Ebla’s Hegemony and Its Impact on the Archaeology of the Amuq Plain in the Third Millennium BCE

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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University of Toronto
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2019

Abstract

This dissertation investigates the emergence of Ebla as a regional state in northwest Syria during the Early Bronze Age and provides a characterization of Ebla that emphasizes its hegemonic rather than imperial features. The texts recovered from the Royal Palace G archives reveal that Ebla expanded from a small Cis euphratean kingdom into a major regional power in Upper Mesopotamia over the course of just four or five decades. To consolidate and maintain its rapidly growing periphery, Ebla engaged in intensive diplomatic relations with an array of client states, semi-autonomous polities, and independent kingdoms. Often, political goals were achieved through mutual gift-exchange and interdynastic marriage, but military activity became increasingly common towards the end of the period covered by the texts. However, apart from installing palace officials at some cities, Ebla did not appear to have invested heavily in building infrastructure, such as roads or forts, along its periphery, preferring instead to leave matters of defense up to client and allied states. As a result, the archaeological impact of Ebla’s political hegemony along parts of its periphery was minimal.

In re-evaluating the archaeological evidence for Ebla’s growth in the mid-third millennium BCE, this dissertation shows that in only a few instances—for example, in changes to regional settlement patterns in the Amuq Plain, subsistence strategies at Tell es-Sweyhat, and the
distribution of ceramic assemblages—can an Eblaite influence on material culture along its periphery be inferred, and even then, only indirectly. While Ebla’s sphere of interaction extended over a considerable territory, this dissertation restricts most of its discussion to Ebla’s northwestern frontier, and particularly to the archaeology of the Amuq Plain. This study demonstrates that even though Ebla had installed an official at Alalaḫu—the major polity in the Amuq Plain—local historical trajectories remained largely intact, and Ebla’s hegemony left only an ephemeral archaeological legacy in the area.
Acknowledgments

This project could not have been completed without the support of many people and organizations. Research for this dissertation was conducted while a fellow of the CRANE Project (Computational Research on the Ancient Near East). Major financial support was provided by a doctoral fellowship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), and by a doctoral award from the Ontario Graduate Scholarship (OGS). Additional funding was provided by the University of Toronto through a doctoral completion grant. The assistance provided by these organizations enabled the completion of this research, and their support in gratefully acknowledged.

I wish to express sincere thanks to my doctoral advisor, Timothy Harrison, for his continued support, accessibility, and above all patience. Appreciation is also extended to my dissertation committee members Clemens Reichel, Paul-Alain Beaulieu, Anne Porter, and Lisa Cooper for their detailed and timely feedback. My dissertation is immeasurably better as a result of their comments. I am grateful to Ted Banning for his sound advice and encouragement, and to Anna Sousa for facilitating the administrative components involved in completing this project. I am also thankful to Douglas Frayne for our many informative conversations prior to his passing in December 2017. Doug was an original member of my dissertation committee, and his many insights into the Ebla texts will not soon be forgotten, nor will he.

Thanks to Debra Foran, Andrew Graham, Stephen Batiuk and Stanley Klassen for their support throughout my time in Toronto. I learned from your past experiences in the program, and your guidance over the years has enabled me to spot many obstacles well in advance. Thank you for the feedback, shelter, and especially friendship. Thank you to my friends and fellow students.
Darren, Khaled, and Phil. Having a group of reliable chaps with whom to commiserate is essentially a pre-requisite for completing a dissertation. You provided that and much more.

I am indebted to Michele Daviau and Robert Chadwick for introducing me to Near Eastern archaeology, and for providing me with the opportunity to join the Wadi ath-Thamad Project in 2004. Thank you also to my Bishop’s University professors Daniel Miller and Michele Murray for inspiring me to pursue a career in research and teaching.

My family also deserves much credit. Their support throughout this journey has never wavered. To Patrick, Debbie, Justin, and Brandon, thank you for keeping me grounded all these years.

Finally, I extend my deepest thanks to Annlee Dolan for her tremendous generosity, sincere encouragement, and tough love. You sacrificed so much to help me see this project through to the end, and for that I am eternally grateful. I could not have done this without you. Thank you.
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Chapter 1

Introduction and Organization of the Study

1 Introduction

This dissertation assesses the impact of political hegemony on the historical trajectories of Early Bronze Age (ca. 3100-2000 BCE) polities in western Syro-Anatolia, and in the Amuq Plain in particular. In the mid-third millennium, the two powerful kingdoms of Ebla and Mari competed for control over the important north-south trade routes along the Middle Euphrates.\(^1\) Neither city achieved a long-lasting hegemony over the other. Ebla was eventually destroyed, probably by Mari, but the latter city was subsequently conquered by Sargon of Akkad.\(^2\) Prior to their destruction, however, Ebla and Mari were not the only political entities in the region. The Ebla texts evince many Syro-Anatolian and Upper Mesopotamian kingdoms, some of which were subject to direct or indirect rule by Ebla, and yet others that operated autonomously. Even though the texts cover a period of only 40 or 50 years, it is also apparent that Ebla’s relationship with these polities changed over time. The resulting impression is that of a highly fragmented political landscape characterized by the differential spread of Eblaite influence and a variety of local strategies that emerged in response to this growing hegemonic power.

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\(^1\) In this case, the Middle Euphrates refers to the Syrian Euphrates from Mari to the Syro-Turkish border near Carchemish. It is common in Anatolian archaeology to refer to this part of the river as the Lower Euphrates. Terminologically, this can be confusing given that Levant or Mesopotamian archaeologists tend to refer to the land adjacent to the Middle Euphrates as Upper Mesopotamia.

\(^2\) Arche and Biga (2003) provide the most comprehensive data concerning the destruction of Ebla’s Palace G to date. Most earlier sources designate Sargon or Naram-Sin as Ebla’s destroyer, but it was probably the result of a campaign by Mari. Mari itself was destroyed by Sargon 10 years after the fall of Ebla, as is evident from synchronisms in texts from both sites, and therefore the latter’s demise antedates the Akkadian campaigns. A summary of these events is also provided by Liverani (2014).
Given the broad geographical coverage of the Ebla texts, the present dissertation will only be able to offer a cursory appraisal of the entire range of polities affected by Eblaite hegemony. Instead, a more limited focus on the individual polity known in the texts as Alalaḫu permits a more in-depth analysis of the relationship between Ebla and one of its neighbors as it is expressed in both the historical and archaeological sources. The spread of Ebla’s hegemony impacted a wide range of polities situated along both sides of the Syrian Euphrates, including not only Alalaḫu, but also other well-known kingdoms such as Carchemish, Emar, Ḫarran, Tunip and Hama. Ultimately, I envision this research as a local contribution to a much needed comprehensive, macro-regional synthesis of Eblaite political hegemony.

While such a broad scale study would be welcomed, there are several important reasons why a focus on Alalaḫu is warranted. First, this polity was situated in the Amuq Plain, northwest of Ebla. This is a region that is less frequently mentioned in the Palace G Archives, which have a strongly Euphratean focus. Much of the scholarship on Ebla and its neighbors has as a result emphasized the importance of the contested territory between Ebla and Mari. A shift in emphasis to the west therefore addresses an often overlooked but important component of Ebla’s sphere of influence. Second, data stemming from comprehensive regional surveys and excavations have allowed for a greater understanding of settlement trends and social complexity in the Amuq Plain during the third millennium. Coupled with a recently published synthesis of texts pertaining to the Amuq (Archi 2006), we now have a sufficient amount of data with which to analyze the relationship between Alalaḫu and Ebla. Ultimately, however, a study of Alalaḫu cannot be taken as representative of the whole region controlled by Ebla, and it will be necessary at times to review the relationships that Ebla held with contemporaneous kingdoms situated throughout its sphere of influence.
2 Thesis Statement

The basic premise of this dissertation is that Ebla’s political ascent culminated not in the creation of a large empire, but rather a hegemonic kingdom whose power and control over its periphery was loose and transitory. I argue that Ebla can be best understood by considering it along the spectrum of core-periphery systems as articulated in the Territorial-Hegemonic Model (after D’Altroy 1992; Schreiber; Parker 2001; 2014). Specifically, I contend that while the Ebla texts may allude to the polity’s large size, the evidence indicates a more indirect form of control that is best characterized as hegemonic, and not territorial. Ebla’s ability to manipulate subordinate polities was relatively limited. Unlike the Near Eastern empires of the later first millennium, Ebla did not construct palaces or military outposts in foreign cities. Its manner of governance was subtler and focused especially on the extraction of tribute as opposed to outright conquest and military rule. Thus, the impact of Eblaite hegemony should be traceable, if at all, in changes to regional settlement patterns, such that local subsistence patterns were modified to meet tributary demands. Despite the presence of Eblaite officials at various subject polities, they maintained only a limited administrative and military presence in these places, and never established permanent forts or garrisons. As a result, the archaeological footprint of Eblaite hegemony was likely weaker in comparison to the more “hands on” approaches of later Near Eastern territorial states. Ebla’s power was based largely on mutual gift-exchange and diplomacy, and less frequently on direct political intervention through military campaigning.

3 Research Goals

Several key questions lie at the center of the present research. First, “how did Ebla’s political hegemony impact socio-political development in the Amuq plain?” Second, “was the spread of
Ebla’s political hegemony uniform across space?” And finally, “how can our understanding of Ebla’s impact on the Amuq plain shed light on the remaining areas affected by the former’s hegemony?”

The primary data concerning the study of Eblaite hegemony stem from two sources: textual data preserved in the Royal Palace G³ archives and archaeological data from surveys and excavations. Both sources are subject to important biases. The Palace G archives are the product of the royal administrative apparatus centered at Ebla, and ultimately reflect the concerns of the ruling elite at that site. Despite recent advances, archaeological surveys have also tended to focus on mounded settlements or tells, and excavations have frequently targeted the largest sites in each region.⁴ This is not the case for all archaeological work in the study area, however, particularly along the Middle Euphrates, where salvage projects in recent decades have resulted in rich settlement and other data in typically neglected areas. Similarly, several regional surveys have also incorporated more inclusive approaches that seek to document flat or even subsurface sites, as well as a greater focus on sherd and lithic scatters. Nevertheless, the biases in the data do not necessarily negate their relevance for studying political hegemony, including from a traditional top-down perspective. While it would be desirable to incorporate multiple scales of analysis that emphasize human agency and other bottom-up components, we are nevertheless bound by certain limitations in the available data. For example, in the present study, the relevant

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3 Tell Mardikh IIB1/EB IVA
4 Remote sensing, especially the use of recently declassified satellite imagery, has greatly expanded our gazetteers in many parts of the Upper Mesopotamia and the Northern Levant. Combined with surface surveys that have emphasized off-site sherd and lithic scatters, as well as low-lying or flat sites, these techniques have contributed to a more thorough understanding of settlement trends in a variety of landscapes, from prehistoric through more recent periods. A summary of the results of off-site surveys in Syro-Anatolia and Upper Mesopotamia is provided by Wilkinson 2000a. An example of the use of CORONA imagery in a west Syrian context is summarized in Beck et al. 2007, and for Upper Mesopotamia see Ur 2003.
data for settlement plans and layouts are quite restricted given the generally limited exposures of pertinent mid to late third millennium levels at sites in the study region.\(^5\)

In other words, this research is concerned with the dynamics of core-periphery interaction, and the physical expressions of territoriality at the level of both landscapes and settlements. Core-periphery interaction is a familiar subject for scholars of early complex societies in the Near East. Despite recent criticism, Algaze’s description of the Uruk expansion as a world-system demonstrates the potential of core-periphery concepts for furthering our understanding of the processes and mechanisms underlying the formation of territorial states or even empires (2008; 2001; 1993a; 1993b; 1989; but also Stein 1999). More recent studies focusing on territoriality (e.g., Bintliff 2013; Mantha 2009; Parker 2014) have contributed to discussions of the physical manifestations of political authority. Similarly, an emphasis on the archaeology of borderlands and frontiers has helped to articulate the effects of core-periphery interaction in a wide variety of historical and archaeological contexts. All these fields come together to help establish an idea of what one can expect when studying hegemonic polities and their impact on local historical trajectories.

4 Organization of the Study

The study of core-periphery systems extends across not only archaeology, but also geography, politics, economics and other disciplines concerned with both the ancient and modern worlds. Chapter 2 describes some of the more pertinent theoretical concepts related to core-periphery studies and their application to archaeological case studies. This discussion provides the

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\(^5\) This is especially true for western Syria. Hama Level J has some of the broader exposures in this region, but they are limited to domestic structures (Fugmann 1958). More recent excavations at Tell Tayinat, the main settlement in the Amuq plain during this period, have uncovered parts of a larger complex dating to the EB IVB, but its plan remains to be determined (Welton et al. 2011).
necessary backdrop from which the Territorial-Hegemonic Model (after Parker 2014; 2001) emerges.

Ebla did not exist in a vacuum. In fact, the large and powerful states of the mid to late third millennium represent only the culmination of a long process towards increased urbanization and socio-political integration that extends back into the fourth millennium. Chapter 3 outlines the archaeological background of the centuries leading up to the period of Ebla’s political hegemony, contrasting the historical trajectories of eastern and western Syro-Anatolia. Understanding Ebla’s roots in the wealth-based economic systems of Early Bronze Age northwest Syria are important for elucidating its later diplomatic system focused on the mutual exchange of manufactured goods and preciosities.

Information about the time periods covered in Chapter 3 stem from a long history of modern archaeological activity in the Syro-Anatolian and Upper Mesopotamian region. Numerous influential surveys and excavations have been carried out in northern Syria and southeastern Turkey over the past century, providing us with ample settlement data and cultural sequences, not to mention the spectacular discoveries of royal archives yielding invaluable textual data. Chapter 5 summarizes the major regional surveys carried out within the study region, highlighting some of the major trends in the evolution of settlement patterns during the third millennium.

The Royal Palace G archives constitute the most important source of textual information concerning third millennium Syria. The broad geographical coverage of the texts means that we have abundant data concerning not only the history, politics and economy of Ebla, but of many of its neighbors as well. Moreover, the significant repository of place-names, or toponymy, of the Ebla texts allow us to make some observations about the historical geography of third
millennium Syria. Chapters 4 and 6 are largely concerned with the Ebla texts, with the former focusing on insights drawn from an analysis of the toponymic data in the texts, while the latter discusses the geopolitical situation of Ebla’s world in light of these data.

Finally, Chapter 7 summarizes some of the key features of the archaeology of the Ebla region, with an emphasis on the settlement patterns of the Amuq Plain. The argument is put forth that little evidence can be traced on the ground indicating the presence of a foreign power within Alalaḫu’s territory, despite the implication within the texts that Ebla controlled that polity directly. In addition, it is shown that both the Amuq Plain and Ebla chora continued to exhibit strong regional distinctiveness in terms of material culture, indicating perhaps that Ebla’s political sway over the Amuq Plain impacted only specific sectors of the local society.
Chapter 2
The Study of Early Expansionist States

The documentary evidence preserved in the Palace G archives attests to Ebla’s rapid growth into a regional power. At the time of Ebla’s destruction, it was still expanding into new regions while also consolidating the peripheral territories it had acquired over the previous five or six decades. For example, Biga (2010: 51-53) describes a campaign carried out against Bagara during the period of Ebla’s last vizier, Ibbi-zikir. Bagara is not mentioned in earlier texts suggesting that Ebla was expanding into new areas late into the reign of Ebla’s last king, Išar-damu. Thus, Ebla can be considered an early expansionist state, comparable to other such states found in both in the Near East and elsewhere. Indeed, Ebla has sometimes been characterized as one of the world’s first empires (e.g. Pettinato 1991). While the acquisition of a large periphery is a feature of most empires, not all expansionist states are necessarily empires, as the defining characteristics of these states are founded not in their territorial extent, but rather in their management strategies and methods of political and economic consolidation. Some early expansionist states, such as the Neo-Assyrian state or Achaemenid Persia, clearly developed into large empires characterized by high levels of integration and the direct management of their peripheries. Others, like Ebla, did not. Rather, Ebla exhibited the features of a more nuanced type of expansionist state whose power was rooted more in diplomacy and indirect hegemonic control as opposed to direct military domination of its periphery. This is best exemplified by its diplomatic activities, which are manifest in the Palace G texts as records of mutual gift exchange between not only Ebla and its allies, but also its client states and enemies.

In the following discussion, I examine the nature of expansionists states by considering various archaeological approaches to power, territoriality and borderlands, and explore how
these features are represented in models of core-periphery systems. By considering Ebla through the perspective of the Territorial-Hegemonic Model, a new characterization of Ebla emerges that emphasizes its hegemonic, as opposed to territorial, aspects. Using a system of strategic alliances—reinforced by gift-exchange and interdynastic marriages—Ebla was able to establish its political and economic dominance over an expanding periphery.

1 Expansionist States

1.1 An Overview of Expansionist States

Expansionist states are political entities that assume control over peripheral states of varying size and complexity. On the largest scale, expansionist states can develop into empires, which can be short-lived—for example, not outlasting their founder—or endure for centuries. Expansion is driven by two factors. First is the desire to ensure the security of the core polity, which can be accomplished by establishing a strategic periphery that acts as a buffer against potential external threats (D’Altroy 1992: 9). Second is the need to acquire resources, which are funneled from the periphery to the core. Acquiring and consolidating a large periphery stems from a polity’s coercive capacity. Such capacity is manifest in four types of power: military, political, economic and ideological (Mann 1986: 1-33). Military power is most commonly invoked during the initial stages of an expanding state, as the core polity assumes control over peripheral states through direct conquest or the threat of military action. Political and economic power are generally exerted as part of a polity’s effort to consolidate its incorporated states. Ideological power is mainly used as a means of legitimizing expansion and to expedite the assimilation of subsumed populations (DeMarrais et al. 1996: 15-17).

6 Though articulated by D’Altroy (1992), I follow especially the modified version of this model described by Parker (2014; 2001), who prefers the term Territorial-Hegemonic Continuum.
1.2 Ebla as an Expansionist State

Almost immediately following the discovery and translation of the Palace G archives, efforts were made to place Ebla within the broader spectrum of expansionist states. These studies advanced a somewhat grandiose picture of Ebla as a vast empire, comparable to the great Egyptian and Mesopotamian empires of the later Bronze and Iron Ages (e.g., Pettinato 1991; Astour 1988). While the geographical scope of the texts seemed at first to justify the presentation of Ebla as the center of a large empire, more recent interpretations have helped to better place Ebla within its historical and cultural context as a nascent expansionist state (especially Archi and Biga 2003; but see also Schloen 2001: 267-283). Though the views of both Pettinato and Astour seem largely outdated in light of recent research, their early efforts are still important to the study of Ebla’s political history. For instance, their emphasis on the toponymic repertory of the Ebla texts put into greater focus the relationship between historical geography and political expansion. Pettinato, moreover, was right to highlight the role of agro-pastoralism as a foundational component of Ebla’s economy, which has been discussed at length in recent syntheses of regional survey data from the Ebla *chora* and adjacent areas (e.g. Wilkinson et al. 2014). Astour, for his part, contributed much to the historical geography of the Ebla texts largely by drawing parallels between the toponymic repertories from Ebla and second millennium Alalakh.

Earlier characterizations of Ebla were plagued by misinterpretations of the textual evidence, which is understandable given the complexities of the Eblaite language and the nascent nature of its study. For example, the identification of several Eblaite toponyms with the biblical cities of the plain have been widely rejected following a fierce and often personal debate by Ebla’s two main epigraphers (Archi 1979; 1981; Pettinato 1976; 1980). As a result, the
geographical horizon of the texts—that is, the absolute territorial coverage of places mentioned in the archives—have been reduced but remain considerable. Likewise, the misidentification of Ebla’s viziers as kings demonstrates another hazard of hastily interpreting recently translated and still poorly understood textual sources. Still, despite these early difficulties, much progress has been made in recent years on the chronology of the Palace G archives, and this has permitted a more fine-grained reconstruction of its political history. Although this reconstruction favors a humbler view of ancient Ebla as a regional, hegemonic kingdom, we are still indebted to the early Ebla scholars whose insightful, if somewhat sensationalized, interpretations of the texts have helped to spark great interest in the political history of third millennium Syria.

Ebla’s rise and expansion echoes similar processes experienced by other early expansionist states, making it amenable to cross-cultural comparison. As territorial states expand, energy must be expended on consolidation and maintenance (D’Altroy 1992: 10). For example, as the Neo-Assyrian empire expanded westward across the Euphrates in the early first millennium, it constructed large, palatial-style complexes at places like Tell Tayinat in the Amuq Plain (Building IX), from which it could directly administer its periphery (Haines 1971: 61-63; Harrison and Osborne 2012: 128-129). Archaeologically, some of the most visible representations of consolidation can be seen in improvements to regional road systems and the appearance of administrative and storage facilities in the periphery (D’Altroy 1992: 10). Politically, subjugated polities often transition from client states run by local rulers to fully integrated extensions of the core polity managed by a superimposed bureaucracy. Economically, expansionist states often place restrictions on exchange, manage population movement, and rely heavily on corvée labor (D’Altroy 1992: 10). I contend that while Ebla was on a trajectory
towards imperialism, it struggled to achieve these necessary changes, precluding its expansion beyond a regional power west of the Euphrates.

