

New Results on Middle Bronze Age Urbanism in South-Eastern Anatolia: The 2004 Campaign at Tilmen Höyük

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After the first excavations between 1959 and 1972 by Bahadır Alkım and his team (Duru 2003), a renewed joint Turkish-Italian project has been started in 2003 with the aim of better studying the urbanism of this 5 hectares large site (fig. 1) and of obtaining a detailed chronological seriation for its monuments and material culture, also setting it into its regional framework and contributing to the historical framework of south-eastern Anatolia and northern Syria during the 2nd mill. BC (Marchetti 2004; id. 2005a; id. 2005b). The site was most likely the capital of a small kingdom: its ancient name remains unknown, the identification with Zalbar being just a hypothesis¹ (Forlanini 1985: 54-56).

The second season of excavations and surveys of the renewed joint Turkish-Italian project at Tilmen Höyük took place in september-october 2004:² the main aims of the season were to continue the exploration of the 2nd mill. BC public sector along the southern flank of the acropolis, already begun in 2003, and to begin the exploration of the lower town, thus far virtually untouched, if one excludes the casemate fortification system.

¹ For a synthetic discussion about Anatolian urban structures see Naumann 1971: 212-213, figs. 278 and esp. 293 for Alişar Höyük; the town of Tilmen, however, is more closely related to Old Syrian urban patterns, on which see below (see also Marchetti 2006).

² Thanks are due, for their financial support, to the Alma Mater Studiorum-University of Bologna and to the Italian Ministries for Education, University and Scientific Research (FIRB projects) and for Foreign Affairs (DGPCC directorate). To my colleagues Refik Duru and Gülsün Umurtak (Istanbul University), Hamza Güllüce and Fatma Bulgan (Gaziantep Museum) I express my warmest gratitude for their unfailing advice and support. I am also deeply grateful to the colleagues of the General Directorate for Cultural Heritage and Museums in Ankara, to the Representative from Gaziantep Museum, Burhan Balcıoğlu, and to the other colleagues from this same institution, Mehmet Önal, Ahmet Beyazlar and Taner Atalay. The Governor of Gaziantep (Lütfullah Bilgin) and the Gaziantep Büyükşehir mayor (Asım Güzelbey), together with Islahiye Kaymakam (Bekir Yılmaz) and the commanders of the Army, Jandarma and Police corps of Islahiye, have made us the honor of a visit to the excavations in october 2004, as well as constantly helping the Expedition during its stay. The participants to the 2004 season were archaeologists Benedetta Panciroli, Alessandro Colantoni, Luciano Cuccui, Luisa Guerri, Marco Baldacci, Alessia Bontempo, Nilüfer Sayıt, Sinem Üstün, Tuğba Güngör, restorer Elisa Spagnoli and topographer Massimo Zanfini.

The new topographical survey of this 5 ha site has been completed with the aid of a total station (fig. 1), obtaining also a 3D model.³ Among the main topographical features of the town one can note, in the western lower town, the depression (perhaps an open area) to the south-west of gate K-2 and the ridge extending to the south from the lower flanks of the acropolis towards K-3, on which Temple M is located. The northern and eastern lower town must have been little more than a corridor between the outer and the inner fortification walls, while there was more space to the south of the acropolis. The survey of previously excavated (still in progress, see fig. 2) and newly discovered monuments highlights articulated patterns of urban planning, with features such as a monumental public sector extending from the southern acropolis (areas A, E) to the southern lower town (M) and an inner functional differentiation of the acropolis (fig. 2).

Work was continued in all the areas excavated in 2003 (A, C, H, E; fig. 4) and two other new areas were opened on the acropolis north and the lower town west respectively (L, M). The description of the main results obtained in 2004 follows.

