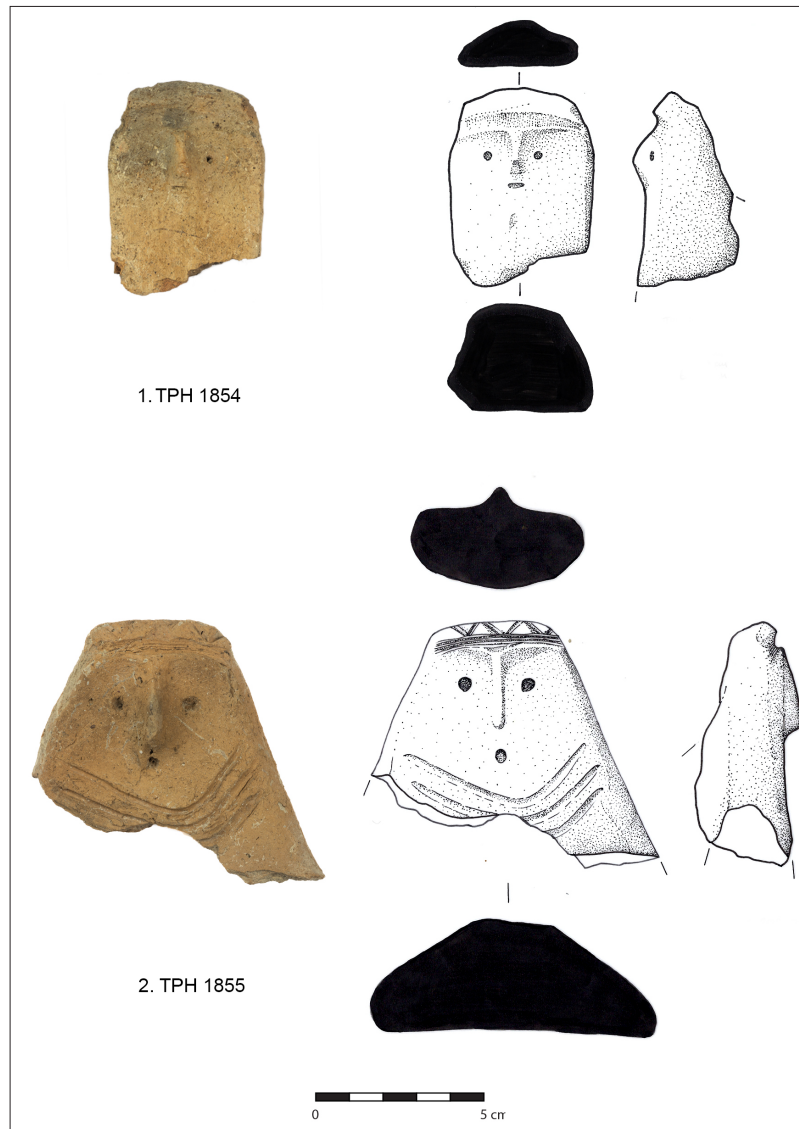
The Coarse Ware examples are cooking pots (Fig. 9: 19-22) and partially perforated baking trays (Fig. 9: 18), but there is also a single example of a lid/pedestal (Fig. 9: 17). For comparisons, see Braidwood & Braidwood, 1960, p. 404, Fig. 308: 5, 16, p. 405, Fig. 309: 2, p. 434, Fig. 334: 10, 13, 17, 23; Welton et al., 2011, p. 181, Fig. 9: 3, 11). Calcite tempered cooking pots, which start to appear in EB IVB and become the prevailing cookware tradition in the region during the MBA (see Horowitz & Çakırlar, 2017; Bulu, 2016; Akar et al., 2021; Welton, 2020, p. 228, 233), are also found in Local Phase 4b of Toprakhisar Höyük (Fig. 9: 20). The Smear Wash Ware examples are represented by bowls (Fig. 9: 13-15), one of which bears a potter's mark (Fig. 9: 15), and jars (Fig. 9: 16), comparisons of which are known from the Amuq (Braidwood & Braidwood, 1960, p. 418, Fig. 319: 2, 19, p. 448, Fig. 346: 1, 10; Welton, 2014, p. 39, Fig. 6: 7). Painted Simple Ware vessels are mainly preserved as body sherds (Fig. 9: 12), but a complete goblet (Fig. 9: 6), as well as rim fragments of bowls (Fig. 9: 11)