Ebla did not expand into empty territory, but rather competed with other regional powers like Mari, Nagar, Akkad, and Armi for control over the major arteries connecting Southern Mesopotamia to the mineral-rich regions located further north. This land included the Euphrates and Balikh valleys, as well as parts of the Western Khabur, all of which were occupied by local populations with varying degrees of allegiance to the major regional powers. To maintain hegemony over these regions, Ebla would have needed to consolidate its territory in the same manner as other, more successful expansionist states both in the Near East and elsewhere. Rather than devote resources to imperial infrastructure and the direct administration of client states, the textual evidence implies that Ebla resorted mainly to more hegemonic strategies, placing much of the security needs of its periphery in the hands of autonomous or semi-autonomous rulers (Cooper 2010: 89-90). This is best exemplified by Ebla’s treaty with Abarsal, in which the latter kingdom remained independent, but was effectively subordinate to Ebla. The purpose of this treaty may have been to establish Abarsal as a buffer state between Ebla and Armi, and that by establishing Abarsal as an independent but subordinate polity, Ebla was able to secure its northeastern border without needing to establish a permanent military presence in that region. Even in cases where Ebla had a permanent bureaucratic presence—for example, at Alalah in the Amuq Plain, where the Eblaite Overseer (ugula) Ze-malik was installed—there is strong evidence to suggest that its hold over certain areas was tenuous at best, and certainly under constant threat of rebellion (Welton 2011: 18-19; Archi 2006: 4). I suggest that the lack of investment in the form of permanent military and administrative infrastructure along its periphery, coupled with the rise of more powerful expansionist states in Mesopotamia, ultimately led to Ebla’s rapid
decline. While Ebla was certainly in the process of establishing itself as a macro-regional power, it never realized this transition. Most important, there remains no direct archaeological evidence—whether in the form of military outposts, administrative complexes, or enclaves—of the Eblaite state at any of the peripheral settlements under its control.

The remainder of this chapter outlines the theoretical foundations that form the basis for the presentation of Ebla as an early expansionist state. Throughout the discussion of the domains of power, territoriality, borders and frontiers, and models of expansionist states, every attempt will be made to describe the relevant archaeological and historical correlates for studying these processes. However, the evidence for Ebla’s expansion and its effect in areas like the Amuq Plain are addressed in Chapter 7, which examines EB IV settlement patterns and the distribution of material culture more explicitly.

2 Power

The study of power relations has come into greater focus as archaeology has shifted away from the cultural evolutionary paradigm of Service (1962) and Fried (1967). Greater emphasis has been placed on agency and the interplay between individuals and the state (Stein 1998: 5). This interplay serves as the catalyst for development, as each interest group competes over power resources (Stein 1998: 6). Despite these advances, ambiguities continue to persist in discussions about power and its relationship to state formation in early complex societies.

For Weber (1964: 152), power was defined as “the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in the position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests.” Foucault (2000: 326-30) extends this notion of power to the state level, noting that power structures the relationships between agents by shaping their world-views. Power, in Foucault’s view, does not act directly on agents, but rather on their
actions. Thus, the role of power, as it pertains to burgeoning governmentality, and ultimately the rise of state level systems, is to structure the relationships between actors so that domination by one group is not resisted, but rather embraced by subordinate groups (Fleisher and Wynne-Jones 2010: 181). Smith argues that understanding the state requires studying the origins and development of political authority (2000: 131). Authority, in this case, is constituted through power and legitimacy (Fleisher and Wynne-Jones 2010: 184), which is supplied to the state by its non-ruling members. For Smith, the objective is to generate a population that not only tolerates state authority, but actively supports its propagation (Smith 2000: 132). Authority, therefore, is constituted by the people, and not imposed on them by the state’s leadership (Fleisher and Wynne-Jones 2010: 184).

2.1 Power Over, Power To, and Power With

Power can be expressed in a variety of ways. Miller and Tilley (1984: 3-5) define two types of power: power over, and power to. Power over represents a repressive form of power, or domination, whereas power to denotes an enabling or creative form of power. A third type of power, power with, was defined by Spencer-Wood (1999: 175). Power with is expressed as persuasion, inspiration, cooperation and collaboration. In other words, power with other people is a non-coercive form of power (Fleisher and Wynne-Jones 2010: 182). In studying expansionist states, it is important to consider these different types of power and how they impacted socio-political development.

This is especially true for Ebla in the third millennium, where examples of each of these three types of power are attested. For example, Ebla exercised power over its weaker rivals by removing local rulers and installing its own officials in their place. This was the case at Alalahu, Carchemish, and Tunip. On the other hand, Ebla exercised power to by offering land grants to
Tiša-Lim of Emar, ensuring that its Euphratean ally remained loyal to Ebla in the face of competing interests from Mari. Finally, Ebla exercised power with in the form of its strategic alliances with Nagar and Kiš during its major conflict with Mari. By providing these allies with significant gifts, and indeed by arranging diplomatic marriages, Ebla was able to secure powerful supporters for its campaign against its main rival. Importantly, Ebla never established political or economic superiority over either Nagar or Kiš, but it nevertheless was able to influence these states into achieving a mutual goal: the destruction of Mari.

2.2 Network-Based and Corporate-Based Power

Power over, power to and power with are related to the classes of power as identified by Stein (1998) and Feinman (1995). Stein identifies hierarchy and heterarchy as the two main modalities of power, with the former being concerned principally with elite strategies of acquiring and consolidating power, and its resulting inequalities (1998: 6). Feinman proposes two classes of power strategies: network-based and corporate-based (1995: 255-56). Network-based strategies are those founded on external links as a means of acquiring preciosities or other valuable commodities. Such strategies form the basis for prestige-goods economies in many chiefdoms. On the other hand, corporate-based strategies emphasize corporate factions or kin groups as the source for power. Growing factions equate to greater abilities to mobilize labor and resources (Stein 1998: 6). In studying power at Ebla, it is crucial to bear in mind this dichotomy between network- and corporate-based strategies, and how they are manifest as forms of power over, power to, and power with. Corporate-based power strategies at Ebla have been suggested previously by Schloen (2001: 267-283) through his invocation of the Patrimonial Household Model. This model sees a series of nested social and political hierarchies existing concurrently.

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7 Corporate-based strategies can lead to individualizing or group-oriented trajectories (Renfrew 1974: 69-70).
within a given society. These structures are then reinforced using familial, or more specifically patriarchal, language and concepts. Schloen (2001: 268-272) identifies correlates for these power dynamics in the land tenure systems suggested by the Ebla texts, though such nested systems are difficult to verify archaeologically. Importantly, Schloen does not deny the presence of more network-oriented strategies of power at Ebla, meaning that both forms of power could have been at play concurrently.

As for heterarchy, Stein is referring to “the relation of elements to one another when they are unranked or when they possess the potential for being ranked in a number of different ways” (1998: 7). Power relations in heterarchies are constantly fluctuating, as they serve to counterbalance hierarchical power relationships. Most important, heterarchies provide an impetus for internal change within a society and preclude the need for external elements to explain socio-political developments (Stein 1998: 7). Stein is essentially noting that both hierarchical and heterarchical principles pervade power relationships in early complex societies, and that we cannot study power without considering both its internal and external sources.

Whatever the degree to which a society exhibits heterarchical or hierarchical organization, power tends to be expressed according to a limited set of domains. Costin and Earle identify three strategies for maintaining social power in complex societies: the monopolization of force, finance, and legitimation (1989: 692). Monopolization of force is synonymous with military power, finance lies at the heart of economic power, and legitimation is rooted in ideological power. Mann (1986: 2-33) goes further in singling out political power as a distinct domain. Thus, the four domains of power are: 1) military, 2) political, 3) economic, and 4) ideological.
2.3 Top-Down and Bottom-Up Perspectives on Power

Archaeologically, there has been a dichotomy in the various approaches to power, where studies of “the state” have tended to focus on repressive or coercive notions of power from a top-down perspective. On the other hand, in post-processual archaeology, power is viewed as being rooted in social practice, and the focus has been on relationships between agents of disparate genders and classes. Attempts have been made to bridge this conceptual gap, namely by Kus (1989), who advocates implementing Foucault’s genealogical approach to state-level structures, and O’Donavan (2002) who argues for studies of power that focus on the processes of legitimization at all levels of a society (Fleisher and Wynne-Jones 2010: 182). But the relationship between power and material culture has remained murky at best. Morrison and Lycett note, “the relationship between archaeological patterns that may reflect centralized elite control and the actual dimensions of control is neither simple nor unambiguous” (1994: 328). Archaeological approaches to power have frequently treated it as a commodity that could be controlled and manipulated like any other resource (Fleisher and Wynne-Jones 2010: 181).

Coercive power tends to generate opposition and resistance in many societies. A more effective route to authority is perhaps found in shared ritual practices and through the forging of political alliances (Fleisher and Wynne-Jones 2010: 185). The problem with non-coercive forms of power, whether political, economic or ideological, is that they may be limited in terms of their archaeological visibility, and therefore hard to assess in cases where documentary sources are lacking. Fortunately, the Palace G archives combine with the archaeological record of third millennium Syro-Anatolia to present us with a robust data set from which we can evaluate the roles and expressions of power as Ebla’s influence expanded in the Amuq, the Middle Euphrates, and elsewhere.
2.4 Military Power

For D’Altroy, military power represents “the capacity to elicit a desired response through a combination of force and diplomatic persuasion” (1992: 12). Luttwak (1976: 195-200) identifies the utility of military force in the form of coercive persuasion, but he notes that in such cases power of this sort is not truly of a military, but rather a political nature, and further that the threat of force is a tactical and not strategic deployment of power. Power, according to Luttwak is at least partly dependent on its perception by the populace. Power has to be recognized, and this can be accomplished through political relations and propaganda. Ultimately, however, the true power of a state is rooted in its ability to deploy military force.

D’Altroy prefers a characterization of power that sees it as developing through time, arguing that while military power may be most important in the initial stages of an expansionist state’s evolution, it is contingent in the long-term on the implementation of political and economic forms of power that complement the use of direct coercive strategies (D’Altroy 1992: 13). According to Costin and Earle (1989: 692), military force constitutes the main source of political control, but its accompanying costs require that additional forms of power must be introduced to establish long-term stability. Mainly, these complementary strategies are executed as economic and ideological power.

2.5 Political Power

Political power entails the ability of one entity to dominate “processes of management, consent, judging, and decision-making” (D’Altroy 1992: 11; after Service 1975: 12). The range of political activities varies according to the complexity of a given society. State societies usually contain hierarchically organized positions or ranks, each with specialized roles. Less complex societies, like chiefdoms, often have fewer differentiated offices, with power being vested in a
smaller number of individuals. As a result, in early expansionist states, political power was highly variable between ruling and non-ruling groups, as well as between non-ruling groups themselves (D’Altroy 1992: 11).

According to Urban et al. (2002: 132), political centralization is “the extent to which power, defined as the ability to direct the actions of others, is differentially distributed across factions within a social unit larger than the domestic group.” Thus, political centralization is linked with the ability to mobilize resources, which in turn may be measured archaeologically by the occurrence of monumental architecture, especially large administrative or religion buildings, palaces, and fortifications and earthworks (Urban et al. 2002: 132).

Political power in expansionist states gradually shifts from the periphery to the core as local leaders are replaced by core administrators, meaning that power becomes distributed from the center outwards in a top-down arrangement. The effect is that subordinate polities are restricted in their ability to freely interact with each other, as decision-making and succession issues become the purview of the core, and not of the local elites. Since subordinate polities vary in terms of size, complexity and socio-political organization, core political power strategies must remain adaptable, and approaches to provincial management must be tailored to each individual polity (D’Altroy 1992: 11). As expansionist states grow, the costs of governance increase accordingly, and therefore it should be expected that a degree of experimentation was in place, whereby the core polity expanded existing offices or conflated positions of provincial administration to consolidate power in a cost-effective manner (D’Altroy 1992: 11).

Polities can have different degrees of boundedness, ranging from open with high levels of access, to closed with limited transference of ideas and goods. Archaeologically, such boundedness can be measured by observing the frequency and influence of imported object and
styles. Tightly bounded polities will exhibit restricted economic exchange, resulting in localized material culture with limited external influence. On the other hand, unbounded entities have fewer restrictions on cross-border exchange, meaning certain material culture can have a much wider distribution (Urban et al. 2002: 132). Political power can strongly impact the degree of boundedness in a given polity.

2.6 Economic Power

According to D’Altroy (1992: 11), “economic power derives from control over access to natural resources, materially productive labor, goods, and services.” Most studies of economic power in early state societies have focused on the relative significance of controlling the production and distribution of either staples (Fried 1967; Price 1982; Mann 1986) or sumptuary goods (e.g., Schwartz 1994). Studies of imperial economics tend to emphasize elite-elite interaction, perhaps mainly due to the overrepresentation of inter-polity exchange in documentary sources.

Studies of political economies are largely concerned with the integration of the production of goods at levels beyond that of the household (e.g., Johnson and Earle 1987). In the context of expansionist states, the political economy of such studies can be divided into two categories. The first concerns the collection of tribute or other forms of payment needed to provide subsistence for administration, religious and military institutions. That is, the political economies of those states are organized toward sustaining their elites and the other non-food producers of the state. The second category emphasizes the production and distribution of sumptuary goods that are important to inter-polity exchange between elites, as well as ceremonial activities (D’Altroy 1992: 12). Studies of political economy most frequently adopt a core-centric perspective, such that discussions of the periphery are concerned mainly with local transformations resulting from core influences. However, D’Altroy (1992: 12) points out that it
is important to consider the continuities of local political economies in the face of political and economic domination, and to evaluate changes in production in the periphery on its own terms.

For Costin and Earle (1989: 692), the pathway to political power is through control over finance. In early complex societies, control over staple storage and distribution is key, but in state societies this extends to the control of attached specialists and the production and circulation of preciosities. In turn, control over economic exchange helps to legitimize elites.

In contrast to political economy, the domestic economy concerns production at the household level. In subject polities, it is anticipated that the domestic economy would be less impacted by external influences than would the political economy of a subdued polity. Domestic economies form the ultimate foundation of state economics, and therefore expansionist states sought to avoid disrupting production at this level as much as possible (D’Altroy 1992: 12). Despite this, some transitions in the domestic economy of subject polities should be anticipated. For example, changes in access to resources or tributary demands may have resulted in the intensification of production in some areas, but the abandonment of certain industries in others. This could result in shifts in settlement patterns. Conversely, expansionist states can also provide greater regional security, permitting new avenues for exchange in an otherwise inhospitable periphery (D’Altroy 1992: 12).

In discussing the rise of complexity in Mesoamerica, Urban et al. (2002: 132) note the important role that heterogeneity can play in such developments. Social heterogeneity entails the “degree to which populations are divided into interest groups by any number of factors” (Urban et al. 2002: 132). One such factor can be distinctions in wealth and occupation, which can be measured archaeologically by documenting the distribution of preciosities and the facilities associated with their manufacturers (Urban et al. 2002: 132). In the case of Ebla and its
periphery, we can investigate its political economy by observing changes in specialist production over time. These changes should be expected to vary based on local access to important resources. In the Amuq Plain, for example, the Amanus Mountains may have provided inner Syria with access to timber resources, while the plain itself provided fertile land for agricultural production. The flanking foothills could also have been exploited for different cultivars like grape and olive (Casana 2003: 54-55). In general, however, the settlement system in the Amuq implies a strongly agrarian base to the local economy. On the other hand, to the south and east of Ebla were the more arid steppe regions, which historically have been occupied mostly by pastoralists whose primary economic contribution has centered on wool production. It is important to consider the changes to these local industries in relation to the flow of preciosities into and out of the core polity centered at Ebla, and to determine the degree to which the former served as a catalyst for such changes.

Economic power can be exercised as the exaction of tribute from subdued polities. Tribute can in turn be used to support specialist producers, and the resulting manufactured goods can be gifted to subordinate polities as a means of garner further support, and thus ensuring a constant supply of tribute. Similarly, polities can establish boundaries in an effort to acquire exclusive access to certain resources and labor. Such boundaries serve not only to protect important resources for local production, but they also limit access to resources by a polity’s competitors. In expansionist states, a core polity might also place limitations on inter-polity exchange in an effort to safeguard access to important resources (Urban et al. 2002: 133).

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8 However, see Batiuk and Harrison 2017 for a discussion of the role of metal production in the Amuq Plain during the third millennium BCE.
2.7 Ideological Power

Ideological power is largely associated with the need for elites to legitimize their rule. This is accomplished in three ways. First, a group needs to establish a legal and divine foundation for domination. Second, power must be consolidated in a centralized institution, office or individual in order to impede the development of competing local groups. And third, elites must provide benevolent acts and manage the dissemination of propaganda to help shape the expectations and desires of the non-ruling population (Costin and Earle 1989: 692).

Ideological power is strongly linked to what is often referred to as social power, which denotes “the capacity to control and manage the labor and activities of a group to gain access to the benefits of social action” (DeMarrais et al. 1996: 15). One of the means of corralling social power is through the spread of ideology. Ideology is manifest through material things and symbols, and like other forms of power, the cost and effectiveness of ideology is largely dependent on its strategic deployment (DeMarrais et al. 1996: 16).

Symbols are rooted in material objects like icons, monuments and texts, which have patterned distributions that can be examined archaeologically. This provides us with a glimpse into how ideology, and by extension social power, is deployed through space and time. The concretization of symbols into material objects is what allows ideology to spread from the core to the periphery (DeMarrais et al. 1996: 16). Through materialization, ideology can shape individual beliefs, and collectively this can impact behavior of the whole group. In the context of an expansionist state, this is “a strategic process in which leaders allocate resources to strengthen and legitimate institutions of elite control” (DeMarrais et al. 1996: 16).

Ideology functions as a form of power in that its materialization requires the mobilization of raw materials and labor, and therefore control over the resources needed to execute
materialization is paramount. Elites that control raw materials and labor needed to create monuments and symbols will inevitably have an advantage at spreading ideology compared to competing groups that lack such abilities. In this sense, ideology is similar to any other resource (DeMarrais et al. 1996: 17).

The materialization of ideology can take many forms, including ceremonial events, symbolic object and icons, public monuments and landscapes, and most explicitly in the form of writing (DeMarrais et al. 1996: 17-190). These forms are quite varied, as they depend on a given polity’s ability to mobilize resources and labor. Ceremonial events are transitory, meaning that they need to be consistently repeated in order to be effective. That results in a constant need for investment of resources, often in the form of foodstuffs used in ceremonial feasts, but it can also include other perishable or consumable resources. Ceremonial events are especially useful for negotiating power relationships between elites from disparate polities, but also among different social groups within a polity. Moreover, such events are useful for purposes of enculturation of incorporated populations (DeMarrais et al. 1996: 17).

Symbolic objects and icons include items used in rituals and performances, such as specialized garments, but also paintings and emblems of any form. Symbolic objects make effective gifts as part of cross-polity exchange. As gifts, these items can in part signify relations of dependency, or they may simply indicate correspondence. In the former case, gifts exchanged between polities can be used to generate loyalties. Symbolic objects can be used similarly within a polity, where their exchange is used to solidify both vertical and horizontal relationships between and among different social groups. An important attribute of symbolic objects and icons is that they function much in the same way as prestige goods, and therefore their value can be manipulated by controlling their circulation and production (DeMarrais et al. 1996: 18).
Public monuments are perhaps the most recognizable form of materialized ideology. These include pyramids and mounds, palaces, large ceremonial and administrative buildings, and fortifications. These tend to be long-lasting structures that can be constructed relatively rapidly, or in some cases over multiple generations. Importantly, public monuments are effective at communicating across linguistic and ethnic boundaries, and they serve as a means of spreading propaganda to disparate areas. In this vein, Morrison and Lycett (1994: 327) argue that such remains could merely have functioned as claims of authority or control, meaning that elite monuments were tools of manipulation. While public monuments—especially ceremonial and administrative buildings—tend to be built first in the core polity, landscape monuments are sometimes employed in the periphery, along the boundaries of a territorial state (DeMarrais et al. 1996: 18-19).

3 Territoriality

The problem with expansionists states is that they are assumed to derive power from their control over a continuous and well-defined territory marked by clear borders (Osborne 2013: 774). Concerning the Syro-Anatolian city-states of the Iron Age, Osborne notes that “in contrast to the generally assumed model of evenly distributed territorial authority, power was expressed and experienced as a patchy and highly variegated phenomenon across the landscape” (Osborne 2013: 775). Osborne dubs this phenomenon “malleable territoriality” (2013: 775). I apply a similar approach to understanding territoriality in the case of Ebla’s rise to prominence as an expansionist state in third millennium Syro-Anatolia. In this case, Ebla engaged with polities of varying degrees of autonomy, ranging from fully subdued client-states (e.g., Alalahu, Carchemish, Tunip) to semi-autonomous states (e.g., Burman, Ra’aqq, NRrar), to fully independent allied states (e.g., Nagar, Kiš). Semi-autonomous states are identified as such
because they are listed in the Ebla texts as being “in the hand of the king [of Ebla]” while simultaneously retaining their own local kings. Independent allies, on the other hand, are never listed as having been “in the hand of the king” (Cooper 2010: 88-90). Significantly, these kingdoms are not neatly organized along Ebla’s periphery, but rather form a patchwork of states with differing degrees of loyalty to Ebla scattered across the landscape. Certainly, there were some cities that were tactically important to Ebla’s protection, such as Abarsal in the northeast and Emar to the east. These kingdoms provided the necessary buffers between Ebla and its rivals Armi and Mari. However, there is no indication that the territory between these kingdoms was ever fully controlled by Ebla. This does not give the impression that Ebla was a perfectly bounded polity, but instead that it was a regional state with a highly porous periphery that would have been difficult to consolidate, especially in the face of competition from other regional powers.