In the MB II Royal Palace A, the eastern walls (W.30 and W.26) of the palace were further exposed towards the south, where they are only preserved at foundation level. The southernmost room (L.34) is almost completely lost due to erosion and to a Roman superimposition cutting through the east boundary wall W.30. In the adjoining building (Residency C) three soundings were dug in the northern row of rooms (see fig. 2, where they are numbered 1-3), revealing a sequence spanning early MB I to MB IIA. Below L.82, to the west, there was a sequence of outer surfaces (L.414 and L.430) dating from MB IIA down to MB I. Below L.74 (fig. 3), in the middle section of the building, there was a large pit filled up with stones, covering a levelling fill for the construction of Residency C, which in turn covered an early MB II pit cutting into MB I levels. Below L.72, to the east, a wall (W.429) and a MB I floor (L.442) below it were exposed. Thus a foundation not earlier than the end of MB II has been confirmed for Residency C, while no new elements could of course be obtained (because of the loss of floor levels) about its abandonment

³ For the previous topographical plan, drawn by Ferit Koper, see Alkim 1962: plans I, III; Duru 2003: pl. 1. Besides an obvious greater precision, in the new plan one can also note, for example along the southern flank of the acropolis, the dump from the Turkish excavations carried out in the sixties (fig. 1). An attempt has been made to create a plan without the excavation areas (lack of measurements therein has been compensated by probability calculations). The absolute elevations and the UTMWGS84 grid (in figs. 1 and 2 respectively) were determined by Gabriele Bitelli and Luca Vittuari of the Faculty of Engineering of the University of Bologna (see instead Alkim 1962: plan IV, for an old set of elevations).

(its reconstruction still visible in various spots must in any case be dated to the developed LBA).

Fortress H, discovered in 2003, was completely excavated (fig. 4 to the right), also identifying the prosecution of the fortification wall towards the north, protecting the base of the acropolis (identical in technique to W.304, connecting the palace and the fortress; fig. 5).⁴ The LB I date for the final phase of the building established in 2003 was strengthened through the retrieval of abundant new pottery materials in rooms L.333 and L.337.

In Area E a series of floors spanning MB I and MB II was excavated in front of Building E to the north (in the so called porch; fig. 6). The lower fill (F.462) has yielded MB I pottery. This stratum is covered by a grayish levelling fill (F.461), a surface covered with sherds and pebbles (F.468) and by a paved floor (L.454): all of them gave (early) MB II pottery and are connected with the rebuilding of the monument (a third construction phase is scantily documented and must perhaps be connected with the rebuilding of Residency C). It seems now certain that Building E was already in ruins and partly subsided when in Hellenistic times its rooms were cleared and, at least in L.278, a furnace (which presumably underwent clearing at regular intervals) was made plastering the faces of the ruined walls (fig. 7).

In Area L a rectangular building eroding on the surface was excavated (fig. 8), revealing various building phases within the MB-LB periods. The upper phase dates from LB I and represents a repair of the preceding MB II building (with an installation made of stones covered by hardened clay), which had been rebuilt on the same plan as the earliest building. The latter was destroyed by fire and on its floor (L.524) a pottery assemblage dating from the EB-MB transition (in fact it can be taken to define the very beginning of the MBA in the region) was retrieved (fig. 9). An extension towards north-west uncovered a Hellenistic house built over another building contemporary with the main one. A peculiar feature of the main building is represented by a buttress along the northern wall (W.508), which was rebuilt as such during the last phase: although certainly a significant feature, its interpretation is still problematic, since the building does not seem to have ever been a temple.

In the lower town west (Area M), where some alignments of massive boulders were noted in 2003, a temple in *antis* – with at least two building phases between late MBA and early LBA – was discovered (figs. 10-11). It faces south as most Old

⁴ W.304 was excavated in 2003, although its outer face was already exposed in the sixties; see Alkim 1968: pls. 145-146; Duru 2003: pl. 15.