and jars (Fig. 9: 10) and a base fragment of a closed vessel (Fig. 9: 7), were also found (for comparative material, see Braidwood & Braidwood, 1960, p. 415, Fig. 317: 6-7; p. 444, Fig. 343: 3).

The context is absent of small finds that may further illuminate functional attributions, apart from a variety of multi-task chipped and ground stones. The two crudely made anthropomorphic andiron fragments are the most distinct objects from this building phase. One in trapezoidal (TPH 1855) and one in squarish form (TPH 1854), both faces have pinched noses and incised foreheads to mimic eyebrows (Fig. 10). The eyes and noses are emphasized by punching dots. The incisions on the lower chin of TPH 1855 may be interpreted as a beard to emphasize a male gender. A zigzag pattern was incised on the forehead. Burning signs are very low on both, suggesting their usage as andirons not directly exposed to high temperatures.

Figure 10

Andiron fragments from Local Phase 4b / *4b Evresi andiron parçaları* (Illustrations by S. Ün, photo by M. Akar).



Local Phase 4a

The very shallow deposition between 4b and 4a raised challenges in our stratigraphic attributions and was defined according to the floor levels of Local Phase 4a, encountered mainly in the northern extent of the square (Building 2018-1). This phase is characterized by the presence of a semi-enclosed space (L.52) created by the use of a single row of mud brick walls along two sides. The beaten earth floor was packed with stone and ceramic concentrations. Judging by the size of the space, the small enclosed space was likely used for cooking purposes, with a *tandır* type installation located inside, although absent in the exposed area (Fig. 11, 12).

The pottery repertoire of Local Phase 4a mainly differs from that of Local Phase 4b in the appearance of new MBA shape and ware types. The majority of the assemblage is Simple Ware vessels.

at both Toprakhisar Höyük (Akar & Kara, 2020, p. 88, Fig. 9: 24-25; 17: 7) and Tell Atchana (Bulu, 2016, p. 309, Fig. 7: 23-27; Akar et al., 2021, p. 85, Fig. 7-13: 8, 14-15; Heinz, 1992, Taf. 61:55; 62: 56; 63: 61). A similar tradition is also seen in the MB I contexts of Tell Mardikh, Ebla (Matthiae, 1977, pp. 140-145, Figs. 33-38, 2006, p. 96-99, Figs. 9-12; Nigro, 2002, p. 300, Fig. 3, p. 307, Fig. 7).

The third distinction in Local Phase 4a is the first appearance of Syro-Cilician Ware, which is the prevailing painted pottery tradition in the Amuq during the MBA (Heinz, 1992; Bulu 2023, 2017a, 2017b, p. 203, Fig. 9). The retrieved examples are of s-curve (Fig. 13: 7) and carinated bowls (Fig. 13: 8), counterparts of which are known from Toprakhisar Höyük (Akar & Kara, 2020, p. 88, Fig. 9: 15) and Tell Atchana (Heinz, 1992, Taf. 85: 2-4; 88: 1-2).

Figure 11

Aerial image of Squares 51/52.37, Local Phase 4a / 51/52.37 plan-karelerinin 4a Evresi hava fotoğrafı (M. Akar).