In fact, boundedness is not a fundamental feature of expansionist states. Factors like topography and communication and transportation technologies all place limitations on a society’s ability to seal its boundaries. This is especially true for expansionist polities located in rugged areas with foot travel as the primary means of transportation (Urban et al. 2002: 133). Ingold (1986: 130-131) sees territorial behavior as a form of communication, as opposed to land tenure, which Mantha calls “a mode of appropriation, by which persons exert claims over resources dispersed in space” (2009: 159). On the other hand, Sack (1986: 1-3) defines territoriality as a method of asserting control over a geographic region in an attempt by a group or groups to manage and influence people and relationships. For Mantha (2009: 159), territoriality entails the demarcation of a geographic area, controlling access into and out of this area, and communicating control over an area through the use of walls, roads or monuments.
3.1 Territory, Terrain and Land

Territory and space are not synonymous. Territory is a form of political technology involving an actor or actors who “territorialize” space, meaning that territory is generated by people while space exists independently from human society (Elden 2010: 801). Soja notes that while all societies are inherently spatial, this does not equate to all societies being territorial (1971: 16). The political organization of space ("territorializing") serves to create and maintain solidarity in a society through shaping processes of competition, conflict and cooperation (Elden 2010: 803).

Studies of territoriality in early state societies are sometimes hindered by confusing terminology. Elden (2010: 803) considers land, terrain and territory to be key to the discussion of the spatial dimensions of early states. Land is viewed as a unit of property that can be owned and distributed like any other resource, and it therefore falls under the purview of politics and economics. Terrain, on the other hand, relates specifically to power. Terrain represents the tangible arena where work or battle can take place, and it is rooted in military activity. This relationship to elements of power and authority render it important to the question of political and strategic significance. Finally, territory is defined as a combination of both land and terrain, though Elden argues that it is more than the sum of these two concepts. Territory should be approached independently of territoriality, and on its own terms in relation to both land and terrain (Elden 2010: 804).

Greene and Lindsay (2013: 55) espouse similar views about territoriality, arguing that it must not be assumed that polities are territorially bounded, governing uniformly sovereign spaces. Moreover, territoriality should not be assumed as the objective of emergent leaders. Establishing boundaries was not necessarily a goal in and of itself in nascent expansionist states (Greene and Lindsay 2013: 55). At the same time, they reject ecological conceptions of
territoriality (such as Chabot-Hanowell and Smith 2013, but also Binford 1982, and Dyson-Hudson and Smith 1978).

3.2 Territoriality, Sovereignty and Economic Defensibility

According to Van Valkenburgh and Osborne (2013: 11-12; Osborne 2013: 776), problems with studying territoriality in the ancient Near East arise due to an overreliance on a Westphalian understanding of sovereignty, wherein neighboring states are assumed to control clearly demarcated areas in which sovereignty is evenly distributed. This is known as Agnew’s “territorial trap” (1994: 53-54), which sees the conceptual bundling of sovereignty and territory, as political power is assumed to be uniformly spread out within a bounded container, or state. However, there are more appropriate means of approaching territoriality in early state societies that see spatiality of state authority as a historically contingent emergent phenomenon (Osborne 2013: 776). For example, network models have become increasingly popular in recent years as a means of exploring territoriality and state formation (Campbell 2009, Keightly 1983, Liverani 1988, Parker 2001, Smith 2005, 2007; Tomaszewski and Smith 2011), as have reinterpretations of older, ecological paradigms that are largely rooted in more processual approaches to territoriality.

For example, territoriality can also be viewed through the lens of evolutionary ecology. Chabot-Hanowell and Smith (2013: 72) see ecological approaches as complementary to models promoting social agency and historicist perspectives of social behavior. They contend that ecological models of territoriality can be distilled down to the principle of economic defensibility and the potential for collective action between groups (Chabot-Hanowell and Smith 2013: 72). Economic defensibility in ecological models of territoriality implies that natural selection favors defending territories and resources only if the potential benefits exceed the costs of such action.
Factors influencing economic defensibility include resource density and predictability. Dense resources are more favorable because they are concentrated in a smaller, and therefore easier to defend territory. Likewise, predictable resources are preferred because they are easier to locate and the resulting benefits of their exploitation are more reliable (Chabot-Hanowell and Smith 2013: 73-75). Dyson-Hudson and Smith (1978) point out, however, that not all resources are necessarily amenable to territorial strategies, and as a result it is imperative to consider the resources in question and to assess the degree to which they could be defended or controlled, even if the will to defend them was present. For example, the exploitation of wool and textile production in the third millennium relied heavily on the pastoralist populations living outside of the urban system, and therefore may have been more difficult to defend directly.

Economic defensibility can help to explain variegated territorial strategies and their resulting impact on social systems. Chabot-Hanowell and Smith (2013:77) explore this idea by examining resource density and predictability in the Pacific Northwest. They note that salmon were both dense and highly predictable on the coast, whereas resources in the interior were more diffuse and less predictable. This led to differing strategies of territoriality in the two regions. On the coast, there was greater linguistic diversity and fragmentation of socio-political groups. In the interior, communal access rights to hunting grounds were necessary, and this led to less linguistic diversity and fragmentation. In other words, the density and predictability of resources dramatically impacted the social systems in place in both areas. The authors note a similar scenario in the Great Basin of North America, where groups like the Shoshone and Paiute displayed considerably less territorial behavior than those in areas of greater resource density and predictability. Chabot-Hanowell and Smith argue that areas with steep gradients in resource density and predictability in relatively short geographical spans, like fertile river valleys in
otherwise arid environments, can significantly contribute to greater social stratification (2013: 77).

Economic defensibility can also vary over time, depending on factors like climate and environment, but also technology, demographics and politics. Moreover, territorial behavior can emphasize certain resources, but not others. This might help explain evidence for malleable territoriality in Syro-Anatolia. A focus on controlling trade routes might have encouraged territorial behavior in the Euphrates by Ebla, but not in the steppe or more fertile valleys where resource density and predictability might have been too low to warrant more territorial strategies.

Territorial strategies rooted in economic defensibility invoke the further complication of collective action problems. These are situations when an increasing number of cooperators in a group benefits the group as a whole, but individual members of the group would be better off acting individually. With regards to territorial defense, collective action problems manifest in two ways. First, it is impossible for an individual group (or polity) to defend a territory without cooperation of other groups. And second, the costs of losing territory are not sufficient to an individual group (or polity) to deter other member groups from eluding (Chabot-Hanowell and Smith 2013: 77).

Economic defensibility “always has a geographic, thus territorial dimension” (Chabot-Hanowell and Smith 2013: 80), but there is no reason to assume that this be expressed as a uniform distribution of sovereignty over an area. Parker (2014: 284) defines “islands of territorial control” that recalls a form of malleable, or permeable territoriality as defined by Osborne (2013: 775).
4 Borders and Frontiers

The study of borders and frontiers was initially tied to the anthropological investigation of acculturation and the formation of core-periphery systems (Parker 2002: 371). Since the 1970s, however, frontier studies have been dominated by colonialist perspectives emphasizing core-periphery relationships. The result has been that discussions of frontiers and borderlands have tended to focus on territorial advancement and boundary maintenance, and the assumption that colonial populations were largely homogenous (Lightfoot and Martinez 1995: 472). Frontiers are seen as the product of core expansion into the periphery, which serves as a buffer between polities, and a source for surplus goods and resources that can be exploited to the benefit of the core. In colonialist perspectives, boundaries are meant to segregate homogenous core populations from local groups, in addition to functioning as semi-permeable barriers that moderate social interaction, filter information and economic exchange, and limit population movement according to the core polity’s desires (Lightfoot and Martinez 1995: 472-473).

Parker lists five primary foci of frontier studies: 1) derive the basic terminology needed to generate a classification system for frontiers; 2) classify the various frontier situations; 3) describe frontier dynamics in terms mechanisms and processes; 4) assess the role that frontiers play in core-periphery systems; and 5) construct models and conduct comparative analyses of frontier situations, while aiming to define the broader themes associated with frontiers and their formation (Parker 2002: 372).

4.1 Boundaries, Borders and Frontiers

Parker distinguishes between “boundaries,” “borders,” and “frontiers” (2002: 373). Boundaries are viewed as the divide between geographic, political or cultural entities, while borders are understood as clearly demarcated dividing lines between political or administrative units. The
latter tend to be fixed in space. Frontiers, on the other hand, are transitional zones between political, administrative or cultural entities, but they can also present at the edge of a polity’s hinterland. In other words, frontiers can be located between polities, but direct physical contact with another polity is not necessary (Parker 2002: 373).

According to Steffan (1980), there are different types of frontiers. Insular frontiers are economically diverse, often with agrarian-based settlement systems driven by endogenous developments. Cosmopolitan frontiers are more specialized, characterized by implanted colonial elements that are shorter-term, and often exhibit directly the features of the core polity in terms of their social organization and material culture. These are best exemplified by trade outposts, mining communities, and similar installations (Lightfoot and Martinez 1995: 473). The problem with colonialist models is that they ignore the importance of colonial-indigenous interaction in cultural transformation. Such understandings demote frontiers to passive recipients when it is more likely the case that they serve as arenas for creativity, innovation and identity formation. Unlike traditional approaches to core-periphery interaction (e.g., Hudson 1969), colonizers rarely, if ever, settled in a vacuum. Rather than displacing indigenous elements, colonization processes were more frequently characterized by episodes of integration and mutual exchange in a wide variety of domains. This exchange drives social and cultural innovation. In short, colonizers alone were not solely responsible for developments in the frontier, and it is important not to marginalize indigenous elements (Lightfoot and Martinez 1995: 475).

One of the classic core-periphery models is Wallerstein’s (1974) world-system, which provides numerous insights into the dynamics of expansionist states. However, his model privileges the core in core-periphery interaction at the expense of local interactions, seeing influence as unidirectional. Wolf (1994: 1-7) has criticized world-systems theory as perpetuating
top-down perspectives to understanding culture change, demoting the frontier to the role of
passive recipient and subordinate to transformations originating from the core polity. Schortman
and Urban (1994: 403-404) contend that peripheries can play an active role in interregional
processes and culture change, though they acknowledge that peripheral elites commonly relied
on links to the core polity in order to legitimize power relations in the frontier. In short,
traditional models like those proposed by Hudson and Wallerstein adhere to insular views of
socio-political development, downplaying the role of frontiers and borderlands as active zones of
interaction and culture change (Lightfoot and Martinez 1995: 474).

For Naum (2010: 101), borderlands and frontiers are synonymous, both terms denoting
ambiguous landscapes. Borderlands retain an inherently geographical component, representing
the territorial limits of a polity or settlement, but it is important to recognize that borderlands are
also politically, socially and ideologically charged places (Naum 2010: 102). Frontiers are thus
dynamic places that can sometimes emerge as distinct political entities, while at other times
hostilities and other factors can reduce them to simple borders, or artificial lines diving polities.
Frontiers can therefore develop as “fragmented landscapes, distinguished by fluidity in social
and cultural sphere and by the multiple loyalties and identities of their inhabitants” (Naum 2010:
102). Archaeologically, such fragmentation and hostility in frontier areas might be measured by
the presence or absence of heavy fortifications. In the case Ebla, therefore, it may be fruitful to
look at evidence for fragmentation along the periphery of its territory, which includes not only
the Amuq Plain in the west, but also the ever-important Euphrates to the east.

4.2 “Third Space” and the Dynamic Nature of Frontiers

Frontier studies have developed along two distinct trajectories in North America and Europe. In
the United States, frontier studies emerged in the 1920s following Turner’s (1996[1920]) seminal
work on the American frontier. In European archaeology, frontier studies have largely been focused on the Romans to the exclusion of most other areas and periods. In both areas, work on frontiers has been mainly the purview of the historian, leading to an overemphasis on political and military aspects, as well as a decidedly top-down or elite perspective (Naum 2010: 103). Ultimately, two notions of the frontier have emerged from these early studies. First, in the American context, the frontier came to be associated with the westward expansion of colonists, and the edge of the territory dominated by European settlers. In Europe, on the other hand, the frontier came to be understood as the negotiated area between polities. Frontiers, or borderlands, are therefore characterized as a form of “in-between” space (Naum 2010: 102-103).

Naum also describes frontiers and borderlands as an example of “Third Space,” which he defines as “a space of hybridity, a realm of inventions and conventions, initiated and maintained by day-to-day situations and encounters” (2010: 106; after Bhabha 1996). Frontiers produce new political objects that are unique and necessary for culture change, yet remain somewhat ambiguous and difficult to characterize. This is partly due to their constant state of flux. Frontiers are inherently unstable places where negotiations among groups are most concentrated, and where identities are constantly being reshaped and invented (Naum 2010: 106-107). Cusick sees borderlands as promoting creolization, and as loci where new “cultural grammars” are adapted from a variety of contributing elements (2000: 46-47). Frontiers and their in-betweenness are important shifting landscapes amid disparate politically and culturally charged entities, but it is this very hybridity and ambiguity that contributes to these areas being major catalysts of change, and makes frontiers and borderlands prime loci for archaeological and historical investigations into the process underlying state formation and the expansion of early territorial states (Naum 2010: 126).
For Lightfoot and Martinez, frontiers are socially charged places and zones of cultural interfaces characterized by multiple overlapping social units whose interactions help to reshape and redefine identities that are more than the sum of their parts (1995: 472; Glatz and Matthews 2005: 49). Major issues associated with the study of frontiers from an archaeological perspective are that they are assumed to be passive recipients of influence from core polities, they are often studied at a macro level of analysis that overemphasizes top-down perspectives, and they are assumed to be archaeologically visible on the ground, mainly in the form of clear-cut breaks in the distribution of material culture (Lightfoot and Martinez 1995: 472).

4.3 Detecting Frontiers Archaeologically

Borders and borderlands are not necessarily easy to detect archaeologically. From a colonial perspective, frontiers are boundaries segregating colonial and local elements, and they provide a visible line of defense from competing groups (Lightfoot and Martinez 1995: 478). Hudson’s (1969) location model\(^9\) implies observable shifts in settlement systems in the periphery as a result of core policies, while Lewis’ (1984) “colonization gradient” model\(^10\) describes how the core sociocultural system is distributed into the hinterlands through replication and the extension of core features, which is especially prominent in agrarian societies (1984: 12-14). Even in cases where borders between polities were clearly demarcated in antiquity, it may not be that these features are visible archaeologically. Moreover, the spatial distribution of material culture may not exhibit clear-cut boundaries in frontier contexts, but rather present increasingly fuzzy

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\(^9\) Drawing on studies of plant ecology, the location model proposes that three processes form the basis for frontier development: colonization, spread and conflict. Colonization marks the initial spread of a population beyond a core territory. Spread implies an increase in settlement density. Conflict relates to competition over resources, leading to a regularization of spacing between settlements along the frontier (Hudson 1969: 365)

\(^10\) The colonization gradient model is similar to Hudson’s location model in that it postulates the regular and repeating pattern of rural settlements along frontiers. However, Lewis also notes that as the frontier expands, the former frontier settlements tend to become more strongly integrated with the core polity, meaning that there is a gradient of integration stemming from the core outward to the periphery (Lewis 1984).
margins at the junctions between social and political entities (Lightfoot and Martinez 1995: 479).

A further complication is that frontiers changed over time, and therefore they must be approached diachronically by looking at the pre-conquest, conquest and post-conquest impacts of state expansion on frontier formation (Wells 2005: 50).

Material culture can be used to transmit information about group identity, and this can be extended to larger social and political units, such as the state. For Wobst (1977), such artifacts serve to mark group boundaries and transmit information in a uniform and clearly understandable way. Further, Wiessner (1983: 253-254) suggests that signaling artifacts associated with group identity should be measurable archaeologically, and present discrete distribution patterns. Likewise, Trinkaus states that boundaries should be clearly demarcated by state iconography in the form of artifacts and architectural features serving as official symbols (1984: 35). Lightfoot and Martinez disagree, however, arguing that while neat clusters of emblematic artifacts can appear, they often do not, and in cases where clear distribution boundaries are noted we must be mindful of the possibility of local imitation, along with other potentially conflating issues concerning artifact life histories (Lightfoot and Martinez 1995: 480).

In short, our understanding of borderlands and frontiers has graduated from their being seen as inert places demarcating a polity’s territorial borders to active, creative spaces “pregnant with cultural meaning” (Bunimovitz and Lederman 2009: 119). Archaeologically, we should expect to see evidence for innovation and experimentation, and perhaps even the hybridization of other, well-known aspects of material culture. In the case of Ebla’s frontier, therefore, we should not anticipate clearly marked borders dotted with fortresses and watchtowers, but rather overlapping spheres of influence marked by a complex mix of cultural elements, especially ideologically charged items. For example, ceramic distributions may indicate high degrees of
overlap in frontier areas, and this should be contrasted with the distribution of preciosities and prestige goods.

5 Models

5.1 An Overview of Core-Periphery Models

Stein argues that terms like core, periphery and acculturation are outdated, and marred by colonial undertones (2002: 904), but these concepts still have merit. Core-periphery models often espouse an unidirectional flow of influence, resulting in the marginalization of the role that peripheries play not only in their own development, but that of the core-periphery system. Despite these limitations, several core-periphery models have contributed significantly to our understanding of early expansionist states. The two most common models adhering to this approach are the world-systems model and the acculturation model (Stein 2002: 904).

Santley and Alexander identify three types of interregional systems, which they dub: 1) the dendritic political economy; 2) the hegemonic empire; and 3) the territorial empire (1992: 24).\footnote{These types of political economies were previously defined by Hassig (1985), Smith (1976), and Luttwak (1976), and are categorized by Eisenstadt at “historical bureaucratic societies” (1963).} Dendritic political economies are characterized by primate systems consisting of a single, large center to which resources are funneled. Secondary centers are collection points for goods produced in the periphery, but these are still just bulking centers that remain wholly subsidiary to the main center. Typically, primate centers are strategically located near transport routes or nearby important resources, providing them with a distinct advantage over the settlements that form the rest of the system. Production of specialized goods generally takes place in the main center, which also controls their export to places outside of its direct political sphere of control.
In short, dendritic political economies are defined by their primary urban center and its elites who maintained a monopoly on production and exchange (Santley and Alexander 1992: 26-27).

Hegemonic empires consist of a series of nested dendritic systems. The core state dominates a large periphery, which is responsible for maintaining a constant flow of commodities, especially raw materials and staples, to the core in exchange for manufactured goods (Hassig 1985; Luttwak 1976). This empire is mainly achieved through conquest, and the threat of military action is used to maintain the whole system. However, as a hegemonic empire, there is little reliance on standing armies in the periphery, and generally the investment in infrastructure beyond the core is minimal (Santley and Alexander 1992: 27). While there appears to be a flow of goods between core and periphery—raw materials from the periphery to the core, and manufactured goods from the core to the periphery—it is important to highlight that this system of exchange is dominated and controlled by the core (Santley and Alexander 1992: 28).

Territorial and hegemonic empires share many features, but in the former’s case, greater emphasis is placed on exercising coercive force on the periphery. This is achieved through maintaining large provincial bureaucracies buttressed by permanent military installations and personnel. Further, core centers tend to be more commercialized in territorial empires than in hegemonic systems, which generally have less developed market and remunerative elements (Santley and Alexander 1992: 29-30).

In short, Santley and Alexander identify three types of core-periphery systems, each with increasing levels of integration. Dendritic political economies consist of a core that dominates its periphery economically, but not politically. Hegemonic empires consist of politically incorporated peripheries that funnel resources to the core, but the core invests only minimally in provincial bureaucracy and military intervention. Finally, territorial empires entail greater
integration, with the core maintaining political and economic control over the periphery through coercive force, while at the same time providing services to the periphery (Santley and Alexander 1992: 31).

5.2 World-Systems, Colonization and Acculturation

Interregional interaction can take many forms, including trade and exchange, emulation of material culture styles, colonization, and even conquest (Stein 2014: 55). Stein’s main argument is that interregional interaction in the late prehistoric and early historic period societies of the Near East is best approached from the perspective of non-hierarchical models (2014: 55). Hierarchical models include world-systems and colonialism, which according to Stein tend to assume asymmetrical relationships between cores and peripheries (Stein 2014: 55). However, it is perhaps too extreme to dismiss core-periphery models outright. Core-periphery models can be useful for evaluating the dynamics of expansionist states, though Stein is justified in suggesting that hierarchical relationships should not be assumed a priori.

World-systems theory is rooted in the idea that well-developed and densely populated cores dominated less socio-politically complex and sparsely populated peripheries. Wallerstein (1974) developed world-systems theory in the 1970s as part of a study tracking the rise of capitalism in the sixteenth century. Since then, numerous historians and archaeologists have adapted the theory and applied it to the study of ancient societies throughout the world. Santley and Alexander recognize world-systems as merely a subtype of core-periphery systems comprising a series of dendritically organized entities (1992: 23-24).

According to Santley and Alexander (1992: 24), world-systems include simple cases involving a single core controlling a periphery, as well as more complex arrangements where multiple cores compete for control over various peripheries. Moreover, the degree of control of
the core over the periphery can vary. Expansion in world-systems was driven by a need to acquire resources, especially preciosities, whose collection and manufacture were under the control of the elite (Santley and Alexander 1992: 23). In contrast, Wallerstein (1974: 41) considers the acquisition and control of staples as the underlying force behind expansion and downplays the role of preciosities. Transportation technology directly impacted the types of resources that could be moved through a system; in societies reliant on human power alone, the resulting core-periphery system would be correspondingly smaller than one reliant on wheeled vehicles or sea- and river-based transport on ships (Santley and Alexander 1992: 25). Preciosities have the advantage of being more transportable and hardy than the typically bulky and perishable staples that form the basis of agrarian states, and therefore it is important to recognize the significant role that the control over the movement of these types of goods played in larger core-periphery systems.

Santley and Alexander note that transportation systems needed to be efficient enough to warrant investment by the core polity in controlling the movement of luxury goods (1992: 25). Moreover, they connect the desire to acquire preciosities from the periphery to the changing economic conditions in the core polity, where specialization tends to graduate towards a greater emphasis on secondary product manufacture (Santley and Alexander 1992: 25). Sinopoli recognizes the central role that technology plays in the development of world-systems, but further notes that it was peripheries’ access to numerous cores that ultimately contributed to the development of such systems in the first place (Sinopoli 1994: 161).