Syrian temples (Matthiae 1989: 160, 312-313). It is built with a very monumental masonry and has an outer buttress on the northern back wall. A paved courtyard with some installations opens in front of the temple. The temple measures c. 10 x 13.5 m; in front of the entrance wall (W.564) a large stone slab serves as door sill (L.583). The western long wall (W.572) is much damaged, while the northern and eastern ones (W.569 and W.570 respectively) are well preserved. A basalt stela was discovered in the cella, although in a superficial layer: it depicts a high dignitary in front of a male god (possibly Haddu) and must date to the end of the MBA (i.e. to the late Old Syrian period according to art historic terminology) because of several iconographic details (fig. 12; for a detailed discussion of the stela see Marchetti in press). A fragmentary stone basin was found in the same superficial layer. The outer courtyard is paved with flat stones of various dimensions. Several phases are documented in it: on the lowermost one, a basalt piece of furniture, probably ritual (a basin on a squared foot; fig. 13), was found. Later phases are represented by two high platforms in the corners of the courtyard (on top of one of which there is a large monolithic basin with its trough opening into a passage through the temenos, of which three sides have been excavated thus far). Among the small objects retrieved, noticeable are a few possible stone weights (fig. 14),⁵ two fragmentary crucibles and the fragment of a multi-sided mould (fig. 15), indicating that smelting activities took place in the nearby (no slags were, however, actually found in the temenos area).

Some final remarks may be devoted to Old Syrian urbanism⁶ (see Marchetti 2006 for further details). Most of the royal palaces are located on the acropolis, although at Ebla they are attested also in the lower town. While they are not in the immediate nearby of a gate, palaces are usually built next to a temple, thus stressing spatially the connection between royal office and divine sanction. However, the two are usually not in a direct relationship, the entrance to the palace being in fact from a different direction in respect to that of the temple. Two features seem characteristic – according to this new analysis – at the same time of Old Syrian palaces: the reception suite and the throne room. Both continue to be documented in LBA palace architecture, where however the former may directly be incorporated into the main façade of the building, thus giving origin to the so called *bīt khilāni*, although the direct connection between these two rooms – characteristic for this architectural typology – will

⁵ Carlo Zaccagnini (p.c.) preliminarily suggests the possibility that the weight of fig. 14, although of an unusual shape, represents three shekels according to the Mesopotamian weight system (8.4 gr x 3 = 25.2 gr).

⁶ At Tilmen, Palace A abutted on the southern flank of the fortified acropolis, next to Building E (a possible early temple) and Fortress H, while Residency C was built against the palace at a later stage. A square opened in front of the palace and a cobbled street arrived there from the monumental stairway K5 (connecting the acropolis and the lower town), in front of which there was the main city gate K1-K6 through the casemate walls of this ancient capital (Duru 2003: 57-59, figs. 4, 8, pls. 18-20, 22-23: 1).

only be made in the Iron Age, when the topographical unity of palace and temple will in many cases continue to be present, as well as the installations in the throne room.⁷

The site of Alalakh in level VII exhibits a rampart with a city gate leading probably into a square, where the ensemble of palace and temple was located (Woolley 1955: 91-106, fig. 35). At Ebla the excavations revealed a complex urban scheme (Matthiae 1989): from the circuit of the rampart fortifications one could enter through four city gates into the town, in which the main circulation seems to have been with streets connecting the gates and running approximately north-south and east-west if one judges from the sides where the entrance to the main buildings are located: palaces P and Q were probably entered from the west. The pairing of the palaces with sacred precincts to the south is noteworthy: the deities worshiped there seem in fact connected with the different functions of the palaces (Matthiae 1986; id. 1991). This unity of palace and temple is also found, during the MBA, in Anatolia at Kaneš (Özguç 2003: figs. 8, 10, 75) and in Mesopotamia mainly at Ur, Mari, Ešnunna and Larsa (Margueron 1982: 156-418, figs. 106-296; see also Matthiae 2000: 28-29, 78-82, 130).