As opposed to the goblets and cups of Local Phase 4b, the open shapes of this phase are characterized by s-curve bowls with rounded or carinated shoulders (Fig. 13: 4-6), carinated shallow bowls (Fig. 9: 2-3) and rounded hemispherical bowls (Fig. 13: 1). Similar shapes are also known from the MBA contexts of Toprakhisar Höyük (Akar & Kara, 2020, p. 92, Fig. 9: 4, 9, 12; 17: 3, 2022, p. 24, Fig. 8: 2-3) and Tell Atchana (Heinz, 1992, Taf. 80: 1-4; 81: 7; 88: 3; Akar et al., 2021, p. 84, Fig. 7-12: 2, 5, 10, p. 85, 7-13: 1). The second distinction is the appearance of hemispherical pithoid jars with a rail rim (Fig. 13: 12), globular pithoid jars (Fig. 9: 11), perforated bases (Fig. 13: 13) that likely belong to the latter, and narrow-mouthed globular jars with a double rim (Fig. 13: 9), which all became common shapes for storage purposes in the MBA

In addition to the new traditions, there are some ware and shape types within the ceramic assemblages of Local Phase 4a that also show continuity from the EB IVB phases of Toprakhisar Höyük. Coarse Ware assemblages consist of grit-tempered (Fig. 13: 14-15) and calcite-tempered (Fig. 13: 16) cooking pots, indicating that they continued to be produced and used together. Similarly, the pithoid jar with a tall, flaring neck (Fig. 13: 10) is a shape type that is known from the EB IVB phases of Toprakhisar Höyük and Tell Tayinat (Welton, 2014, p. 346, Fig. 4: 13). Lastly, examples of Red Black Burnished Ware and Smear Wash Ware still continue to appear in Local Phase 4a but in much smaller amounts.

BEFORE THE MIDDLE BRONZE AGE RE-URBANIZATION AT THE HINTERLAND SITE OF TOPRAKHİSAR HÖYÜK (HATAY, TÜRKİYE)

Figure 12

Plan of Local Phase 4a, MB I Building 2018-1 at Toprakhisar Höyük / *Toprakhisar Höyük Orta Tunç I, 4a Evresi Bina 2018-1 çizimi* (Plan by O. H. Kırman).