Stein identifies three main assumptions at the base of world-systems models. These include: 1) core dominance; 2) an asymmetric exchange system controlled by the core polity; and 3) a periphery that is structured according to the effects of long-distance interaction (Stein 2002:
Thus, in many applications of world-systems thinking to ancient societies, the periphery is relegated to the role of passive recipient. This is not always the case, as some studies have adopted a more flexible interpretation of the world-systems model, but Stein argues that these attempts have resulted in an ill-defined theory lacking in the analytical power of the original model (Stein 2002: 904).

The world-system has become the classic formulation of the core-periphery model. Chase-Dunn and Hall describe world-systems as “intersocietal networks in which interaction […] is an important condition of the reproduction of the internal structures of the composite units” (1991: 7). Its main tenets are that cores dominate their peripheries economically, controlling an asymmetric system of exchange, and that the political economies of peripheries are bound to the effects of long-distance trade (Stein 2014: 55). Stein is critical of world-systems theory mainly because it marginalizes the role that peripheries play in such dynamic economic and political arrangements (2014: 55).

Similar to the world-systems model, the concept of acculturation sees the periphery as a passive recipient to the more power and advanced core. Over time the periphery adopts the cultural elements of the influential core, and eventually becomes fully incorporated into so-called donor societies that control the system (Stein 2002: 905).12

Stein is similarly critical of colonialism, noting that too often the concepts of colonies and colonialism are conflated (2014: 55). Moreover, colonies do not necessarily politically dominate the settlements to which they have been implanted (2014: 55-56). In short, we can have “colonies without colonialism” (Stein 2014: 56).

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12 Stein cites the spread of Hellenism in the Old world as an example of acculturation (2002: 905).
5.3 The Formation of Core-Periphery Systems

Santley and Alexander (1992: 24) surmise that core-periphery systems arise as the core expands outward in an attempt to acquire resources lacking in the central polity. In other words, they see the development of core-periphery systems as largely a unidirectional phenomenon, with the impetus for expansion deriving entirely from the central polity. Part of this impetus apparently resulted from the concentration of wealth and economic specialization in the core, which could only be sustained by a highly-integrated network of exchange reliant on outward expansion and the incorporation of an increasingly larger periphery (Santley and Alexander 1992: 24).

Santley and Alexander see the growth of core-periphery systems as largely the impetus of the core region, which expands in response to local economic stresses requiring the acquisition of wealth and raw materials not immediately accessible to the main center (1992: 32). On the other hand, they acknowledge that in dendritic systems politically independent peripheries can influence the core economy through increased demand for specialist-produced goods. As political and economic control expands, staple contributions from the periphery increase, and this can lead to the disenfranchisement of local staple producers in the core. The subsequent result is the influx of disenfranchised workers into the main center and creation of more dependent specialists. Thus, as a dendritic system expands into more hegemonic and territorial iterations, the primate nature of the settlement arrangement is exacerbated, causing more and more specialization in the urban center, which requires further extension of control into an increasingly distant, yet incorporated periphery.

As this feedback loop is in effect, the primate center eventually reaches a point of criticality beyond which it cannot grow larger. One solution to an ever-increasing population in the main center is to redistribute segments of the population into the periphery. In some cases,
this can take the form of installing provincial bureaucracies in the periphery with low-ranking elites from the core. Furthermore, land grants could be issued to elites from the core or high-ranking and high-achievement military personnel. This redistribution of the population could have lasting effects on settlement patterns that can be tracked archaeologically. For example, local leaders could be replaced with administrators from the core polity, and these individuals would then be granted estates in order to sustain themselves. This type of action could have had lasting impacts on land tenure systems in the periphery, and this would be visible in settlement patterns to a degree (Santley and Alexander 1992: 33-35).

An extreme example of this is the founding of wholesale colonies in the provinces, which involves large segments of the core population being resettled in the distant periphery. According to Santley and Alexander, population redistribution is largely focused on relieving pressures in the core, and is more generally associated with territorial rather than hegemonic empires, which they see as inherently unstable (1992: 36).

Competitions between elites in the core and periphery may have necessitated a greater focus on the control of preciosities, and Santley and Alexander suggests that in some cases it was precisely this type of focus on the movement and production of exotics that provided the means by which hegemonies could be established over large territories (1992: 37). The growth of core-periphery systems is largely a product of the changing political economy, which could be more or less diversified. In undiversified economies, there was less upward mobility for elites, whereas in more diversified economies there were greater opportunities for elites to gain status. It is in the transition from narrow to broad-spectrum political economies that cores tend to assert more control over exotics. However, this change in emphasis also initiates greater competition and can lead to more conflicts (Santley and Alexander 1992: 38).
According to Santley and Alexander, hegemonies represent a strategy based on least effort, where resources can be collected from a large periphery without requiring high levels of investment in order to ensure the flow of goods to the core (1992: 40). However, hegemonies are not stable systems, and they are subject to frequent rebellion. This is largely due to the lack of mechanisms in place to guarantee tributary compliance, such as a permanent military presence in the provinces, and poor incentives (Santley and Alexander 1992: 40-41).

Dendritic political economies need not develop into hegemonic and territorial empires. Similarly, there is no fundamental reason why territorial empires must first pass through a stage of hegemony as they evolve. These are instead possible iterations of core-periphery systems along a spectrum of greater and lesser integration (Santley and Alexander 1992: 43).

5.4 Problems with Core-Periphery Models

Stein advocates an approach to interregional interaction that emphasizes agency and the recursive relationship between the actions of individuals and groups and society as a whole (2002: 905). Moreover, there needs to be greater engagement between archaeologists specializing in different regions and cultures, including prehistoric and historical archaeologists working in both the Old and New Worlds, and especially those focusing on textually documented ancient societies (Stein 2002: 905).

In response to the shortcomings of acculturation models, Stein proposes emphasizing transculturation and ethnogenesis, including the study of processes of creolization that see development in the periphery as the result of both exogenous and endogenous factors (2002: 905). Stein further explains that beyond returning agency to the peripheries, it is helpful to view such systems as part of a larger network where “interaction is organized not just by core states but by the action of all participants” (Stein 2002: 906).
Models of interregional interaction must abandon the notion of unidirectional influence, as more detailed studies of core-periphery relationships in antiquity are showing that goods and information often flowed in both directions (Stein 2002: 905).\(^\text{13}\)

In his assessment of core-periphery systems in archaeological research, Stein ultimately proposes a new paradigm consisting of seven interrelated elements: 1) adopt both processual and post-processual approaches, such as political economy and cross-cultural comparison; 2) incorporate heterogeneous models that reject unilineal approaches to socio-political development, such as world-systems and acculturation; 3) multi-scalar analysis at the regional, site-based and household or individual level, and focusing especially on both top-down and bottom-up perspectives; 4) abandon the assumption that cores always dominate peripheries; 5) view polities not as homogenous wholes, but as complex heterogenous entities comprising various groups that may or may not be in conflict with each other; 6) emphasize endogenous processes in socio-political development in the periphery; and 7) balance between human agency and macro-scale political economies (Stein 2002: 907).

In addition to arguing for a new paradigm for studying interregional interaction in general, Stein also outlines how research methods can be adapted to meet the objectives of this new approach. Specifically, he notes that emphasis needs to be placed on: 1) studying the empirical evidence for power relations between polities, while also acknowledging the domains in which power can be expressed (ideological, economic, military, political); 2) abandoning the assumption that the presence of foreign material culture can be taken as evidence for political or economic control of one polity over another; 3) recognizing the role that gender, class and

\(^{13}\) For example, Schortman and Urban (1994) showed that periphery in the Mayan state was not just a passive recipient of influence (as well as goods and information) from the dominant core, but an active participant in a system characterized by a bidirectional flow of goods.
ethnicity play in interregional interaction; 4) symmetry in power relations as expressed through alliances and marriages; and 5) both top-down and bottom-up perspective, including the mechanics of interpolity exchange, as well as variation within polities (Stein 2002: 907).

Stein identifies three problems with hierarchical models of interregional interaction. First, they assume absolute economic, political, military and ideological dominance of the core over the periphery. Second, they fail to recognize the bi-directional flow of influence in core-periphery systems. Finally, they tend to characterize the peripheries as passive recipients, leaving no room for agency (Stein 2014: 55-56). These limitations can be mitigated by adopting a more nuanced core-periphery perspective that allows for greater flexibility in modeling the dynamics of interaction between core polities and client states. I contend that the Territorial-Hegemonic Model (see below) presents such an alternative to traditional core-periphery models because it does not assume core dominance across all domains of power. Likewise, the model is amenable to bi-directional flow of influence between cores and peripheries, the latter of which are not assumed to be passive.

The degree to which cores dominate peripheries, if at all, depends on a number of factors that influence the balance of power. The foremost of these factors may be technology, particularly as it relates to military and transportation. In addition, demographic factors like population size and composition, as well as differences in social complexity between the core and periphery, play major roles (Stein 2014: 56). In other words, hierarchical arrangements are certainly present in core-periphery systems, but models should not assume such asymmetries.

6 The Territorial-Hegemonic Model

The Territorial-Hegemonic Model (hereafter, THM) has been applied across a range of Old and New World case studies, including the Roman (Luttwak 1976), Aztec (Hassig 1985, 1988) and
Incan empires (D’Altroy 1992; Schreiber 1992). More recently, it has been invoked in discussions of the expanding Assyrian Empire (Parker 2001, 2013, 2014). First presented as a coherent model by D’Altroy (1992), the THM has most recently been modified by Parker (2014; 2001) who in addition to articulating archaeological correlates for territoriality and hegemony in a Near Eastern context, also focused extensively on discontiguity of territoriality and political authority. In essence, the THM articulates the different strategies used by expansionist states to control their peripheries, and organizes these strategies along a continuum with hegemonic and territorial approaches making up either end (Hassig 1985: 100; D’Altroy 1992: 19). Figure 1 illustrates the continuum of degrees of control at the heart of the THM.

According to the model, hegemonic states exhibit weak or indirect forms of periphery integration. In such cases, the core polity dominates a set of client states that implement core policies, extract resources for the core while providing their own security. Client states retain different degrees of autonomy in hegemonic systems, often including continuity of governance by a local ruler, as opposed to a core-based official. Thus, in a hegemonic system, control is mostly maintained through indirect means. On the other side of the spectrum is territorial control, which involves more direct intervention in state affairs, including managing security explicitly and the direct administration of client states through core proxies. The key to the THM is its inherent flexibility and recognition that states can implement both hegemonic and territorial policies differentially throughout its area of influence and across different domains of power as required. Factors affecting the strategies adopted by core polities include their internal organization as well as the organization of its subject polities, and the distribution of resources across the landscape.
Central to the THM is its explicit focus on the costs and benefits of strategies emanating from both sides of the continuum. Moreover, relationships between the core polity and its client states can also change over time, and the model aims to account for this by emphasizing the volatility of core-periphery systems. High integration entails the full annexation of a client state, and perhaps even its conversion into an imperial province. Figure 2 identifies the various degrees of autonomy between imperial cores and peripheries, along with examples of the types of states associated with each degree. For instance, provinces are fully integrated areas or polities under direct territorial control by the core. At the opposite end of the continuum are enemy states that are not only fully autonomous, but also hostile towards the core polity. Hegemonic control corresponds to vassal states that have not been fully integrated into the imperial fold and maintain certain degrees of autonomy. Despite the apparent simplicity of the continuum depicted in Figure 2, it does not entail a rigid and unchanging system of core-periphery relationships. Any type of state can become more or less autonomous depending on its level of friendliness or hostility towards the core polity. Autonomous states or vassals can also become fully incorporated into the imperial system as the core polity adopts policies that are more territorial rather than hegemonic in nature. In short, this continuum is flexible and the polities involved are constantly transitioning in the face of evolving territorial and hegemonic forces.

Such transitions require significant investment across the various military, political and economic domains of power. The THM allows these domains to be accounted for independently, particularly considering the ad hoc nature under which certain strategies of control would have been implemented, as is certainly the case in many early expansionist states (D’Altroy 1992: 19-20). As a state expanded and incorporated new territories, its periphery shifted accordingly, and new boundaries were constantly being redefined. The two main boundary types discussed in the
THM include borders and frontiers, which are defined by their relative levels of porosity and fluidity. Borders are typically more static and restrictive in that they impede the flow of people and commodities across a given area. Frontiers, in contrast, are more porous and fluid. Figure 3 presents these boundary types—or borderlands—along a similar continuum to those shown in Figures 2 and 3. The link between boundary types and territorial or hegemonic strategies is not always clear, but it is assumed that more than one boundary type can be present in both territorial and hegemonic states, and further that these types can change over time in response to local circumstances or core initiatives.

Like political boundaries, geographic, demographic, cultural and economic boundaries found along the growing periphery of an expansionist state can also be more or less static or porous, depending on a variety of factors. Figure 4 summarizes the different boundary types across these domains. Like political boundaries, cultural or economic boundaries can emerge differentially along the periphery of a territorial or hegemonic system, and it is not necessary that such boundaries should overlap. For example, the acquisition of vassal states may have resulted in redefined political boundaries that were more restrictive than previously, but economic and cultural boundaries along a state’s periphery may have remained relatively unaffected.

The THM embraces the role that spatial analysis plays in understanding the dynamics of expansionist states, recognizing that imperial strategies are systematically tied to spatial variation. While the most basic assumption of the relationship between imperial rule and spatial variation rests on the idea that control varies, at least in part, as a function of distance from the core polity, this is probably not a universal characteristic of the distribution of power dynamics within expansionist states. Such a relationship presupposes the even distribution of power and authority of a territory, which may not have been the case for early expansionist states. For
example, Osborne (2011; 2013) demonstrates that Neo-Assyrian power may have spread differentially across the northern Levant in the Iron Age, resulting in a landscape characterized by territorial permeability and governance of discontiguous regions. Figure 5 presents Parker’s (2001) theoretical model of the Neo-Assyrian empire. It highlights this notion of territorial permeability by showing that vassal states can be inter-mixed among the imperial core’s territory and that of its provinces. Distance from the imperial core, therefore, is a secondary factor in the arrangement of client states. Buffer states form the periphery of this system, and a greater degree of autonomy is assumed to be given to such polities.

The Territorial-Hegemonic Model accounts for such discrepancies further by unpacking the various domains of power, and considering how a core polity’s military, political and economic strategies of control could be implemented in different ways throughout its sphere of influence. These strategies could overlap spatially, perhaps resulting in denser areas of focused control, while other regions may have been largely devoid of controlling mechanisms, whether direct or indirect. This appears to hold true for the Early Bronze Age case at Ebla, as that kingdom came to dominate a patchwork of states spread unevenly throughout Syro-Anatolia.

Hegemonic states—of which we can count Ebla—are characterized by what Hassig calls low-control, low-extraction economic systems. That is, the core polity invests only minimally in local administration in subject states, but this leads to correspondingly limited extracted resources or other forms of tribute being funneled back to the core. The demands of the core polity contribute to the intensification of production within client states, often including the reorganization of labor and the manipulation of the circulation of certain types of goods. In hegemonic systems, core states adopt a hands-off approach to local production intensification, generally leaving these efforts to the client states themselves, though more direct state
intervention is also possible. As an example, control over metal resources and the manufacturing of metal objects may have been one domain where a core polity exerted more direct control over specific resources in hegemonic systems. This focus could result in an increase in the total number of attached specialists in a client state. D’Altroy (1992) likens this idea to that espoused by Wallerstein (1974) in his discussion of the development of free wage labor and forced cash-crop labor in core-periphery systems in the 17th century.

Regarding Ebla, the Royal Palace G archives contain a series of tablets known as the Annual Accounts of Metals (AAM) which document the delivery of metals both to and from Ebla, its client states, and its various allies. Very few texts attest to the extraction of staple goods from Ebla’s periphery. In fact, most toponyms listed in texts dealing with agricultural goods are unidentified, and thus probably correspond to local hamlets and villages within Ebla’s core territory. While tribute delivered to Ebla by its client states could have resulted in some degree of local intensification of production, both with regards to agricultural staples and attached specialists in major towns or cities, it is unlikely that such low levels of integration would have resulted in significant modifications to land tenure systems or town planning. As a result, the archaeological footprint of such a hegemonic relationship is probably quite limited, and perhaps impossible to detect archaeologically.

In contrast to hegemonic states, territorial states involve high-control, high-extraction strategies that entail significant investment in security and the administration of client states, and at much greater costs to the core polity. Intensification of production is also a by-product of territorial strategies, though the influences are more profound than in hegemonic systems. For example, more direct approaches to intensification could result in the creation of entirely new institutions dedicated to productive activities for the benefit of the core polity. Archaeologically,
this can be documented by the appearance of enclaves occupied by craft and agricultural specialists. Early Near Eastern examples include the enclaves, stations and outposts associated with the so-called Uruk expansion in the late fourth millennium (Algaze 1989: 577-580), and the Akkadian “palace” of Naram-Sin at Tell Brak (Oates et al. 2001: figures 136, 381; Mallowan 1947: plates 48:2, 59). However, despite Ebla’s political and economic superiority in the mid-third millennium, there remains little evidence for such direct, territorial strategies within its sphere of influence, and especially among its peripheral client states. There is some evidence for agricultural intensification around Tell es-Sweyhat (Danti 2000: 276; Cooper 2010: 91), but several problems prevent this intensification from being attributed to Eblaite influence. Namely, we cannot associate Tell es-Sweyhat with any of the toponyms mentioned in the Ebla texts, and therefore cannot establish whether that city was a client state of the latter or an autonomous kingdom. Further, the expansion and intensification of Tell es-Sweyhat’s agricultural activities probably occurred only during the EB IVB, after the destruction of the royal palace at Ebla and the removal of its political and economic hegemony (Wilkinson 2004).

7 Summary Observations

In this chapter, Ebla is described as an early expansionist state. Such political entities are characterized by the acquisition of large peripheries comprising many smaller, subordinate polities. As Ebla expanded, it gained control or influence over numerous smaller cities and kingdoms. At the same time, it encountered other expansionist states like Mari, Nagar and Armi that vied for control over much of the same territory. This chapter explored some of the key theoretical concepts and models associated with the study of expansionist states and the dynamics underlying their interaction.
The Territorial-Hegemonic Model (THM) is presented as a useful model for studying Ebla’s emergence as a hegemonic state for three reasons. First, the THM provides clear definitions of hegemonic and territorial states and articulates the borderland dynamics that can be expected in both cases. Second, the THM emphasizes that hegemonic and territorial states exist along a continuum, and that a given state can implement both hegemonic and territorial policies differentially across its sphere of influence. Moreover, these strategies were flexible and could change over time as needed. Third, the THM indicates the specific archaeological correlates to be expected in cases where a state operated either hegemonically or territorially.

In cases involving hegemonic states, the THM suggests that integration of peripheral states was relatively weak. Investment in the periphery was limited, and often governance and security remained under the purview of local leaders who nevertheless were subordinate to the core polity. Archaeologically, the correlates for hegemonic states are more ephemeral. Changes in local subsistence strategies may be reflected in alterations to settlement patterns or land tenure systems, as client states and subordinate polities attempted to maximize production in the face of tributary demands. Territorial states, on the other hand, were characterized by greater investment in infrastructure along the periphery. This could be represented archaeologically by border forts, military garrisons, or core administrative facilities in subordinate cities.

Ultimately, the THM describes the expected archaeological impact of both hegemonic and territorial states. Unfortunately, hegemonic states tend to have a minimal impact on local archaeology compared to territorial states. Nevertheless, by articulating these expectations, the THM provides a means by which Ebla’s expansion into the Euphrates, the Amuq Plain and elsewhere can be analyzed without resorting to oversimplification. Specifically, the THM offers a vocabulary with which the nuanced and variegated nature of Ebla’s periphery can be discussed.
I propose that while Ebla was on a trajectory leading to greater territorial behavior, for the most part its periphery was characterized by hegemonic initiatives entailing minimal investment and integration. As a result, Ebla’s rise as a hegemonic state did not significantly impact the archaeology of the Amuq Plain, though there remains some evidence that the region was in the process of being more fully integrated into the Eblaite state system.
Chapter 3
Syro-Anatolia in the Third Millennium

Many characterizations of Ebla have been put forward following the initial discovery of the Royal Palace G archives in the mid-1970s. Almost from the beginning, Ebla was declared a major third millennium polity, and indeed an empire by Pettinato (1981) and Matthiae (1981).

More recent discussions about the nature of Eblaite political organization have espoused less grandiose views. Regardless of Ebla’s designation as an empire or hegemonic state, important questions about the socio-political and economic organization continue to be at the center of Eblaite studies. How far did its political hegemony extend? What institutions enforced Ebla’s expansionist policies? How can we trace Ebla’s expansion archaeologically? What impact did Ebla’s growth have on neighboring polities’ developmental trajectories, whether rival, ally, or subject? This chapter aims to address these questions by examining the archaeological and historical context from which Ebla emerged as a regional power.

A review of the literature reveals a considerable range of interpretations concerning the nature of the Eblaite state. Such a review also exposes a pattern in Eblaite studies wherein that polity’s purported size and power have been gradually reduced from the status of a broad-reaching empire to that of a modest, localized city-state. Reconstructions generally fall into two categories. The first posits that Ebla was a large territorial state or empire, directly controlling much of Upper Mesopotamia and the Levant, while the second presents a more restricted view of Ebla as but one of many city-states competing for economic and political hegemony. More recent scholarship has also tended to emphasize the mechanisms through which Ebla was able to establish and maintain its heightened status. While the consensus appears to be that Ebla was far less expansive compared to later territorial states originating in Southern Mesopotamia, such as
the Akkadian and Ur III states, Ebla nevertheless engaged in expansionist activities that put it in direct conflict with neighboring polities. At its peak, Ebla undoubtedly exercised hegemonic control over a considerable territory, but the nature of this control remains poorly understood.