Finally, it must be pointed out that the ancient site of Tilmen Höyük can only be understood within its regional framework: an intense program of landscape archaeology is being developed through remote sensing at Bologna University, while an assessment of the archaeological risk of the area is being developed together with Gaziantep Museum in order to proceed to protection and enhancement operations.⁸

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⁷ Compare, for example, the palace and temple of Tell Taynat (Naumann 1971: figs. 551, 611) and room K2 in the Lower Palace at Sam'al (Naumann 1971: fig. 549), respectively.

⁸ In addition to the survey carried out by B. Alkım (for a sketch map of which see most recently Duru 2004: folder at the end of the volume), other smaller archaeological sites around Islahiye, not previously documented, have been noted (some of which are actually endangered): all of them need to be recorded and protected within a forthcoming project of an archaeological park for the Islahiye valley. In 2004, preparatory works for the archaeological park of Tilmen Höyük have been carried out at the site.

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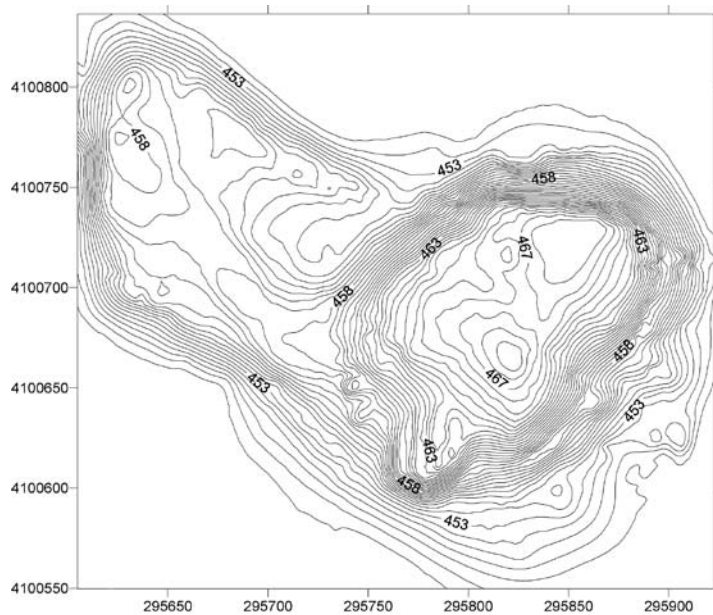


Fig. 1 Topographic map of Tilmen Höyük (contour lines 0.5 m)

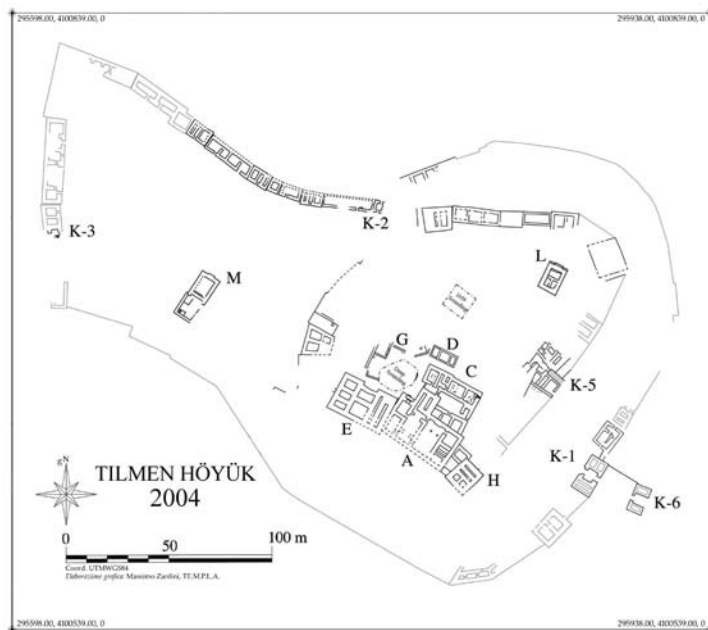


Fig. 2 Topographic map of Tilmen Höyük with 2nd mill. BC monuments (lighter grey means surveyed only by B. Alkim's Expedition)