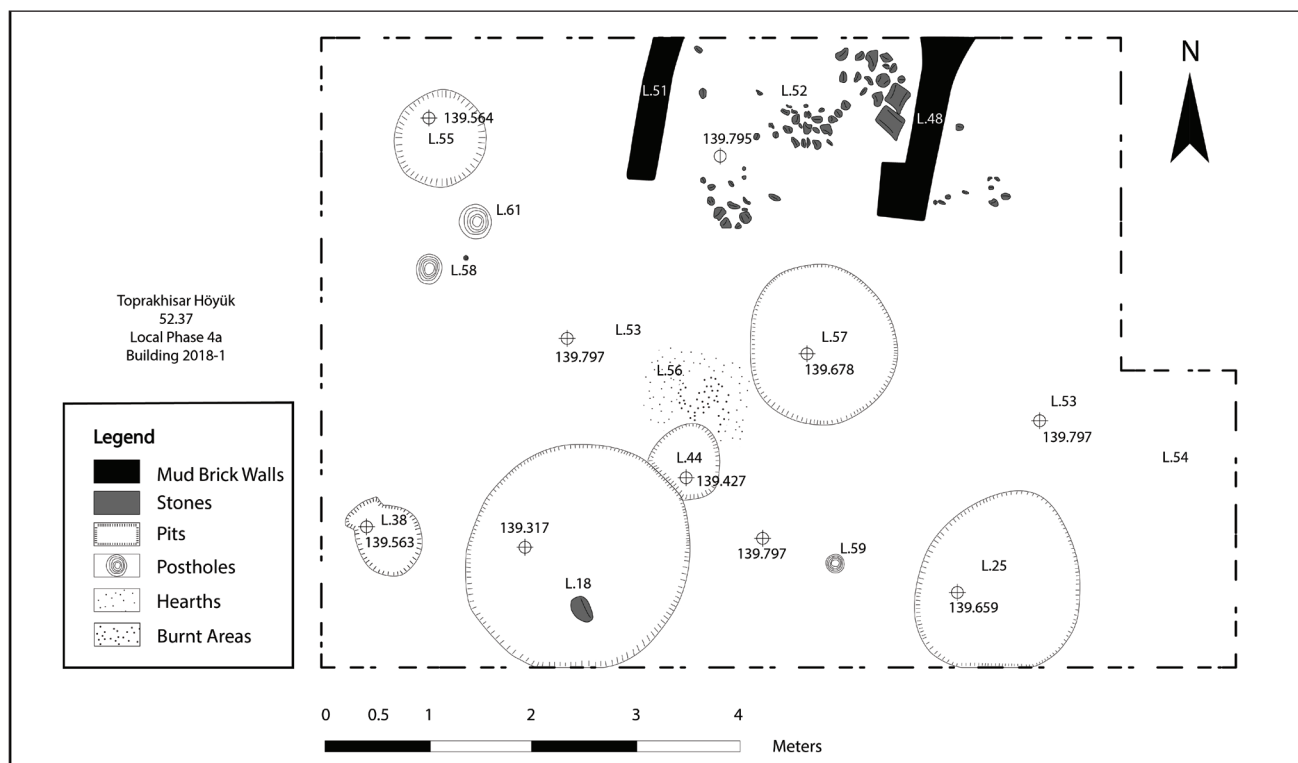
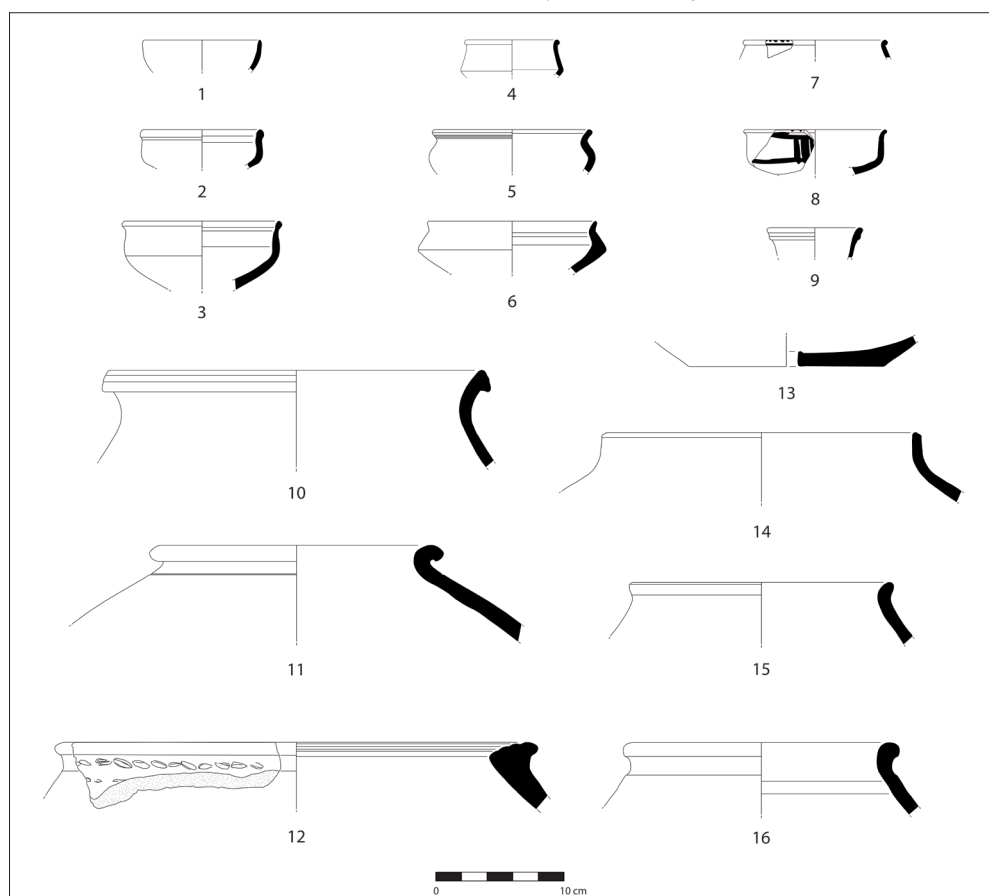