1  Historical and Chronological Background

Understanding the processes and mechanisms underlying the origin and collapse of the so-called “second urban revolution” represent important and exciting areas of research. While a study of the impact of hegemony on socio-political development is inherently diachronic, a detailed analysis of the precise causes of urbanism’s rise and collapse remains beyond the scope of the present dissertation, which is concerned specifically with the period of Ebla’s economic and political height during the Early Bronze IVA (ca. 2500-2300 BCE). Describing the archaeology of the phases immediately preceding and succeeding Ebla’s emergence is, however, essential for building an appropriate context from which to gauge the impact of that state’s hegemony, and thus forms a critical part of this study. At the same time, to appreciate the role that Ebla played in influencing socio-political developments along its periphery, it is also useful to evaluate contemporaneous developments in neighboring regions. Comparative approaches to socio-political evolution permit not only the identification of common processes and mechanisms at play in different loci of state formation, but also the isolation of idiosyncratic elements unique to any given state. By thinking both spatially and temporally, we can produce a more nuanced understanding of Eblaite hegemony, and the often-ambiguous changes it can affect.

The origins of Early Bronze Age urbanism are to be found in the first few centuries of the third millennium (EB II/III, ca. 3000-2600/2500 BCE), in the period immediately following the collapse of the so-called Uruk world-system and the withdrawal of a southern Mesopotamian presence in the region. Typically regarded as a time of socio-political decentralization and
ruralisation, recent scholarship has started to focus on the evidence for increasing social stratification and economic specialization in the early third millennium (Schwartz 1994). Particular emphasis has been placed on the role of wealth finance in western Syro-Anatolia, in contrast to the greater reliance on staple finance in the dry-farming regions of Upper Mesopotamia (Akkermans and Schwartz 2003; Wilkinson 1994). While this formative period remains poorly understood, it is becoming increasingly clear that the region did not revert to the pre-Uruk levels of socio-political complexity of the fourth millennium. Rather, the seeds of urbanism had already been planted by the beginning of the Early Bronze Age, and these would eventually come to fruition in the form of large hegemonic states like Ebla, Mari and others.

1.1 Late Fourth/Early Third Millennium

The development of large-scale urban societies in the mid-third millennium was preceded by an important formative period lasting several centuries. Following the withdrawal of Uruk influence in the late fourth millennium, much of northern Syria and Upper Mesopotamia underwent a process of decentralization and ruralization (Ur 2010a; 2002). The early third millennium landscape was generally characterized by a two-tier settlement hierarchy comprising mostly modest-sized centers and smaller villages. Increasing socio-political complexity is attested in the construction of communal storage buildings, the use of administrative technologies such as cylinder seals, and advances in specialized craft production (Akkermans and Schwartz 2003: 216-224; Schwartz and Curvers 1992: 416-418). The latter feature was particularly important in western Syro-Anatolia, where it formed the economic base and ultimately helped fuel the development of large territorial states like Ebla. On the other hand, Mari seems to have arisen in a region that in the first centuries of the third millennium focused largely on the production and redistribution of agricultural surpluses, especially cereals, and only in the mid to late Early
Bronze Age did its economy transition to an emphasis on controlling the movement of prestige goods.

Evidence for pre-urban societies in the northern part of the Fertile Crescent can be categorized into two geographical zones. An eastern area, comprising the Khabur, Upper Tigris and Northern Jazira, shares the distinctive Ninevite 5 culture, characterized by painted and incised pottery styles first encountered by Mallowan (1964; Schwartz 1985) in his deep sounding at Nineveh. Ninevite 5 sites are particularly well documented in the Khabur, where dam construction in recent decades has resulted in a variety of smaller settlements being excavated as part of salvage operations, though they are found as far east as the foothills of the Zagros.

Along the Middle Khabur, sites like Raqa’i (Schwartz and Curvers 1992) and ‘Atij (Fortin 1995) evince increasing socio-political complexity in the form of large, centrally planned buildings used to store cereals, especially wheat and barley. Granaries are not uncommon in the Early Bronze Age, and indeed they are attested in much earlier periods. However, these structures are noteworthy for being generally quite large, centrally located, and often circumscribed by large mud-brick enclosure walls. The earliest of these structures take on distinctive “grill-like” plans, as attested in early third millennium levels at Raqa’i and ‘Atij. At the former site, atop the grill building was a much larger structure called the Rounded Building, which was enclosed by a thick wall and surrounded by various domestic structures. Paleoethnobotanical studies show that these structures did indeed store various grain species, and barley in particular is prominent in the later phases of these buildings (McCorriston 1998).

The presence of large granaries at these otherwise diminutive settlements—often measuring just 1 ha or less—indicates a focus on surplus production. That is, the food stored in these buildings would have exceeded any local subsistence requirements. As a result, several
explanations have been put forward that attempt to describe these storage buildings as evidence for a larger political superstructure charged with the collection and redistribution of staples. In the case of the rural Middle Khabur sites, this means attachment and subordination to a larger settlement, perhaps Tell Brak to the north or Mari further south along the Euphrates. Enclosing the granaries with mud-brick walls indicates the deliberate restriction of access to the stored cereals, and implies that a central authority was at least partly responsible for the organization of this storage process. Noting that barley was often used as animal fodder, Hole (1999; 1991) alternatively proposed that these structures stored surpluses for nomadic pastoralists, thus eliminating the need for a central authority to explain the presence of enclosed granaries.

Beyond these buildings, public architecture is limited for this period, though enclosure walls have also been excavated at Rad Shaqrah, Mulla Matar and Bderi (Akkermans and Schwartz 2003: 218-224). Further evidence for complexity is suggested by the “Piedmont Jemdet Nasr” style cylinder seals found in contemporaneous levels, which may be connected to nascent administrative institutions. Based on these finds, Fortin (1999; 1997) and Schwartz and Curvers (1992) have suggested that the economic base for this region was staple finance. That is, the Middle Khabur and adjacent areas were focused primarily on the production, storage and redistribution of agricultural surpluses, mainly wheat and barley. Further, drawing on models outlined by Service (1975), Carneiro (1981; 1970) and others, Schwartz (1994) argues that this society can be best described as a complex chiefdom, wherein a regional leader, or chief, would have been capable of appropriating agricultural surpluses in the form of tribute. The application of neo-evolutionary models, and particularly the notion of chiefdoms, to the pre-urban societies of the Near East has been heavily criticized (Yoffee 1993).
The second geographical zone comprises the area extending from roughly the Balikh to the Mediterranean coast. As in the Khabur, this western area underwent a process of ruralization following the withdrawal of southern Mesopotamian influence in the late fourth millennium. Early third millennium settlement was limited to relatively small sites with minimal hierarchical organization. In contrast to the Ninevite 5-dominated ceramic assemblages of the Khabur, the pre-urban culture of this western zone was characterized first by the persistence of late fourth millennium assemblages, including Late Reserved Slip Ware, followed by the introduction and proliferation of Red-Black Burnished Ware (Amuq Phase H; Braidwood and Braidwood 1960). This latter ware has been the subject of much controversy, particularly regarding its association with a migrant population originating in the Kura and Araxes region of Transcaucasia. The distribution of Red-Black Burnished Ware is largely coastal, though it is found in significant quantities in the Amuq Plain and at sites along the Orontes. It does not appear to have penetrated inner Syria.

A trend towards smaller, more uniform settlements is attested in regional surveys from the Balikh, Jabbul, Qoueiq and Amuq (summarized in Lawrence and Wilkinson 2015). Archaeological exposures of early third millennium levels are generally quite limited, with the best examples coming from Hama and Habuba Kabira North, but more recent data from the Tishrin Dam area has added to this repertoire. There is very limited evidence for large public buildings. One exception may be the predecessor to Palace G at Ebla (Mazzoni 1991). Further evidence comes from Tell Halawa in the Tabqa Dam region, where a temple was found atop a mud-brick platform and enclosed in a precinct reminiscent of contemporaneous Mesopotamian

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14 Important discussions and summaries of the Khirbet Kerak Ware phenomenon include Philip and Millard 2000, and Batiuk 2005.
15 Tishrin sites include Shiyukh Fawqani, Qara Quzaq, Shiyukh Tahtani, Jerablus Tahtani, Tell Ahmar and Tell Khamis (Del Olmo Lete and Montero Fenollós 1999).
temple complexes (Orthmann 1989). Despite these finds, there is a notable dearth of large-scale buildings in the west. Residential structures, on the other hand, were excavated at Hama (Level K; Fugmann 1958) and Judaidah (Phase H; Braidwood and Braidwood 1960), as well as at Ras Shamra (IIIA1; Schaeffer 1948).

Despite the lack of large-scale architecture, there is some evidence for socio-political complexity, but in contrast to the Khabur, this takes shape in the west in the form of specialized craft production. In particular, early third millennium evidence in the Euphrates and further west indicates a sophisticated metallurgical industry, best exemplified by the tin-bronze statues recovered from Tell al-Judaidah in the Amuq Plain (Braidwood and Braidwood 1960; Yener 2000; Snow 2005). Daggers and spearheads also appear with some frequency in grave assemblages from tombs in the Euphrates region, namely at Carchemish (Woolley and Barnett 1952). The inclusion of weapons in grave assemblages implies a greater emphasis on warfare, and perhaps suggests an increasing tendency for conflict and competition between developing polities.

In addition to grave assemblages, several workshops evince craft specialists. For example, a workshop area associated with potter production was uncovered at Habuba Kabira North (Levels 2-3). This area was later converted into a more specialized bead and amulet manufactory, highlighting the trend toward the production of prestige goods (Strommenger 1980). Concerning pottery, there is an obvious trend toward more specialist-produced vessels. The sinuous-sided bowls made of a highly-fired green paste that replaced Late Reserved Slip Wares are clearly the product of specialist potters, and a workshop dedicated to their production may be documented in the Kurban area (Wilkinson 1990). Like in the east, some evidence is also attested for long-term grain storage, particularly at Hajji Ibrahim near Tell es-Sweyhat (Danti
2000). It is hypothesized that grain storage was intended to offset the risks of the dry-season for local pastoralists.

According to Schwartz (1994), the development of a precocious metallurgical industry in the west evidences a form of wealth finance in this region, in contrast to the reliance on the surplus production of staples in the east. That is, the economic base in this western zone was founded on the acquisition and dissemination of highly valued objects, largely made of metal. Although more evidence is needed to confirm this reconstruction, it nevertheless represents an interesting proposal that may explain the privileged position that metals hold in the later economies of territorial states in the region.

This characterization of the first half of the third millennium is meant to emphasize the contrasting elements of decentralization following the Uruk collapse with the limited evidence for increasing socio-political complexity. Much debate has centered on the origins of the large-scale state societies that emerged in Syro-Anatolia and Upper Mesopotamia in the mid-third millennium. Explanations for the “urban revolution” in the north have focused mainly on the degree of impact that internal and external forces had on this process. For example, Weiss (1986; 1983) and Wilkinson (1997; 1994b) have emphasized landscape development and improvements in agricultural production and surplus distribution on local scales. Population growth and circumscription models have also been invoked in discussions of the causes underlying northern Mesopotamia’s urban revival (Akkermans and Schwartz 2003: 276, after Carneiro 1970). Warfare and competition may also have played a role. From this perspective, the urbanized state societies of the mid-third millennium are seen as the result of a system of peer-polity interaction (Akkermans and Schwartz 2003: 276, after Renfrew and Cherry 1986). On the other hand, Gelb (1992) has characterized the urban revolution in northern Mesopotamia as a case of secondary
state formation, referring specifically the extension of the “Kiš civilization” into the north. Given the continued use of southern-style Mesopotamian cylinder seals and eventual adoption of the cuneiform script, coupled with the proliferation of local pottery styles and other material culture, it is clear that both internal and external factors impacted socio-political development in the north. Akkermans and Schwartz (2003: 277) have outlined several different scenarios that try to account for the degrees of internal vs. external influence on state formation in the north. They focus especially on the role of elite emulation as a means for explaining the appearance of southern elements such as glyptic styles and the use of cuneiform and Sumerian, while at the same time emphasizing local developments and the role of interregional trade. Regardless of the degree of impact of these factors, by the mid-third millennium, Syro-Anatolia was primed to enter into the historical period and begin to assert itself as an important node in the increasingly vast network connecting the whole of the Near East.

1.2 Mid-Late Third Millennium

Political integration in Early Bronze Age Syro-Anatolia reached its peak during the middle to late third millennium, starting with the emergence of urban centers around 2600 BCE and ending with widespread transformative processes towards the end of the millennium. Once thought to be the result of climatic events or pressures (Weiss et al. 1993), the end of the Early Bronze Age is now less commonly referred to as a collapse. For example, Greenberg has recently characterized the Early Bronze Age/Middle Bronze Age transition in the southern Levant as a transmutation, even going so far as to describe the changes in local settlement patterns as a sort of exodus (2017: 31, 48). Likewise, Schloen—though acknowledging the role of climate change—has downplayed notions of collapse due to exogenous phenomena, preferring to describe the end of
the Early Bronze Age as a transitional process resulting from conscious decision-making on the part of the societies involved (2017: 62-64).

In terms of urbanization in the mid-to-late third millennium, while major centers like Tell Mardikh (Ebla) and Tell Brak (Nagar) appear to have developed early in this period, others like Tell es-Sweyhat only achieved their greatest extent in the final few centuries of the third millennium, following the decline of the hegemonic polities that surrounded them (Holland 2006: 383-385). As for material culture, the region spanning from the Amuq in the west to the Euphrates in the east, and from Hama in the south to the Aleppo plateau in the north share many similar features: the predominance of caliciform ware (Mazzoni 2000), albeit with many regional differences; the presence of multi-tiered settlement hierarchies; the widespread use of fortifications, sometimes constructed atop earthen ramparts and strengthened by a glacis; monumental tombs and other burials featuring high quality grave goods; large administrative complexes or elite residential buildings; and the abandonment of tripartite buildings in favor of courtyard houses. Semitic personal names preserved in texts from Ebla and other sites also imply a certain degree of cultural and linguistic homogeneity (Liverani 2014).

Beginning in the 1990s, scholarship (e.g. Butzer 1997; Weiss et al. 1993) began to focus on the final few centuries of the third millennium, especially with regards to the causes underlying the decline and eventual collapse of many Early Bronze Age polities. A consensus regarding the third millennium collapse has not been reached, though in recent improved environmental data has started to call into question the validity of climate-related explanations (e.g. Schneider 2015). As for Ebla’s collapse, its political and economic hegemony was effectively nullified when Palace G (Mardikh IIB1) was destroyed in the 24th century, likely by its principal rival Mari. The city was rebuilt (Mardikh IIB2), but it too was destroyed at the end
of the third millennium, having never regained the political status of its predecessor (Archi and Biga 2003). The growth of Akkadian power impacted other parts of the northern Fertile Crescent, but eventually most major urban centers experienced significant destructions and abandonments. The reasons for this widespread collapse are still debated, with much attention being drawn to the role of climate change and environmental degradation (Weiss et al. 1993).

By the 24th century, the Palace G texts reveal that Ebla was just one of a large number of polities scattered throughout Syro-Anatolia. The three most prominent kingdoms were Ebla in the west, Nagar to the east in the Khabur, and Mari to the south along the Euphrates. Kiš was the predominant Mesopotamian power, but its impact in the northwest was buffered by Mari. Lesser kingdoms included Abarsal, Armı, Burman, Dub, Ḫarran, Haššuwan, Ibubu, Imar (Emar), Kakmium, Luban, and Nlrar. Other well-known cities are attested in the texts, including Carchemish, Hama, Qatna, Kadesh, Alalakh, and Aleppo, but these are not associated with kings, and thus were either secondary centers, or had lost their sovereignty and were governed by Eblaite officials by the time of the archives (Archi et al. 1993: 31-36).

Figure 6 depicts the geopolitical situation in Syro-Anatolia in the mid-third millennium, and includes the locations of some of the main cities and kingdoms mentioned above. Based on a map published by Milano and Rova (2000: 742, Fig. 3), the locations of many of these kingdoms are contested. For example, Archi and Biga (2003: 10) identify Abarsal with Tell Chuera in the western Khabur. Similarly, Armı (Armium) is shown in Figure 6 to be situated north of Aleppo, relatively close to Ebla itself. However, Archi (2011: 29) has postulated that the site be identified with Samsat, while Otto (2006: 1-26) has proposed that it be located at Tell Bazi-Banat.16

Finally, Adu is most commonly depicted along the Balikh, south of Harran and north of Tuttul.

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16 This identification has been more recently repeated by Otto and Biga (2010), though Archi (2011) appears to reject this association in favor of Armı being located at Samsat.
but Archi (2014: 164) has suggested it be identified with Tell Malhat ed-Derû, closer to Mari. Despite the present difficulties with the historical geography of third millennium Syro-Anatolia, Figure 6 depicts a sketch of the geopolitical setting at the time of Palace G. That Ebla expanded into a crowded landscape of competing polities is clear from the texts, and this map helps to visualize the geographical constraints faced by Ebla as it expanded eastward and northward along the Euphrates.

The Ebla texts contain several thousand distinct toponyms, most of which are attested only in the Palace G archives. Others are well known from second millennium toponymy, including a few places that went on to become important kingdoms in the Middle and Late Bronze Ages, such as Alalakh, Yamhad and Carchemish (Astour 1988a). Considering that these cities are associated with Eblaite officials (Archi et al. 1993: 35-36), it is assumed that they were subordinate to Ebla at the height of the latter’s political hegemony in the mid-third millennium. However, their subjugation was hardly a _fait accompli_. The Palace G texts preserve a variety of information concerning the diplomatic measures taken by the royal administration to maintain positive relationships with its neighbors. This usually took the form of standardized gift-exchange, involving deliveries of garments from the palace at Ebla to foreign cities. Sometimes, gifts of metal weapons or other ornaments were exchanged on special occasions (Archi 1995). Military campaigning was not uncommon, but diplomatic solutions were an apparently desirable alternative to open conflict.

Polities located to the west or southwest of Ebla are mentioned less frequently than polities to the north, east and southeast. The reasons for this imbalance are largely circumstantial; the Middle Euphrates was, at the time of the archives, a focus of Eblaite diplomacy and foreign interest. This is unsurprising given that the region functioned both as an important buffer
between Ebla and Mari, as well as the main north-south artery connecting Southern Mesopotamia to the northwest. The allegiances of many of the cities in this buffer zone shifted according to the relative strength of each regional power. At times loyal to Mari, Euphratean cities would shift their support in favor of Ebla when the former city’s power started to wane. An example of the political fluidity in the region is preserved, at least implicitly, in the Letter of Enna-Dagan (Liverani 2014). In this letter, a number of Euphratean towns are listed as having been conquered by Mari. This suggests that they had previously been allied with or were subjugated by Ebla. Subsequently, the Ebla texts list these same cities as delivering tribute to the royal palace, while Ebla reciprocated by giving them gifts meant to ensure their loyalty. These towns dotted the landscape on both sides of the Euphrates, but were often interspersed with independent kingdoms. This gives the impression that the border between Ebla and Mari was largely discontiguous, and given the frequency of changing allegiances, it is clear that the frontiers between regional powers were fluid and subject to change, even at the height of Ebla’s political hegemony (Astour 1992: 35)

The texts reveal that the Euphrates was the focus of much of Ebla’s diplomatic and military activity. In addition, many client kingdoms were located along the river or further east. The archaeology of EB IV levels at Euphratean sites shows that many cities were heavily fortified around the time of Ebla’s ascendance, and numerous extramural cemeteries perhaps indicates the prevalence for armed conflict in the region. Despite this eastern focus, it is not necessarily the case that its client states in the west and south were more congenial to foreign dominance.

2   The Geographical Extent of Ebla’s Periphery

Any discussion of the geographical scope of the Eblaite state must make clear the distinction between the territories—be they villages, towns or kingdoms—under Eblaite control, and those that are merely mentioned in the Ebla texts. That is, there are clearly sites mentioned that were never under the direct authority of the royal palace. Rather, the area directly or indirectly controlled by Ebla is considerably more restricted than the actual geographical coverage of the texts. The geographical horizon of the Ebla texts extends primarily to northern Syria, the Euphrates and Khabur regions, and possibly to specific locations further south and east in Mesopotamia, such as Kiš. It is more difficult to delineate the territory under the control of Ebla, though recent scholarship appears to favor a modest territory extending at least to the Euphrates, or perhaps slightly beyond. Figure 7 presents a recent map produced by Archi (2011) showing the outline of the territory under Eblaite control. It is much more restricted, extending no further east than the Euphrates, and only as far south as the Homs region where the confederacy of Ibal is probably to be located.

2.1   West

The western extent of Ebla’s hegemony is generally agreed to be the Amuq Plain and Orontes River. Coastal cities do not feature prominently in the texts, though several prestige items found during the excavation of the Royal Palace G indicate that Ebla had contact with the coast, perhaps indirectly through its various client cities (Pinnock 1990: 42-43). According to Astour (1992), the southernmost coastal city mentioned in the texts is in the Amuq Plain. In short, Ebla’s power did not extend beyond the littoral mountains of western Syro-Anatolia, namely the Jebel
al-Ansariyah and Amanus ranges. References to Ugarit remain uncertain.\(^{18}\)

2.2 South

Recent reconstructions tend to offer a more restricted view of Ebla’s territorial extent in the south, north and east, particularly compared to the earlier views espoused by Pettinato and Astour. Archi (1995; 1992) states that Ebla’s southern boundary was Hama, and this is echoed by Thuesen (2000) and Liverani (2014). Hama was a client state of Ebla, bordered on the south by the independent kingdom of Ibal, probably to be located at Qatna (Liverani 2014). Pettinato (1991) argued that Ebla’s sphere of control extended further south into Palestine, even reaching Sinai.