Fig. 3
Sounding no. 2
in room L.74 of Residency C,
from east, MB I-II



Fig. 4
Photoorthorectified aerial
view of Buildings E, A, C
and H, MB II – LB I



Fig. 5
View of wall W.30
of Palace A (left),
binding wall W.304
(in the middle), walls W.132
(right foreground) and W.305
(going uphill), room L.308 of
Fortress H (right background)
from south, MB II – LB I



*Fig. 6
View of Building E from north-west, MB I-II: in the foreground the sounding along the northern main façade (the large basalt block is the fallen corner stone of the MB II rebuilding), with paved MB II surfaces immediately behind to the east*



*Fig. 7
The furnace in room L.278 from east, Building E: note the burnt cracked plaster over the foundation walls of L.278 and the reexcavated fill in the middle*



*Fig. 8
View of Building L from south, MB I-II: in the foreground an LB I installation*



Fig. 9
The transitional EB-MB
pottery assemblage
retrieved on the floor of
L.524 from the first phase
of Building L

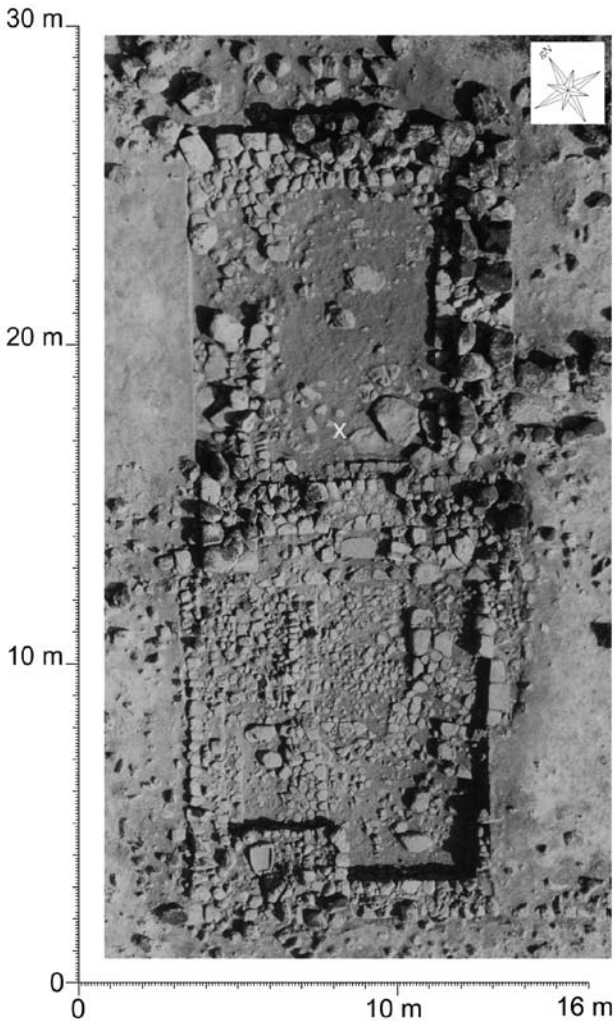


Fig. 10
Photoorthorectified aerial view of Temple
M (left) and its temenos area (right), MB II
(the X marks the spot where
the stela has been found)



Fig. 11 View of Temple M from south-west, MB II: in the foreground the southern end of wall W.572, to the right wall W.564



Fig. 12 Late Old Syrian stela TH.04.M.100 immediately after its recovery in the cella of Temple M, from west; in the background, the acropolis



Fig. 13 Basalt basin TH.04.M.99, MB II



Fig. 14 Possible stone weight TH.04.M.9 (25.29 gr), MB II



Fig. 15 Stone multiple mould TH.04.M.95 with traces of burning, MB II