Figure 13

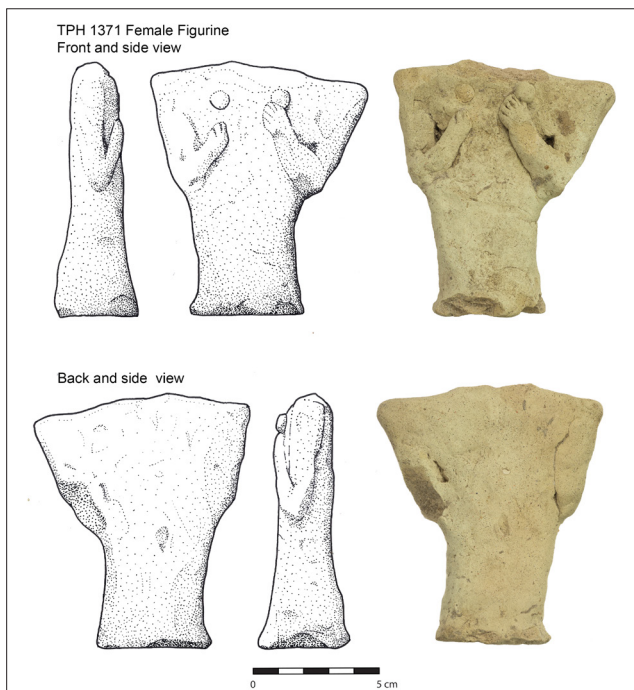
A selection of Square 52.37 Local Phase 4a ceramics from Toprakhisar Höyük / *Toprakhisar Höyük 52.37 plan-karesi 4a Evresi seramiklerinden bir seçki*. Nos. 1-6, 9-13: *Simple Ware*; Nos. 7-8: *Syro-Cilician Ware*; Nos. 14-16: *Coarse Ware* (Illustrations by S. Ün, G. Akgül and M. Bulu).



Local Phase 4a is also missing chronically distinct small finds, except for the presence of a crudely hand-modeled female figurine (TPH 1371, Fig. 14). The head is missing. The uneven torso was emphasized with wider shoulders, and a narrow pillar-like waist was formed by hand pinching with a pillared-shaped body. Both arms were fashioned with the intention to display a figure holding its breasts, although due to the careless approach, the arms are disproportional. One hand was incised with six fingers, whereas the other was defined by three. Breasts were added as clay balls, and the entire surface of the figurine was light buff and slipped.

Figure 14

Naked female figurine from Local Phase 4a / *4a Evresi çıplak kadın heykelciği* (Illustration by S. Ün, photo by M. Akar).