2.3 North and East

Liverani marks Ebla’s northern boundary at Aleppo (2014), while Archi favors Carchemish (1992). Astour preferred to locate this border further north, in the Taurus foothills of southeast Turkey (1988a). In the east, conservative reconstructions restrict Ebla’s sphere to the Jabbul, and selected cities along either bank of the Euphrates, while Astour again prefers a much broader territory that includes parts of the Balikh and West Jazira (1988a). However, locating Ebla’s northern and eastern boundaries presents several difficulties. First, Ebla’s power fluctuated widely, particularly as it struggled with Mari for regional control along the major trade routes (Archi and Biga 2003). Cities changed hands even within the short period covered by the Ebla texts, and this highlights the volatility of the Middle Euphrates at the time. Second, and perhaps more important, it is clear from the texts that Ebla did not control a contiguous territory, but rather held sway over various cities that were interspersed within a territory comprising cities and towns with different degrees of friendliness and hostility (Cooper 2010: 90).

2.4 Territorial Permeability

It is impossible to draw a solid line on a map that demarcates Ebla’s boundaries with any certainty, especially along the highly contested Euphrates. Its client states comprise a patchwork of localities, sometimes cut off from direct access to the political core and to each other. It is perhaps more helpful to view the Eblaite state as a network of city-states or small polities dominated by a central authority, and to deemphasize the need for geographical contiguity in such an arrangement. Adopting a network approach to understanding the mechanics by which the Eblaite state operated minimizes the complications that arise from trying to envision a fragmented state as a homogenous territory. Territorial control cannot be completely divorced from geography, however, and so it is necessary to embrace a more nuanced consideration of how hegemony might spread across a diverse landscape made up of polities of varying degrees of autonomy. Notions of geographic discontiguity in diffusory processes have been invoked in discussions concerning the spread of Early Transcaucasian material culture earlier in the third millennium, particularly the idea of “leap-frogging” to explain gaps in its distribution (Rothman 2003). Though these phenomena—Early Transcaucasian wares and Eblaite hegemony—are unrelated, it is enticing to consider that similar mechanisms may be underlying both events. In terms of political authority, Porter (2010: 72-74) has recently discussed the various expressions of political morphology, which can be bifurcated or dispersed depending on the context. Key, however, is that a polity need not control a contiguous territory to command political authority.

Astour’s reconstruction of the geography of the Eblaite state presents a good example of the potential drawbacks of traditional approaches to territorial control. He estimates that Ebla dominated a territory measuring about 80,000 km², with half of that total comprising client states (Astour 1988a; 1992). Figure 8 shows a map produced by Astour that represents his
reconstruction of the political geography of Ebla. This territory was administered by a sophisticated network of palace officials, bearing the titles *lugal*, *ugula* or *maškim*, who operated within these client states, as well as at the capital. Astour recognized that various client kingdoms were interspersed among the direct holdings of Ebla, and were primarily located around the Euphrates, in the north, and across the river in the western Jazira. He claims that there were four main, contemporaneous and independent states of note (Ebla, Mari, Kiš and Nagar), and in addition, that some 63 royal cities were dependent on Ebla to some degree. This is slightly less than the number of cities put forward by Pettinato (1991), which Astour says is inflated due to several places being counted more than once (1992: 51, note 314).

Astour’s reconstruction succeeds in accounting for the various forms that Eblaite control took, even if the situation was more complex than a simple core-periphery relationship with various client kingdoms. However, assigning Ebla a territory of 80,000 km² is misleading as it ignores the considerable geographic and political fragmentation characteristic of the Syro-Anatolian landscape. Only the subsequent Akkadian empire achieved hegemony over a comparable territory, and even then there is some debate as to the level of authority that that kingdom was able to establish in distant areas. It seems highly unlikely that Ebla formed a single contiguous state spanning such a vast territory. Rather, Ebla controlled a large number of client kingdoms, but these were dispersed across a politically heterogeneous landscape wherein various states remained independent, or were subject to another regional power’s hegemony, such as Mari. Astour’s reconstruction, therefore, is somewhat simplistic in its approach to territoriality, and suffers from an assumption that control over a distant city necessarily equates to control over all of the intervening space.

Concerning Mari, in the earlier years covered in the Ebla texts, the latter city was
subordinate to the former, and was forced to pay a considerable tribute (Liverani 2014). Mari, under Iblul-II, was a powerful state that controlled much of the Euphrates region to the east of Ebla. It was not until the reign of Irkab-damu, in the time of the vizier Ibrim, that Ebla began to take a more prominent role in controlling the Euphrates and parts of the Balikh, and even then such control was likely tenuous. Subsequently, under the vizier Ibbi-zikir, further campaigns were initiated not only in the east, but also in the south against Ibal, located south of Hama. It was during this time that a coalition between Ebla, Kiš and Nagar against Mari was able to subdue the latter city, leading to its paying a significant tribute to Ebla (Liverani 2014). Thus chronologically, the geographic scope of the Eblaite state changed considerably, and within a relatively short amount of time.

In summary, most conservative reconstructions designate Ebla’s territorial limits at Hama in the south, the Amuq Plain in the west, Aleppo in the north, and the Jabbul in the east. Regions beyond this zone were subject to Ebla’s hegemony at different intervals, but in general, these areas, especially in the east from the Euphrates to the Balikh, were semi-independent clients who engaged Ebla diplomatically. The nature of this type of arrangement is discussed below. Instead of representing Eblaite control as a contiguous territory on a map, it is more useful to view Ebla and its various subjects as a network of nodes linked by various political arrangements. That is, Ebla had differing degrees of control over a variety of polities, and these can be represented in ways, including as a network or graph, that better capture the nuanced character of political arrangements typical in the time of the Ebla archives. Such arrangements are frequently overlooked in traditional representations of territorial states. Ebla controlled a vast territory, but this was a largely fragmented system highlighted by key allies and client states interspersed among a mosaic of other independent and sometimes hostile polities.
3 Explaining Ebla’s Expansion

3.1 Agricultural Pressure

In his later, less sensationalized works, Pettinato (1991) seems to strategically avoid the term “empire,” but nevertheless emphasizes the vast territory controlled directly by Ebla. In particular, he argued that the kingdom extended south beyond Hama and into the southern Levant, perhaps as far as Sinai. He contends that the similarities in Eblaite and biblical toponymy, coupled with an overcrowded Syro-Anatolia, substantiate Ebla’s expansion into the less densely settled regions of the southern Levant (Pettinato 1991). This assessment, though criticized by some (e.g., Liverani 2014), appears to have been somewhat prescient in light of recent revisions to the chronology and settlement history of the Levant in the EB IV (ca. 2500-2000 BCE).

Pettinato based his estimates for the amount of agricultural land required by Ebla on documents recording the number sheep, goats and cattle controlled by the state. These estimates are probably exaggerated. For example, Liverani (2014: 124) points out that the estimates of 400,000 cows and 2,500,000 sheep and goats are comparable with the total counts of livestock for the whole of modern-day Syria. He suggests that estimates of 9,000 cows and 140,000 sheep and goats are more plausible figures, though he does not specify precisely why these lower totals should be accepted. Liverani makes no clear argument as to why estimates of modern Syria’s agro-pastoral activities should have a specific bearing on the wool economy of ancient Ebla, except perhaps an implicit notion that flocks in antiquity would in general be smaller than in the present day due to lower overall productivity in the Early Bronze Age. Further, Liverani seems to

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indicate that lower totals for the size of Ebla’s flocks would necessarily have required less pasture land, and as a result limit the need for territorial expansion.

More recently, however, Wilkinson et al. (2014: 58) and Sallaberger (2014) have supported the high estimates for the size of Ebla’s herds, suggesting that they could have reached up to two million total animals. Importantly, Wilkinson et al. (2014: 57-60) have observed that in light of the recent revisions concerning the chronology of the beginning of the EB IV in the southern Levant (after Regev et al. 2012), much of the Levant shared a cultural tradition marked by the widespread distribution of drinking vessels, especially caliciform goblets and teapots (see Cooper and Welton 2014 for an recent overview). Originating in the Orontes Valley around Hama and Tell ‘Acharneh, the caliciform wares dominated the ceramic repertory around Ebla at the time of Palace G (EB IVA) (Cooper and Welton 2014; Cooper 2018; Welton 2014; 2018). Its spread to the southern Levant in the mid-third millennium coincided with the apparent disappearance of walled towns and major shifts in local settlement patterns (Schloen 2017). Part of this transformation may have entailed a greater focus on agro-pastoralism, and the forging of greater ties between the strong, centralized polities of the northern Levant, like Ebla, with the populations of the south (Wilkinson et al. 2014: 57-58). Still, while Ebla may have interacted with the southern Levant through trade, there does not appear to be any direct evidence that it ever expanded territorially beyond the arid margins east of Homs (e.g., Al-Rawda) (Castel 2018). In short, agricultural pressures may have prompted expansion into new areas in an effort to acquire grazing lands for massive herds, but there is no indication that this process extended beyond northwestern Syria.

Pettinato’s contention that northern Syria was overcrowded in the Early Bronze Age has also gained support in light of recent syntheses of settlement patterns (e.g., Wilkinson et al. 2014;
Lawrence 2012) that point to considerable urbanization across much of western Syria during the EB IV. Pettinato’s discussion draws on parallels to socio-political developments in Early Dynastic Southern Mesopotamia, where competition for arable land brought a number of city-states into conflict, the best example being the border dispute between Umma and Lagash (Lambert 1956; also summarized more recently in Van De Mieroop 2004). However, Ebla is located in the dry-farming zone of northern Syria, and did not rely on extensive irrigation agriculture or canal building. Rather, it exploited the fertile Matkh and Idlib plains for growing crops, while the flanking hilly regions were used for cultivating grapes and olives (Liverani 2014). The vast majority of its hinterland was located in the steppe, which focused exclusively on grazing herds of sheep and goat. Moreover, the city-states in the south were not only more densely populated, but also more closely clustered. Negotiating boundaries between the Sumerian city-states would have been necessary to avoid conflict. Similar processes may have occurred in Syro-Anatolia, including western Syria, where competition over grazing lands was probably fierce.

While population density in northwestern Syria may have been lower than in Southern Mesopotamia, Ebla did not expand into a completely empty landscape. Immediately to the west of Ebla, large urban centers had sprung up along much of the Orontes River, as evidenced by the larger mounded settlements at Tell ‘Acharneh, Tell en-Nasriyah, Tell Ahmed, and Tell Qarqur (Cooper 2007). Similarly, large, circular settlements were founded to the east of Hama and south of Ebla at Al-Rawda and Tell Sh’airat (Castel 2018; Castel et al. 2008; Mouamar 2016). These apparently planned settlements, situated on the edge of the arid margins that make up a prime area for agro-pastoral activities, have been surmised to be the result of Ebla’s deliberate expansion into the area (Castel 2018). However, the connection between these large settlements
and Ebla—or any other major polity for that matter—remains tenuous. Still, the results from recent excavations and surveys in the Ebla chora and surrounding areas in western Syria point to an archaeological landscape characterized by many urban-scale settlements all competing for limited resources not only in the fertile plains of the Orontes Valley and Idlib plain, but also along the arid margins of Inner Syria.

Whether or not the urban growth in the region resulted in overcrowding, it seems at least probable that agricultural pressure played at least a minor role in Ebla’s expansionary policies. Pettinato’s claim that Ebla expanded to the southern Levant in order to meet its agricultural needs hinges largely on Palestine being a relatively empty landscape at the time. The revised dates for the start of the EB IV in the south lend some credence to Pettinato’s hypothesis, but there remains little direct evidence of an Eblaite presence this far south. Rather, the exploitation of the arid margins around Al-Rawda seems a far more probable locale for Ebla’s expansion. In short, competition between growing urban centers may have been an impetus for Ebla’s expansion, but agricultural pressures alone do not account for Ebla’s hegemonic growth into regions like the Euphrates Valley.

3.2 Elite Emulation and Control of Trade Routes

To understand the rise of Ebla as a regional power, it is perhaps more fruitful to consider its strategic location near to, though not necessarily along, important trade routes in western Syro-Anatolia, and especially its proximity to the Euphrates. While Early Bronze Age mounds west of the Syrian Euphrates tend to be smaller than those located further east, Ebla, at around 56 ha, is a relatively large mound, surpassed in western Syria by only three other mounds: Qatna (ca. 100 ha), Qadesh (ca. 75 ha) and Tunip (ca. 60 ha) (Astour 1992). To the southeast along the
Euphrates, Mari was similar in size at ca. 54 ha. Unlike these other sites, however, Ebla was not located along a major river. The main east-west routes connecting Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean passed north or south of Ebla, and thus it was not situated directly on any major nexus of trade and communication routes. Despite these circumstances, Ebla emerged as the major urban settlement west of the Euphrates in the mid to late third millennium. Part of its rise to prominence can probably be attributed to textile production. Though other cities may have had access to larger and more fertile plains suitable for grain agriculture, dominance over the steppe to the east and south of Ebla allowed the city to focus its production on the manufacture and trade of textiles, namely garments. The Ebla texts attest to the important role that textiles played not only in Ebla’s economy, but also in its diplomatic efforts. Astour suggests that Ebla’s comparative lack of other natural resources, namely agricultural lands, but also minerals and timber, may have served as the primary impetus for expanding trade and interaction throughout much of northern Syria and beyond. On the other hand, external demands for textiles could also have been the major driving force behind Ebla's entry into interregional commerce (Astour 1988a; 1992).

Archi compares Ebla to the city-state centered at Girsu, a large polity located in the irrigation farming zone of southern Mesopotamia (1992). Girsu maintained a higher population density compared to Ebla, where the dry-farming basis of local agricultural production promoted greater population dispersal (Archi 1992; Liverani 2014). The landscape around Ebla was characterized by many smaller villages and hamlets, whereas southern Mesopotamia was dominated by large urban centers with fewer rural settlements (Archi 1992). However, it was not just agriculture that led to these diverging settlement structures. Southern Mesopotamia also

20 Other sources indicate Mari may have been larger, perhaps reaching 100 ha in the EBA (Margueron 2014)
benefitted from access to a wide variety of food-based and other natural resources associated with the marsh environment (Algaze 2008). This was not possible in the vicinity of Ebla, and so the settlement network is more spread out across the landscape to compensate for the relative lack of local resources. Archi’s reconstruction echoes Astour's comments regarding the limitations of Ebla's immediate location, and implies that these may have provided, at least in part, the impetus for territorial expansion. Archi does not, however, go so far as to assume that these limitations necessarily forced Ebla to expand its political and economic interests beyond the Eblaite chor.21 Admittedly, Astour is not as explicit in this regard as Pettinato, but it is implicit in the former’s discussion that Ebla had to reach beyond its local territory to obtain the resources required for a large urban polity (Archi 1992: 24).

A related idea connecting Ebla’s expansionism to its agricultural productivity posits that the royal palace’s motivations were rooted in elite emulation. Given the use of Early Dynastic style cylinder seals, as well as the adoption of the cuneiform script, a strong Mesopotamian influence on Ebla can be inferred. Milano posits that southern Mesopotamian city-states may have served as a model for Ebla as it sought to express itself as an independent power in the northwest (Milano 1995). Part of this model involved territorial expansion and the establishment of an extended periphery. The differing geographic contexts between southern Mesopotamian and northwest Syrian city-states resulted in Ebla’s expansion into a comparatively larger territory, where it ultimately encompassed various independent cities and states into its hegemony. This reconstruction, however, still relies heavily on the relative differences in agricultural productivity in both regions, and thus the settlement structures in the north called for greater territorial expansion in order to achieve the same political effect as in the south.

21 A definition of the chor is provided in Matthiae and Marchetti (eds.) 2013.
Unfortunately, Milano does not comment further on how such models of statehood might have been transferred to Ebla.

Archici, on the other hand, identified trade as a primary stimulus for Eblaite state formation (1992). Dominating a territory from Hama to Aleppo meant Ebla controlled access to important resources in the northwest, such as the timber and minerals in the Amanus and Taurus regions. Controlling the Euphrates trade routes was vital, given that the southern route to the Mediterranean would have required traversing the Syrian desert, which prior to the introduction of camel in the Near East, was a difficult crossing. Moreover, Ebla was situated in close proximity to major east-west routes, though these passed to the north and south of the actual city. It was this privileged geographic position near important routes that allowed Ebla to exert influence on the flow of trade goods from the northwest into Mesopotamia. Archici notes that the strategic importance of this region is further attested by the subsequent and enduring presence of various polities centered at Aleppo, which replaced Ebla as the major city along this critical bridge connecting Mesopotamia to the eastern Mediterranean (1993). In relation, Archici deduces that Ebla’s status as the predominant west Syrian polity was only achieved after having established direct control over Carchemish, which presumably gave the former city a major foothold on trade along the Euphrates (Archici 1993a).

4 Previous Interpretations of the Eblaite State

Following the discovery of the Palace G archives, a variety of characterizations of the Eblaite state have been put forward, ranging from city-state to regional or territorial state, and even so far as dubbing Ebla an empire. These reconstructions are often quite contrasting, and this obfuscates the important goal of discerning precisely how Ebla managed to achieve its political and economic hegemony (Cooper 2010). The earliest reconstructions of the Eblaite state were
largely the product of linguists and historians, and though they made use of archaeological data, they were heavily reliant on the textual data preserved in the archives. The main problem with these studies is that they suffer from an incomplete understanding of the language, and many conclusions drawn in their analyses were based on incorrect readings of the texts. This is especially apparent in the way that Ebla has sometimes been presented as a large empire controlling a vast territory spanning much of the Near East, including parts of the southern Levant. Since then, more tempered reconstructions have been offered, and these tend to take a more holistic approach that incorporates the various data available beyond that contained in the texts.

4.1 Ebla as an Empire

By far the most enthusiastic supporter of the Ebla-as-empire hypothesis was Pettinato. In his view, the discovery of the texts vaulted Ebla into an esteemed position within the greater history of the ancient Near East, on par with the major cultural anchors on either end of the Fertile Crescent. Pettinato considered Ebla to be the “third pole of civilization” of the third millennium, linking Old Kingdom Egypt to Early Dynastic Southern Mesopotamia (1991). Others adhering to this characterization include Matthiae (1981), Garelli (1985), and especially Astour (1988a; 1992; 2002). In a series of articles on the geography and toponymy of Ebla, Astour argued that its expansive territorial control separated it socio-politically from its southern Mesopotamian contemporaries, most frequently referred to as city-states. Astour focuses especially on the size of Ebla’s sphere of control, arguing essentially that it became too large for a city-state, and therefore should be seen as an empire (1988a).

Garelli acknowledged the fluidity of third millennium politics, but accepted the

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22 For example, early publications cite the vizier Ibrium as a king of Ebla, which was later proven incorrect.
designated as an empire (1985). In contrast, others preferred to call Ebla a city state. This includes Klengel (1985), Michalowski (1985) and Diakonoff (1985). Astour, as noted above, argued that Ebla's vast size was pivotal in determining its status. However, it is important to consider not only the size, but also the mechanism of control employed by Ebla in establishing its large polity. Specifically, we need to question what Ebla's domination might look like archaeologically, which Astour does not consider. In contrast, Cooper does take into consideration the archaeological data from Middle Euphrates sites in an attempt to identify evidence for Ebla's hegemony, and finds it sorely lacking (2010: 90-93). Astour's description of an empire spanning 80,000 km², but leaving little behind in an area where it was believed to be most active—the Middle Euphrates—seems highly improbable, unless the nature of the state itself was quite different than that of typical empires. If Ebla exerted influence over its client states through gift-exchange and other diplomatic means, and in the worst of times through sporadic military activity, we should not expect to find much archaeologically that would attest to a strong presence in subordinate cities.

In terms of administration, the texts make clear that Eblaite officials were actively involved in the governance of Ebla's client states, and maintained a permanent presence in foreign cities. Various officials were employed in a wide range of places, including Ebla itself. Numerous officials given these designations were responsible for the management of a range of activities and resources, such as treasuries, horses and olives, and not just the management of subject polities. Astour takes this as evidence for a highly centralized economy where the palace controlled most aspects of production (1988a). Archi (1992) also highlights the large number of individuals that would have been dependent on the palace. It is based on this and other evidence that Astour criticizes Klengel's (1988) characterization of Ebla as a nascent state (1992: 54). He is also critical of Grégoire and Renger's (1988) view of Ebla as a federated state (“Bundesstaat”).
In Astour's view, Ebla was a fully developed empire, on par or in some cases even exceeding later Near Eastern empires in terms of size and complexity (1992: 56-7). However, evidence of a highly centralized economy does not necessarily render Ebla an empire, but rather emphasizes its strong economic focus.

Admittedly, Ebla did function as a large territorial state to some degree, and its influence was considerable, but it must be noted that neither Astour nor Pettinato acknowledge the lack of accompanying remains that one would expect for such a vast empire. Even the short-lived Akkadian empire is evidenced in the large structure found at Tell Brak (Akkermans and Schwartz 2003: 279-280), sometimes dubbed the “Palace of Naram-Sin,” but otherwise interpreted as a building associated with commerce. Archaeology within the territory of Ebla’s main area of activity, has not yielded similar remains. This remains a curious problem, and it is argued in this dissertation that it is not a problem stemming from a lack of excavation, but rather that Ebla did not exert influence in its client states in a similar manner to later Near Eastern territorial states or empires.

Importantly, the archives do not make specific mention of nomadic groups. Nor are the texts necessarily commercial in nature. Rather, they seem to record mainly the flow of gifts that were frequently received and delivered to the various states with which Ebla maintained regular contact. That is, the flow of goods in the form of oxen, metals, and textiles, in addition to many others, reflect not trade, but diplomatic measures used to solidify and bolster Ebla's standing with neighboring kingdoms and client kingdoms. Thus, the texts are inherently political in that they reflect the Ebla’s diplomatic efforts to maintain its standing in strategic regions. Yet, it remains somewhat unclear exactly how Ebla was able to establish its supremacy and exert influence over such a large territory, and in certain cases how it came to control other polities, even those most
frequently mentioned in the texts. In other words, it is not easy to discern whether these cities were dependent on Ebla, or alternatively that they maintained a certain degree of autonomy and continued to operate without interference (Cooper 2010).

Important comparisons can be made between Ebla and Akkad as early examples of expansionist states. Gelb (1977) and Steinkeller (1993) described Akkad as the culmination of a political confederation headed initially by a hegemonic entity based at Kiš during the Early Dynastic II and III period. According to Steinkeller (1993: 120-123) Akkad had far more in common with its northern counterpart at Ebla, particularly with regard to the secular nature of the ruling families of both states. However, Ristvet’s (2014) analysis of the Eblaite coronation ritual calls into question the secular interpretation of Ebla’s royal family, suggesting a more nebulous distinction between secular and religious sectors of Eblaite society.

Weiss et al. (1993) described Akkad’s expansion into Upper Mesopotamia as the result of population pressure and limitations in agricultural productivity in Babylonia. Essentially, Akkad is purported to have advanced on the Jezirah region in an effort to relieve the stresses of population growth, which had remained unchecked in the south. Though successful in its implementation of a permanent presence at places like Nagar, Akkad was ultimately doomed by drought.

Liverani (2014) described Akkad’s expansion as a colonizing process such that while retaining direct control over a core territory, Akkad eventually acquired an extensive periphery over which it maintained only indirect authority. Moreover, this periphery was prone to disruption through frequent revolts. Michalowski (1993), on the other hand, has questioned the extent to which Akkad’s hegemony impacted places like the Khabur. In a similar vein, Neumann (1989) has opted to avoid using the term empire to describe Akkad, preferring to call it a
territorial state. Regardless of its designation, Akkad clearly exercised control over a vast
territory, and indirectly controlled or influenced disparate regions in both Syria and Iran.

Buccionellati (2013: 137-173) has characterized Akkad as an expansionist entity
characterized by a program that included the systematic deployment of propagandistic art and
writing (e.g., the Stele of Naram-Sin, Royal Inscriptions), and the strategic placement of military
garrisons (e.g., at Susa and the Naram-Sin building at Nagar). Moreover, defensive walls were
systematically destroyed at cities conquered by the Akkadians. Thus, this program exhibits a
strongly territorial bent to peripheral administration and incorporation, which is not the case at
Ebla. On the other hand, like Ebla, Akkad also engaged in diplomacy, gift-exchange, and
interdynastic marriages, suggesting that in addition to its aggressive militaristic approach to
governance, softer forms of power were employed simultaneously (Foster 2016: 307-310).

Future studies of Akkad’s political expansion should continue to emphasize the
hegemonic strategies adopted by early expansionist states to consolidate their growing
peripheries. While the Naram-Sin building at Nagar highlights the direct territorial control
exerted by Akkad over parts of the Khabur, it nevertheless overshadows the apparently integral
role that gift-exchange and diplomacy played in mid-to-late third millennium politics as
evidenced by the Ebla texts. In short, it is anticipated that further investigations of the growth of
Akkad into a large, territorial state will reveal an extensive hegemonic base beneath a relatively
thin territorial veneer.

4.2 Ebla as a City-State

Michalowski supports the view that Ebla was a more confined city-state, and he is highly critical
of attempts to elevate the polity to the status of empire. He rejects Pettinato’s claims of a large
Eblaite state, arguing that modern historians are too reliant on traditional models of
Mesopotamian kingship, themselves founded on and influenced by propagandistic archetypes like the Dynasty of Akkad. Ebla-as-empire reconstructions, he argues, are a product of this school of thought (Michalowski 1985). Milano’s characterization does not differ much from those of Michalowski and Archi. He downplays any notions of empire, preferring instead to emphasize Ebla’s hegemonic approach to expansion. In particular, Milano highlights the prominent role of gift-exchange as a form of diplomacy, and is also aware of the differential spread of Eblaite activity across the landscape. Though noting that Ebla traded indirectly with independent port cities, he makes very little mention of the regions to the west of Ebla, which is a symptom of many studies of the Eblaite state (Milano 1995).

While the presence of Eblaite officials at a given city or town might imply direct governance on the part of the palace, Archi notes that in many cases these centers remained relatively autonomous, provided they made certain annual contributions. In fact, foreign cities were a frequent recipient of gifts from Ebla, usually in the form of textiles. These gifts typically consisted of three items: a cloak, tunic and belt, all of varying qualities. Generally, foreign cities received high quality garments. Importantly, Archi states that textile deliveries to friendly cities tended to be listed in a manner that suggest some kind of geographic order or rationale, and this could be useful for locating specific toponyms (Archi 1993a). However, as these lists of deliveries accord to cities with a particular relationship to the royal palace—namely in this case, friendly cities—it is important to consider the role that political status might have played in addition to geography in the co-occurrence of toponyms in a given text.

In addition to garments, Ebla also exchanged precious metal objects, such as daggers, on special occasions. This type of exchange would not have been economically significant, as the quantities transferred were usually quite small. Rather, it evinces a focus on political activity and
diplomatic efforts on the part of the palace, particularly as it relates to dealing with foreign states. That being said, larger deliveries are also attested in the texts, and these should be understood as tributary payments received by the royal palace. Compounding these arrangements is the deliberate use of the word for gift (nig-ba, “gift”) when the texts refer to Ebla’s tributary payments to a dominant Mari, whereas gifts to the royal palace are typically recorded as deliveries (mu-túm), or tribute (Archi 1993a). The nuanced word selection of the scribes could reflect inherent biases in the recording practices at Ebla, and by extension we should therefore be cautious of the details concerning the political statuses of supposed client kingdoms (Archi 1993a).

Although Astour recognizes the logical comparison between Ebla and other city states, and also notes that it dealt with and ultimately came to control numerous city-states, he prefers to see Ebla as an Early Bronze Age version of Macedon. Ebla, in his view, is a territorial state, though he stresses that size is not the only determining factor in his characterization. He refers to the “composite character with gradations of sovereignty” as an important distinction of the Ebla political system (Astour 1988a: 140-141). Finally, Astour invokes examples of Sudanic-type empires in Africa as parallels for Ebla's situation. Such a comparative approach is laudable, though one wonders if following Yoffee’s approach, it may be more appropriate to simply assess the Eblaite state on its own terms. Avoiding needless terminological debates would at least be a first step towards a more meaningful characterization of Ebla.

The center of the Eblaite administration was the palace, and Archi estimates that some 20,000 people were directly or indirectly bound to this institution (2002). That constituted the majority of the urban population at Ebla. In addition, certain officials maintain residences outside of Ebla in its surrounding towns and villages. Archi lists these places as Azan, Larugadu, Lub
and Madu, but it included many other places as well. While Ebla was clearly the political and
economic center of the kingdom, it shared importance in terms of cult activity with various other
places, and this inevitably carried over to the political arena. While a number of temples were
located at Ebla, temples were also active in other towns and villages, especially near Ebla, or in
its core territory. These cult places played a significant role in several rituals involving the *en* and
the *maliktum*, including a certain coronation ritual that saw the royal couple visiting numerous
nearby localities over an extended period as part of complex ritual.²³

Astour and others tended to overemphasize the centrality of Ebla, and especially the
palace, by painting a highly dichotomous picture that distinguishes clearly urban and rural
elements of Eblaite society. Decentralized religious institutions not only differentiate Ebla from
its southern Mesopotamian counterparts, they may serve as evidence that in terms of social
organization, Ebla was more traditional in some ways than others. That is, it did not merge
religious and secular institutions into new organizations that favored the political and economic
elite. Moreover, the continued presence of a council of “elders” in the royal court indicates at
least some degree of patrimonialism whereby the heads of prominent families had a degree of
influence over state governance. Whether or not this was a superficial arrangement that reflected
an actual decentralized form of religious and secular authority is still to be determined. (Archi
1992: 25)

Archi also discusses some of the elements of land tenure described in the texts. Mainly,
high ranking officials, including the king and queen, were often given charge over large tracts of
land in numerous villages and towns surrounding Ebla and beyond. The king usually retained the
largest parcels, which in some cases may have comprised whole villages (Schloen 2001: 270–

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²³ For a summary of the key rituals that involved the *en* and the *maliktum*, and a discussion of the cultic geography
in and around Ebla, see Porter (2012: 214-222) and Ristvet (2014: 40-42).
The labor used to cultivate externally-owned fields was provided by the towns where the fields were located, or possibly imported corvée labor. In addition to fields, towns were responsible for providing the palace with livestock (Archi 1992: 25-26).

Despite the long reach of the palace, production appears to have been largely delegated to local officials, and this practice resulted in substantial autonomy for those places. The texts can give the impression that the king and the palace dominated whole towns, villages, and even client kingdoms, but a subtler reading of the texts suggests that local social and political orders were frequently maintained. The result is that Ebla was at the centre of a network of connections, and though its subject polities were bound at least indirectly to the palace, most business in these places carried on as usual and without much interference from the palace. (Archi 1992: 27).

4.3 Ebla as a Hegemonic State

Returning to the issue of landscape, Thuesen (2000) notes the naturally fragmented topography of western Syro-Anatolia, suggesting that it would have been difficult to establish a large state across various physical boundaries. Unfortunately, he offers no explanation as to how Ebla overcame these difficulties and established dominance over foreign cities in disparate locales. This lack of discussion highlights the need for a greater focus on the mechanisms of control. It is a good first step to identify the potential impediments to the spread of hegemony, such as topographic barriers, but it is insufficient to state these difficulties without describing how they were met, as was the case with Ebla (Thuesen 2000). Graff’s (2006: 72) map of Ebla attempts to account for these difficulties by demarcating the territories under Ebla’s direct and indirect control (Figure 9).

Cooper, on the other hand, is not primarily concerned with what kind of state Ebla was, but rather she focuses more on describing how it operated (2010: 88). She explores its
relationship with the Syrian Euphrates, mainly because this is the geographical focus of the texts, and also due to the abundant archaeological data stemming from recent surveys and excavations in the region. The present research builds on this approach by shifting focus westward towards the Amuq and Orontes watershed, where Ebla's political involvement has always been assumed to be pervasive and less tenuous than its hold over the perpetually threatened Euphrates settlements.

Cooper (2010: 88-90) identifies three categories of polities that Ebla dealt with. These include: 1) independent kingdoms ruled by kings; 2) semi-autonomous kingdoms ruled by kings; and 3) dependent regions or former kingdoms not ruled by kings. A good example of the first type of polity is Mari. Although Ebla eventually had some military success against Mari, it never conquered the latter polity or took control over its territory. Also in this category is the kingdom of Abarsal, known especially from its treaty with Ebla (Edzard 1992). This treaty favored Ebla in a number of ways, especially concerning the free movement of travelling merchants from Ebla in the vicinity of Abarsal. Merchants from Abarsal were not allowed to operate freely within Eblaite territory, thus the terms of the treaty were hardly equal (Biga 2009: 51-53). In fact, this arrangement is similar to the relationship between Ebla and Mari, where the latter's merchants also had greater freedom of movement than Eblaite merchants, who were required to pay certain fees to conduct business in Mariote territory, or in some cases rely on Mariote merchants to carry out business on their behalf in Mari and further south at Kiš. While Ebla did receive gifts from Abarsal, it also sent gifts to that city, and in some cases they were probably more substantial than those it received. Moreover, in the treaty, cities belonging to each kingdom were listed separately, further indicating a heightened level of sovereignty held by Abarsal (Archi 1989: 16). Given this political arrangement, it is worth comparing the actual quantities of gifts exchanged
between other regions to see how this pattern repeats, if at all, with cities directly subject to Ebla. In particular, what were the quantities of gifts sent from Alalaḫu to Ebla, and did the latter city reciprocate? Perhaps it only collected tribute, and was not obliged to send gifts. If anything, the process of gift-exchange was surely a strategy to help bolster its position on the Euphrates, and perhaps prop itself up further against its rival Mari to the south.

Another example that fits into this first category is Emar, located east of Ebla on the Euphrates river, and probably to be associated with Tell Meskene (Cooper 2010: 89). The relationship between Ebla and Emar is remarkable given that the Queen of Emar, Tisha-Lim was able to purchase lands in towns that were controlled by Ebla. Emar was a strategically important buffer kingdom on the frontier between Ebla and Mari (Archi and Biga 2003), and so it was in Ebla's best interest to maintain friendly relations with that city through diplomatic gift-exchange and forging close ties between royal families (Cooper 2010: 89).

The second category consists of kingdoms that are explicitly stated as being “in the hand of the king” (Cooper 2010: 89). In the treaty of Abarsal, a number of these kingdoms are listed, including: Burman, Gasur, Gudadanum, Haddu, Haššuwan, Kablul, Kakmium, NIrar and Ra'aq. Cooper (2010: 89) places these north and northeast of Ebla, possibly reaching the Balikh. Since they are listed in the treaty, it is assumed that they may have functioned as buffer states between the major regional powers, namely Mari, Ebla and Nagar. These semi-autonomous kingdoms were previously independent and ruled by their own kings.

The location of these sites in the northeast begins to solidify an increasingly secure historical geography for the region. Coupled with the certain locations of other Ebla toponyms, we can perhaps begin to infer patterns in the grouping of toponyms on specific tablets, and how these patterns reflect the distribution of the sites across the landscape. Astour in particular relies
heavily on these connections to determine the geographical positions of the less well attested sites. By determining the least cost pathways between the sites with known locations and comparing these results to the pattern of grouping on the tablets, we can determine quantitatively the relative impact that such groupings might have on sites with unknown locations. None of the extant literature on Eblaite toponymy and geography has adopted such an approach.

The client kingdoms of Cooper’s second category maintained their own rulers, and it is implied that they were able to operate more or less unchanged under Eblaite control. However, places like Haššuwan and Kablul, at one time ruled by their own sovereigns, cease to be associated with kings in certain texts. This indicates that their statuses may have changed. Moreover, this highlights the diachronic elements of the archives, which record the fluidity and ever-changing political arrangements that characterized the period. While remaining semi-autonomous, client kingdoms were still required to pay tribute to Ebla. These were not crippling tributes, however, and Ebla also reciprocated with gifts to these client kings. In addition, lists of gifts sent by Ebla to independent kingdoms also included these subjugated client kingdoms as well, reflecting the apparently nebulous status of these client states (Cooper 2010: 90).

This last section brings up an important contribution of Cooper's work. Namely, it proposes that a kingdom's status may have been a driving force behind the grouping of place names in the texts. While geography can still play an element, here we have a second and perhaps more important variable that guided the organization of the toponyms. In the end, we should probably assume that a variety of factors influenced how toponyms were recorded, but the only way we can test this is by comparing the relative distribution of toponyms across the landscape and the distribution of autonomous, semi-autonomous, and fully dependent kingdoms within the texts.
Also important are records of the quantities (or values) of gifts being sent from Ebla to various polities. Did they differ according to the status or geographic location of the recipient. For example, gifts may have been larger to polities that served as buffer states between Ebla and Mari. Ebla would have been concerned about Mari's influence in these regions, and so bolstering its position would have been a prudent strategy to protect its interests, and this may have been possible by offering generous gifts to certain cities—essentially, buying loyalty. On the other hand, gifts may have been comparatively larger to independent kingdoms, whose allegiance could not be coerced militarily. It will be especially important to consider the differences between Euphratean kingdoms and those to the west of Ebla, which presumably did not buffer Ebla's competitors to the west (Cooper 2010: 90).

Cooper’s third category consists of those cities in the texts that are never associated with their own kings. An example of this type of city is Carchemish, which is listed in the Treaty of Abarsal as being in the hand of the king of Ebla (Archi 1989: 16). Two more examples are IrPEŠ and Gurrabal, towns possibly located west of the Euphrates, near the Jabbul plain. It was here that Ebla sold land to the Queen of Emar, but there were also aristocratic Eblaite estates in these cities as well (Milano and Rova 2000: 724). The fact that these cities' territories could be redistributed in such a fashion indicates a high degree of control on the part of the palace.

The important takeaway provided by Cooper’s (2010) hegemonic model is that Ebla had a variety of relationships with its neighboring polities. Though these three categories may be artificial constructions, they nevertheless retain value as heuristic devices that help to illuminate a less rigid and formalized system of political interaction at Ebla. Distance from the city of Ebla does not seem to have been a major factor in determining the status of a polity. Subjugated polities could have been located as far east as the Balikh, while much closer cities on both sides
of the Euphrates are seen to have remained largely independent. Thus, Ebla's political organization seems to have followed a more patchwork nature, and this is probably due in part to the neighboring polities' relative strength and influence, in addition to their willingness to engage with Ebla politically and economically (Peltenburg 2007). Such a system of permeable territoriality has also been observed for this region in the Iron Age, when local Neo-Hittite polities were faced with the looming threat of Assyrian hegemony (Osborne 2011; Harrison 2009).

Cooper’s study of Eblaite hegemony also makes a valuable contribution by emphasizing its potential impact on the archaeology of the Euphrates. In searching for the material evidence of Ebla's influence in this region, Cooper describes several criteria that must be met. First, the evidence must date to the period of the archives, or nearly thereabouts. The dates she selects are between 2450 and 2300 BC. Moreover, the data must be able to signify control or subordination. Such data might be city defenses, landscape data concerning agriculture, public and private buildings, funerary remains, and other small objects reflective of authority (Cooper 2010: 91). These criteria represent an important advance for the study of Eblaite hegemony, and a similar approach is adopted in the present research.

Architectural remains like forts or watchtowers may have been used to garrison Eblaite soldiers, but to date no such structures have been recovered in the Syrian Euphrates region. Many sites were fortified, but none of these elements can be directly connected to Ebla. Rather, the political climate at the time, with Ebla, Mari and perhaps Abarsal vying for supremacy along the Euphrates may have prompted the local towns to fortify themselves. Such defensive structures cannot be attributed to some form of sponsorship on the part of Ebla, and moreover, most of the Euphrates fortifications predate the Ebla/Mari conflict. This highlights the concern of
the local settlements for their safety throughout the mid to late Early Bronze Age.

Cooper (2010: 91) recognizes that much of what was collected in tribute is difficult to trace archaeologically, but importantly she notes that indirect evidence could be found in changes to the landscape surrounding subordinate polities. Specifically, in order to meet tributary demands, settlements may have expanded agricultural activities into previously unexploited areas. This appears to be the case at Tell al-Hassan/Tell Jedi, located near Tell Sweyhat (Danti 2000: 275-276). Cooper (2010: 91) surmises that this settlement represents the expansion of cultivated lands into the uplands east of the Euphrates Valley. Such a strategy may have been employed to optimize production and meet external demands. Of course, such activity cannot be directly traced to Ebla, but it is a good indicator of the pressure felt by local communities to increase production, whether the impetus came from internal or external influences. Particularly important is the recognition of the potential of regional settlement studies to identify the effects of political hegemony. Though indirect, structural changes in settlement patterns may reflect local responses to external socio-political stresses.

Evidence of Ebla's presence in the Euphrates may be preserved in administrative buildings used to house foreign officers, such as an ugula or lugal mentioned in the texts. Unfortunately, evidence for public and secular buildings is scant. Building 6 at Tell Banat (Porter 2002) and the Southern Mansion at Selenkahiye (van Loon 2001) are two candidates, though nothing directly connecting these structures to Ebla has so far been recovered. The Southern Mansion did yield several seals and sealings, though again there is nothing particularly Eblaite about these objects (Cooper 2010: 92). Comparisons between these buildings and contemporaneous remains in cities to the west of Ebla may yield important insights, but limited third millennium exposures presents a number of challenges. New evidence from Tell Tayinat’s
late Early Bronze Age levels may provide some interesting parallels, though architectural remains uncovered so far post-date the period of the Ebla archives. Likewise, evidence from Hama, and perhaps Acharneh, may be useful for investigating Eblaite influence in the west, though at the former site structural remains appear to be largely residential.

In short, Cooper concludes that the evidence supports a characterization of Ebla's control in the Euphrates as “loose and transitory” (2010: 91). The present dissertation extends this characterization to Ebla’s western sphere, arguing that it maintained a territory marked by permeability and a lack of contiguous control of whole regions. Essentially, the picture presented in the texts, where Ebla is a vast regional power, is less tangible on the ground, at least in terms of material remains that have so far been uncovered. Rather, the archaeological evidence seems to indicate that the Euphrates settlements were able to operate uninterrupted despite Ebla's hegemony, albeit with some evidence indicating that tributary demands may have impacted local agricultural strategies. Regional political tensions between Ebla and Mari may have encouraged further construction of fortifications, but the evidence for this direct cause and effect relationship is limited.

Cooper (2010: 92) notes that the third millennium was a particularly prosperous time for the Euphrates settlements. Strategically located, the Syrian Euphrates was a nexus for interaction between north and south, east and west. Commodities flowed through this region at an unprecedented rate, and as a result the local polities grew wealthy. In some ways, the Euphrates settlements formed part of the periphery of a number of regional polities. As a result, this periphery itself became highly interconnected, and the increase in interregional interaction helped to spur socio-political development. Concerning Ebla's control over the region at the height of that city's dominance, Cooper describes the situation as a “hegemony without
sovereignty” (2010: 92). This is a concept that has been used in other contexts, but essentially it entails a state can exert control and influence without a direct military or administrative presence. They exert dominance by demonstrating cultural and military strength and superiority, but not necessarily acting on it. This brings about an important component that seems to be lacking at Ebla. Mainly, if this form of hegemony is an accurate account of Ebla's power, why are there no public monuments or other overt displays of such superiority? Ebla exhibits few of the features of later territorial or imperial states that typically arose in the Near East. Based on its impact as attested in archaeological data, its approach to territoriality was far more subdued, and this calls into question any characterizations of Ebla as an empire.