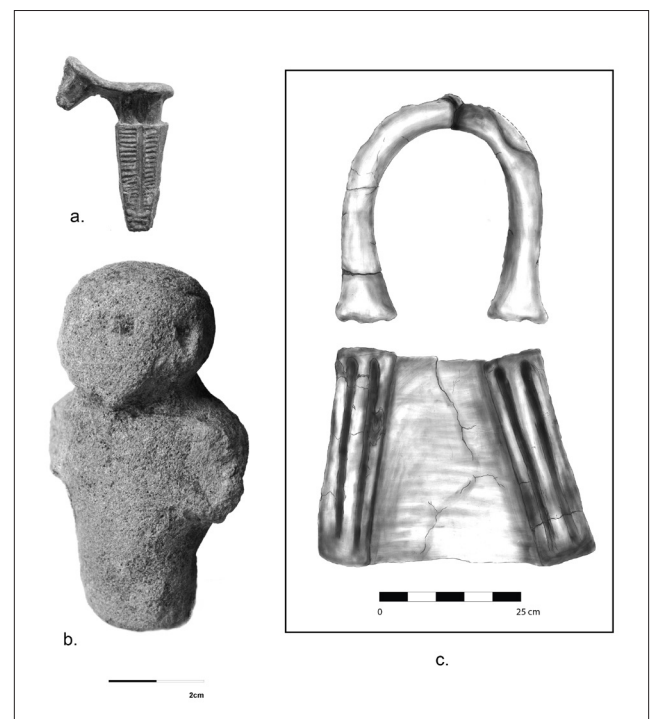
DISCUSSION

The previous publications on Toprakhisar concentrated on providing a general occupational history of the settlement through intensive surface surveys and in-depth analysis of the mature MB I phase. The exposure of a well-preserved burnt MB I administrative building complex yielded the rare opportunity to explore how rural management was performed and aided by commemorations, as evident in the administratively mediated collective memory practices materialized through the presence of foundation and termination rituals with objects of symbolic value, including the crudely made “Stone Spirits” with a Northern Mesopotamian origin (Fig. 15: b; Akar & Kara, 2020). The evidence in hand pointed to the possibility of new cultural habits forming in a time period corresponding to the 4.2 Ka BP global climate event that is accepted as a catalyst in the long-distance population movements, particularly from the Khabur Basin due to drought and aridity, following

the collapse of the Akkadian Empire. This Northern Mesopotamian connection was also evident in cooking practices with the presence of decorated horseshoe-shaped hearths (Fig. 15: c) with identical features to examples uncovered from Upper/Middle Euphrates sites in the late EBA and early MBA (Kelly-Buccellati, 2004; Aquilano, 2016, p.114; Ay, 2021, p. 348, Fig. 9; Akar & Kara, 2018, p. 113, Figs. 12-14). Recent geoarchaeological research in the Amuq Valley confirms the presence of the 4.2 ka BP global event in undisturbed sediment cores from around Tell Atchana, Tell Tayinat and the Amuq Lake (Avşar et al., 2019). Thus, we proposed that Toprakhisar Höyük likely witnessed long-distance human mobility at the beginning of the MBA, in accordance with the hypothesis developed around climate change-induced population movements at the end of the EBA (Weiss, 2017b, p. 145; Akar & Kara, 2020, p. 95). This hypothesis may also find confirmation in the material culture, as well as in the genomic change observed in the EBA-MBA transition from Tell Mardikh and Tell Atchana (Skourtanioti et al., 2020, p. 1168). Connections to the MBA Assyrian trade network are also evident in the presence of a Syro-Anatolian lead figurine in the form of a possible bull standing on a peg (Fig. 15: a) found in close proximity to grain silos (Akar & Kara, 2022, p. 29, Fig. 14). This particular object is taken as a remarkable example of hybridity, combining Mesopotamian and Anatolian elements at a peripheral site. The unique application in lead figurine iconography of a bull, and its functional attribute as a foundation peg, has been argued to provide clues to developing ritual practices in times of environmental stress, materializing the cult of a storm god with Hurrian characteristics.

Figure 15

Objects of Northern Mesopotamian and Anatolian influence / *Kuzey Mezopotamya ve Anadolu etkili buluntular* (Illustrations by O. H. Kirman, photo by M. Akar).



The exposure of the Local Phase 4 contexts in the same excavation area, predating the construction of the Local Phase 3 administrative building, now allows us to provide an archaeological framework for the hypothesis summarized above. Although not detailed in this article (see Kara & Akar, 2022 for a brief report) following the destruction of the Local Phase 5 EB IVB administrative building, the short-lived local phases (4a-b) in an approximately 50 cm deposition revealed architectural remains defined by smaller scale units and pyrotechnological installations used for pottery production and, to some extent, metallurgical activities. This is in accordance with the sites in the region that witnessed a brief period of collapse followed by small-scale, dispersed settlement layouts, suggesting a brief period of decentralization.

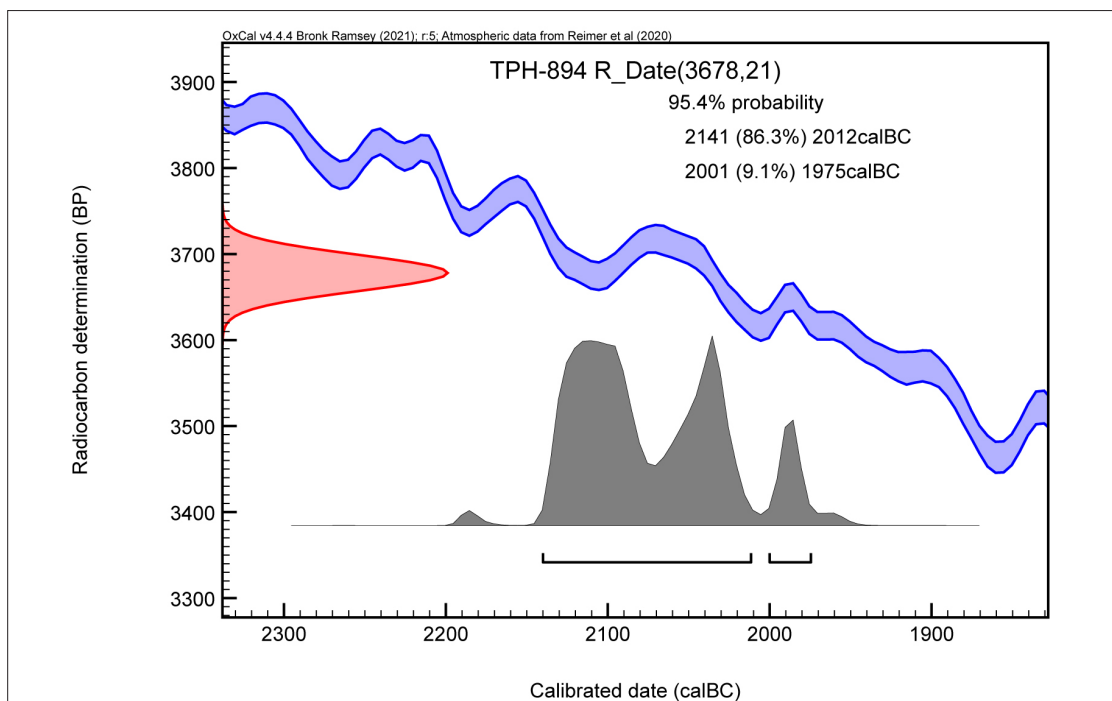
The fragmentary architectural remains from Local Phase 4b follows the preceding orientation of the Local Phase 5 architecture, with the assemblages dominated by the EB IVB ceramic repertoire. Of particular interest is observed that the Early-Transcaucasian material culture at Toprakhisar Höyük is persistent at the site until the end of the EBA, although the context that revealed distinct Red Black Burnished Ware vessels and anthropomorphic andiron fragments was a secondary one in the form of a drainage system. Nevertheless, the high number of such distinct forms evident in the overall assemblage may indicate their persistent usage. This is in accordance with recent understanding of the Early Transcaucasian material culture at Tell Tayinat, pointing to the local adaptation and long usage of Red Black Burnished Ware in the Amuq Valley. Parallels to the Toprakhisar

andirons can be found in the Amuq at Tabarat al-Akrad (Hood, 1951, p. 139, Fig. 9), Tell al-Judaidah and Tayinat (Braidwood & Braidwood, 1960, p. 374, Fig. 290). Based on their fragmentary condition and retrieval from a secondary context, we would avoid assigning any symbolic attributes with regard to their role in household rituals (Smogorzewska, 2004, p.162; Batiuk et al., 2022, p. 298), yet we value their presence for chronological and stylistic reasons. Future excavations may reveal evidence of the early appearance of Early-Transcaucasian material culture and the much-discussed issues of long-distance migrations and the development of the local Red Black Burnished Ware culture in the Amuq and its surroundings (Batiuk, 2013). The overall results indicate that Local Phase 4b at Toprakhisar chronologically correlates with Tayinat Phase 7 (Welton, 2014; for radiocarbon dates see Manning et al., 2020, p. 16, Table 4)

The striking difference between Local Phase 4a and 4b is evident in the overall material assemblage reflecting a change in the choice of shapes and production technologies, marking the beginning of the MBA. Local Phase 4a introduced new material culture, following the general trends in the region before the construction of the Local Phase 3 monumental building (see Fig. 16 for radiocarbon dating of Building 2016-2). The short-lived Local Phase 4a marks the beginning of the MB I. Both of these phases are identical in terms of their pottery production industries and belong to the same cultural horizon. However, as early MB levels have not yet been exposed during the renewed excavations at Tell Atchana, it is difficult to provide a correlation there.

Figure 16

AMS 14C dating of the short-lived fuel wood sample TPH-984 (University of Arizona AMS Laboratory). The raw date was calibrated using OxCal 4.4 software based on the IntCal2020 atmospheric curve (Reimer et al. 2020).



We can propose that Local Phase 4a at Toprakhisar should correlate with the early urban phase at Tell Atchana corresponding to Levels XVII-XVI (Woolley, 1955). This is tentative and awaits more radiocarbon dates from both sites.

Several remarkable objects found in Local Phase 4 may provide clues to cultural diversity and hybridization in daily life habits, particularly in household ritual practices. The presence of a late EBA handmade figurine found on the floor of a Local Phase 4a building could be interpreted as an object of ritual value in a culturally mixed environment where similar human representations in the form of anthropomorphic Early Transcaucasian andirons were in use (Valentini, 2008, p. 348). This figurine type finds parallels from the Middle Euphrates sites, and it is stylistically and chronologically associated with the Type MEFTA, following the conventions applied by the ARCANE Project (for an extended bibliography on typology and comparatives see Sakal, 2015, 2019; Makowski, 2020; Petty, 2006, p. 113, type 61). Parallels can also be found at Tell Tayinat (Welton et al., 2011, p. 182, Fig. 11: 1-2). This Northern Mesopotamian connection in combination with the presence of Early Transcaucasian material culture may show that diverse ritual habits and styles were amalgamated at this village site during this transformative period.

CONCLUSION

Although MB I urbanization at Toprakhisar may follow general trends following a brief period of collapse defined by the absence of evidence pertaining to administrative practices, the specific role that the site played in the regional and supra-regional trade networks is central to underlining the role of the site during this transitional period. As today, the Toprakhisar Höyük community benefited greatly from their horticultural practices, evident in the archaeobotanical assemblage which revealed significant amounts of olive stones and grape seeds, pointing to olive oil and wine production. The Alalakh Level VII texts confirm the crucial value of these products and provide details of the management of their production (Lauinger, 2015). In fact, even before those texts were written, Zimri-Lim, the King of Mari, had sent his advisor to purchase Alahtum in order to access high-quality olive oil and wine (Durand, 2002, p. 95). This specialty, which the site maintained, required administrative management as well as corvée labor practices and the participation of this small rural community in the larger trade networks of the MBA. The archaeobotanical research currently in progress may reveal changes throughout each local phase and will be presented in forthcoming articles. In conjunction with these products, the presence of a lead figurine similar in style to the Kültepe group but distinct in its form and

function, with a representation of a bull figure in the form of a foundation peg, is strong evidence linking Toprakhisar Höyük to the MBA Assyrian trade network, as well as to Northern Mesopotamia, pointing to the origins of the use of foundation pegs in succeeding periods in Anatolia. Putting all the evidence together, we suggest that the Toprakhisar Höyük community benefited from their olive oil and wine production, both agro-products of high value which are often disregarded due to their organic and invisible nature in archaeological research.

The cultural change and hybridity observed in this transitional period also highlight the impacts of the 4.2 ka BP climate event, which has now been commonly accepted as a strong environmental trigger leading to the collapse of the Akkadian Empire in Northern Mesopotamia, followed by consequent long distance mobility patterns often centered around the Amorites but which also included the Hurrians and various other unknown communities. Toprakhisar is suggested to be one of the localities that attracted migrants and facilitated a niche that was focused on the production of olive oil and wine, the most valuable agro-industries of the Bronze Age.

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