Cooper seems to recognize the potential shortcomings of this description, noting that Ebla did not necessarily follow any clear strategy to exact its political hegemony. Rather, Ebla operated more opportunistically, and it seems that the polity formed more of an ad hoc political hegemony (Cooper 2010: 93). That is, it did not have any deliberate program of expansion, which is what we would expect for a larger territorial state or empire. Also, its political supremacy in the region was incredibly short-lived, and this may have prevented Ebla from implementing a more strategic approach to territoriality and hegemony.

5 Summary Observations

This chapter can be divided into two parts. The first part provided a survey of the archaeology of Syro-Anatolia from the late fourth millennium through the mid-to-late third millennium, while the second part reviewed the previous scholarship concerning the extent and nature of the Eblaite state and the factors impacting its political rise.

Ebla emerged as a regional power in the wake of several centuries of progressive urban expansion. Following the collapse of the Uruk world-system at the end of the fourth millennium,
the urban centers of Upper Mesopotamia slowly began to recover in the opening centuries of the third millennium. This process culminated in the mid-to-late third millennium with the formation of several large urban centers in Upper Mesopotamia, sometimes extending over 100 ha. While this “second urban revolution” was more limited west of the Euphrates—at least, in terms of the overall size of settlements, which rarely exceeded 50 ha—Ebla emerged as the most important regional political center, rivalling its Mesopotamian neighbors in both size and influence. How was Ebla able to achieve such considerable political influence? What are the mechanisms underlying Ebla’s expansion? These questions continue to be at the center of Eblaite studies, especially as new anthropological models have begun to influence research into the early expansionist states of the ancient Near East.

Schwartz (1994) argued that a wealth finance system focused on the movement of preciosities dominated the economies of northwest Syro-Anatolia during the first few centuries of the third millennium. This was in contrast to the staple finance that dominated Upper Mesopotamia at the same time. The Ebla texts reveal a significant focus on textiles and the production of metal objects (Snow 2005), indicating that preciosities did, indeed, remain a focus of economic activity in northwest Syria during the mid-third millennium. However, Schwartz does not specify a link between this wealth finance system and the emergence of large regional polities like Ebla. Pettinato (1991), however, sees agricultural pressure—particularly the need to acquire more grazing lands—as the driving force behind Ebla’s expansion. While Pettinato’s argument is based on faulty assumptions regarding population pressure and the size the Ebla’s herds, his discussion emphasizes the important need to identify the causes of Ebla’s expansion. Unfortunately, Pettinato was largely fixated on promoting Ebla as a large empire, on par with
those of later periods in Mesopotamia, and as a result his characterization of Ebla exaggerated its territorial extent. Similar problems plague Astour’s studies on the Eblaite state.

A review of more recent studies reveals a shift from a focus on questions relating to the size of Ebla’s territory to questions concerning how that kingdom operated. Archi (1992) and Schloen (2001) have examined the structure of the Eblaite state and the features of its land tenure systems to show that Ebla was a complex patrimonial entity with a series of nested hierarchical structures, and a set of relationships with neighboring polities—both friendly and hostile—that were being constantly renegotiated. This is best evidenced in the texts, which record large quantities of goods, mainly textiles and silver, being transferred between Ebla and a large number of contemporaneous kingdoms as part of a highly integrated gift-exchange system. Sizable land grants, possibly encompassing whole towns or cities, are also recorded.

Other scholars (e.g. Cooper 2010; Biga 2014) have started to focus on the nature of Eblaite hegemony. Analysis has shown that Ebla’s power was not felt evenly across its sphere of influence, but rather it was distributed differentially through space. Some kingdoms retained considerable autonomy from the royal palace, as revealed by the continued presence of local sovereigns at certain cities. Other kingdoms were more directly controlled by Ebla, as evidenced by the installation of Eblaite officials in those cities, and the loss of local sovereigns. Though many of the cities with which Ebla interacted cannot be definitively located, it appears as though some autonomous kingdoms were located relatively close to Ebla itself—for example, Emar on the Euphrates—while other subject kingdoms were spread out at considerable distances. The result is a picture of Eblaite power and territoriality that is notable for its permeability and patchwork nature.
In short, the trend in recent studies has been to downplay any characterizations of Ebla as a large empire by focusing instead on the nature of Eblaite hegemony. This has been accomplished mainly through cross-cultural comparisons and a greater emphasis on articulating the nature of power and hegemony in ancient societies in general. While the nuanced nature of Ebla’s hegemony has become a greater focus of recent research, investigations into the size of the territory controlled by Ebla have nevertheless shown that that polity governed a much smaller area than previously thought. Ultimately, previous scholarship on the Eblaite state has done much to advance the discussion of Eblaite socio-political development, setting the stage for its assessment from the perspective of new anthropological models. By adopting the Territorial-Hegemonic Model as a means for further dissecting Eblaite hegemony, I aim to contribute to the growing body of scholarship on Ebla by clearly articulating the archaeological correlates for hegemonic states.
Chapter 4

Ebla and Its Periphery: Geopolitics in Light of the Ebla Texts

This chapter presents an examination of the geopolitics of Syro-Anatolia in light of the textual data stemming from the Palace G archives at Ebla. Two of the most important texts directly reflecting Ebla’s political situation are the Treaty with Abarsal and the Letter of Enna-Dagan (Archi and Biga 2003: 2-3). However, other major political events, including a successful military campaign carried out by Ebla against Mari, are alluded to indirectly in various administrative documents concerned with the delivery of metals and textiles into and out of the royal palace. Important information about Ebla’s relationship with its client states, including Alalaḫu in the Amuq Plain, is also preserved in the texts. I discuss the significance of these political events and relationships with consideration to how these reveal aspects about the nature of Ebla’s hegemony. However, I first discuss the discovery, subject matter, and relative chronology of the texts themselves, which are crucial to understanding the sequence of events that they describe.

1 Discovery and Subject Matter of the Ebla Texts

1.1 Discovery of the Palace G Archives

The violent fire that destroyed Palace G had the inadvertent effect of baking the clay tablets contained in its archive rooms, much to the benefit of Near Eastern historians and archaeologists (Figure 10). The excavation of the texts was carried out meticulously, with the precise locations of each tablet being recorded so that their original positions in L. 2769—the main archive room (Figure 11)—could be reconstructed (Biga 2010: 40). This precise recording, coupled with the careful translation of the texts themselves, has resulted in a robust dataset detailing not only the
various administrative practices in effect at the time, but also the means by which the tablets themselves were organized and cared for by the scribes of Ebla (Figure 12).

By examining the ways in which the tablets were arranged on the floor as they were excavated, it is possible to deduce that they lined three of the four walls of the main archive room. The tablets were stacked on wooden shelves which apparently burned during the destruction of the palace, forcing the tablets to collapse towards the center of the room, where they were hardened by the fire and buried (Biga 2009: 29).

1.2 Subject Matter of the Texts

The Ebla texts constitute the administrative records for the last 40 to 45 years leading up to the destruction of Palace G. Archi dates the archives to the period spanning 2380 to 2335 BCE. This period witnessed at least three generations of Eblaite kings, including Igriš-ḫalab, Irkab-damu and, finally, Išar-damu. Five ministers, or viziers, are represented in the texts. Arrukum served under Irkab-damu for that king’s final five years. The bulk of the archives date to the 35-year period occupied by Ebla’s final two viziers, Ibrium and his son Ibbi-zikir (Archi 2014: 163).

The subject matter of the Ebla texts concerns mostly matters of local interest, but at the same time present important data concerning interaction between states (Archi 2014: 162). Most of the texts document especially the textile and metallurgical sectors of Ebla’s economy. A few tablets detail ritual offerings, while others are concerned chiefly with agriculture, including barley production, but also cultivation olives and grapes (Biga 2009: 29-30).

Ebla’s political and economic relationships are more overtly outlined in several letters that have been preserved. The most important political document in the archives is probably the Treaty with Abarsal, which attests to the spread of Ebla’s hegemony into the Euphrates region. While couched in apparently neutral language, the treaty is demonstrably one-sided, with the
balance of power between both polities favoring Ebla. Most important, the treaty begins with a list of city-states and kingdoms loyal to, or indeed under the control of Ebla, followed by a similar list of polities loyal to Abarsal. Though not explicit, it seems likely that these cities were located along the boundary between Ebla and Abarsal, thus, the treaty serves as a good source of information about the territorial extent of Ebla’s hegemony early on in the period covered by the archives. The treaty is dated to the reign of Irkab-damu or his predecessor Igriš-ḫalab, meaning that Ebla’s expansion into Abarsal’s territory took place either at or just prior to the period covered by the bulk of the texts (Biga 2009: 30).

Ritual texts are also found in the archives, albeit in limited numbers. These documents provide information concerning ritual practices at Ebla, which often involved the royal couple performing various rites (Biga 2009: 30). In addition to ritual texts, other document types included spells, hymns, literary texts, and lexical texts (Biga 2009: 30).

2 Relative Chronology

While the archaeology and paleography of the Ebla texts point to a pre-Sargonic date for the Palace G archives, the time-span covered by the documents is a more complicated matter. The tablets lack a formalized dating system—such as year names or sequences, as is the case for other Mesopotamian archives—making it difficult to establish a relative chronology. Month names are sometimes present, but such information alone is often insufficient to reconstruct complete sequences, as documents containing the same month do not necessarily date to the same year. Since the texts preserve important details—albeit often indirect—concerning Ebla’s political and economic history, establishing an internal chronology for the texts has become central to reconstructing Ebla’s emergence as a regional power. Fortunately, such a chronology has started to take shape following decades of research, and a general sequence for some of the
Another obstacle to generating a relative chronology for the texts concerns the ambiguity of the identities of Ebla’s kings. The king’s name is rarely mentioned in the Ebla texts. Instead, he is most often referred to by his title, *en*. Important figures like Ibrium and Ibbi-zikir were at first thought to be kings based on their central role in the administration of the state (e.g., Pettinato 1991: 66, Archi 1985: 48), and their frequent attestations in the texts. However, it has since been shown that these two figures served as viziers, and were, in fact, not kings of Ebla (e.g., Archi and Biga 2003: 6-7, Table 1). Through the careful investigation of the careers of important individuals, and especially of the many women of the court, a relative chronology of the tablets has been slowly articulated, allowing not only a complete list of Ebla’s kings to be established, but also a very detailed history of both the domestic and foreign activities of the palace. By using prosopography to order the series of texts that are chiefly concerned with deliveries of both textiles and metals, it has become possible to reconstruct the political and economic history of Ebla to a remarkable level of detail (Biga 2003: 346).

Only Igriš-ḥalab and Irkab-damu are referred to directly as kings in the Ebla texts. Many sons and daughters of the Eblaite kings are referred to by name in the texts, but these did not include the names of the children of Ibrium and Ibbi-zikir. As a result, it became clear that these figures were not kings, but rather senior officials within the palace administration. In fact, Ibrium and Ibbi-zikir occupied the position of vizier or minister (*lugal*, most often translated as “lord”), second in status only to the king himself. Further, at least three other viziers were identified in the texts, including Ibrium’s predecessors Darmia, Tir, and Arrukum. Ibrium does not appear to
have any family connections to his immediate predecessor Arrukum, so it remains unclear whether the office of vizier became hereditary only following Ibrium’s death, when he was succeeded by his son Ibbi-zikir (Biga 2003: 347).

Two texts, ARET VII 150 and TM.74.G.120, provide parallel lists of ten kings of Ebla, beginning with the most recent, Išar-damu. Išar-damu was the last king of Ebla, and most of the texts in the archive date to his reign. He was preceded by Irkab-damu, Igriš-ḫalab, and Kum-damu. Adub-damu may have had a short reign after Kum-damu. Thus, an initial sequence of ten kings and five viziers has emerged, and it is now possible to deduce under which king each vizier served, though the length of each king’s reign and each vizier’s time in office remain to be determined. According to Biga (2003: 348), recent work has uncovered another king of Ebla who was not attested in the previously mentioned lists. This brings the total number of known Eblaite kings to eleven, though there remain indicators for yet older sovereigns. Table 1 provides a list of the eleven known Eblaite kings (Biga 2003: 348).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reign</th>
<th>Name of King</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Older</td>
<td>Abur-Lim</td>
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<tr>
<td>Older</td>
<td>Agur-Lim</td>
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<tr>
<td>Older</td>
<td>Ibbi-damu</td>
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<tr>
<td>Older</td>
<td>Baga-damu</td>
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<tr>
<td>Older</td>
<td>Enar-damu</td>
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<tr>
<td>Older</td>
<td>Išar-malik</td>
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<tr>
<td>Older</td>
<td>Kum-damu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger</td>
<td>Adub-damu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger</td>
<td>Igriš-ḫalab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger</td>
<td>Irkab-damu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger</td>
<td>Išar-damu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 - Kings of Ebla (based on the list provided by Biga [2003: 348])

Much of our ability to place the Ebla texts in a sequence is possible due to exhaustive analysis of the many events recorded in the texts that relate to the women of the court. The palace sent gifts whenever Eblaite court women, including royal daughters, were married, gave
birth, became queens of foreign states, or died. These exchanges were meticulously documented by Ebla’s scribes. Often the gifts associated with these women included precious items made of metal, like jewellery. Such deliveries were recorded in two series of tablets. First, the Monthly Accounts of Textiles (MATs) comprise lists mostly of textiles given by the palace to various recipients, but these also sometimes include records of metals and other goods. The second set of documents are called the Annual Accounts of Metals (AAMs), which are large lists of metal deliveries, produced on an annual basis, and these record the same information as those on the monthly tablets, except they are only concerned with metals and they provide more detailed information, such as total weights. The monthly texts document many events, and some of these were also listed in the annual accounts. This allowed for the careers of many court women to be ordered chronologically, and therefore the tablets themselves to be placed in order, at least crudely (Biga 2010: 39). Based on this understanding of the correspondence between the monthly and annual texts, Archi, Biga and Pomponio (1993) were able to arrange many of these into four broad chronological categories.

Ibrium assumed the post of vizier following the death of his predecessor Arrukum. He served in this role for the remainder of his life. Later during Ibrium’s long tenure, his son Ibbi-zikir served as an associate vizier. Upon Ibrium’s death, Ibbi-zikir took over his father’s role. This basic sequence of viziers—Arrukum, Ibrium, Ibbi-zikir—is self-evident in the texts, but now it is also possible to determine the relative length of each vizier’s term. For example, 18 AAMs have been dated to the time of Ibrium, meaning that he was vizier for 18 years. This is corroborated by the total of 18 mu-túm texts that also date to Ibrium’s time. The mu-túm texts are a separate body of accounting tablets that record incoming deliveries to the palace on behalf of the various lords (lugal) of Ebla, of which Ibrium was the highest rank. Thus, both corpora
containing 18 annual accounts attest to Ibrium’s viziership lasting 18 years. For his successor, Ibbi-zikir, there are 17 AAMs that date to his time. Arrukum probably served as vizier for at least five years, though the evidence for his tenure is less secure, in part because the AAMs were only standardized during Ibrium’s viziership. Nevertheless, given the total number of annual texts, it appears that the archive covered a period of some 40 to 45 years, which corresponds to roughly three generations of Eblaite rulers.

Some of the events recorded in the monthly and annual accounts refer to expeditions to foreign cities. These could be either military or commercial campaigns. The formula for describing a military campaign was as follows: “nig-kas₄ + GN.” This was usually followed by a description of a captured or defeated city, which could be rendered in one of two ways: “in ud GN šu-ba₄-ti” or “in ud GN TIL.” Both renderings imply the capture or defeat of a city, though there remains some ambiguity as to whether this formula can also be taken as indicating a military defeat by Ebla. In general, however, it would seem that Ebla did not make note of unsuccessful campaigns, or at least even in those instances where the outcome was negative, it is treated as a victory.

The significance of the texts recording military campaigns is twofold. First, some of the places mentioned in these campaigns are well-known cities that can be identified, or in other cases their locations can at least be inferred in general terms. Second, since the texts can be ordered chronologically, we have the potential to trace Ebla’s expansion, especially for Ibrium and Ibbi-zikir’s periods, which are better documented. The general picture that emerges is one which sees Ebla as initially occupying a relatively limited territory, with Mari dominating much of the land along the Euphrates that separated both polities. Subsequently, Ebla was able to gain ground against Mari, as exemplified by its cessation of tribute payments to that city, and
supported by diplomatic marriages to other regional powers, like Nagar and Kiš. Moreover, the frequency and coverage of military campaigns against foreign cities increases dramatically through Ibrium and Ibbi-zikir’s vizierships, to the point that Ebla was campaigning annually against cities essentially on all fronts. Understanding this expansion is entirely dependent on having a firm handle on the relative chronology of the texts. Table 2 lists the years of Irkab-damu and Išar-damu’s reigns and those of their corresponding viziers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kings of Ebla</th>
<th></th>
<th>Viziers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Years</td>
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<td>Irkab-damu</td>
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<td>Išar-damu</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 - List of the last three Eblaite kings and their viziers (after Archi and Biga 2003: 6-7)

| 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 | 31 | 32 | 33 | 34 | 35 |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 1  | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  | 6  | 7  | 8  | 9  | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 |

3 Organization of the Eblaite State

Given the ecological context of dry-farming in northern Syria, Ebla’s rural population was dispersed across a landscape made up of many smaller villages (Archi 1992: 24). Ebla gradually transformed from a smaller city-state into a large regional polity, perhaps as a response to the growing pressure of Mari’s expansion into the Euphrates valley as far north as Ḥaššuwan (Archi 1992: 24). Control over interregional trade networks that passed through the Euphrates most likely prompted expansion of Eblaite hegemony east and north, but also along its other flanks. As a regional state, Ebla’s kingdom extended from the Amuq Plain in the west to the Jabbul in the east, and from Carchemish in the north to Hama in the south. Ebla’s economy undoubtedly relied on resources being funneled to the core from those peripheral states that it controlled. The flow of goods from subjugated states was administered by overseers (*ugula*), stationed at places like Carchemish and Alalahu. However, the documentary evidence for the flow of resources to the capital remains superficial, recording only occasional deliveries. Indeed,
we have more complete information concerning the rural territory governed as part of the Ebla
chora, even though geographically we are less certain of the locations of the many villages listed
in the texts compared to the often better-known kingdoms and states that formed Ebla’s
peripheral holdings (Archi 1992: 24).

The Ebla chora refers to “the core region sustaining the urban center, the nuclear area,
and the economic hinterland, independent of any political aggregation” (Matthiae and Marchetti
2013: 26). This region measures approximately 90 x 40 km around Tell Mardikh, and includes
different ecological zones (e.g., marl plateau, basalt outcrops, steppe, plain). Encompassed in the
chora are other sites and regions that have also been subject to intensive archaeological surveys
and excavations, such as Tell Afis to the southwest of Tell Mardikh (Matthiae and Marchetti
2013: 26-27).

3.1 Administrative Units

According to Pettinato (1976), the city of Ebla was divided into eight administrative units. Four
were associated with the sa-zâx̔ki, which refers to the “palace,” “acropolis,” or upper town. These
included: é-en referring to the “king’s palace” (é-en), the principal palace (é-maḥ), the stables
(gigir̔ki), and the house of the bulls (é-am). The other four units were associated with the lower
town. All eight units were administered by overseers (ugula), and their various subordinates
(ir̔11) (Arcari 1988: 125). Based on an analysis of texts relating to monthly barley deliveries to
the sa-zâx̔ki, Arcari (1988: 126-27) deduces that the king’s palace comprised the king himself, the
“Elders” and various subordinates (guruš). Rounding out the members of the sa-zâx̔ki are an
assortment of overseers. The lower town (eb-la̔ki) comprised four units: é-duru̔3̔ki-maḥ, é-duru̔5̔ki-2, é-duru̔5̔ki-3, éduru̔5̔ki-4. There was a significant degree of mobility among officials, with palace
overseers being transferred to the lower town and vice versa (Arcari 1988: 128-129).
According to Archi (1992: 25), the city of Ebla was organized according to the structure of the “palace” (sa-zax) itself. He estimates that approximately 20,000 people were dependent on the palace, which would have comprised the bulk of the city’s overall population. Table 3 summarizes the hypothetical makeup of Ebla’s urban population.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Population (estimated)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male functionaries/palace servants</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female weavers, flour grinders, cooks</td>
<td>800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpenters</td>
<td>150-200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metalsmiths</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singers, musicians, barbers, physicians</td>
<td>200-300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General workers (na-še11 and gurus)</td>
<td>4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royal family members</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High officials, nobility, and their families</td>
<td>200-300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other palace servants, craftsmen and workers</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous family members</td>
<td>3,000-5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total (estimated)</strong></td>
<td><strong>20,000</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 - Estimated population of the city of Ebla (after Archi 1992: 25)

The city of Ebla served as the administrative center for the surrounding territory, and at the head of this administration was the king and the court. Politically, the palace housed the most important state offices, but royal officials were also assigned to residences throughout the *chora*, including at Azan, Larugadu, Lub, and Madu—all local settlements that have not be identified, but are assumed to be located close to Ebla. Ebla also housed important temples, including those dedicated to Adda, Dagan, Ištar, Išhara, and Kura. Thus, the centrality of the city of Ebla in the state’s economic, political and ritual activities was absolute (Archi 1992: 25).

3.2 Rural Territory

Data concerning the organization of Ebla’s rural territory are preserved in lists of fields assigned to officials according to the following formula: “x measures of land in the village of GN.” Measures of land, in this case, are represented by the term gána-kešdak, and are usually listed as
round numbers like 200, 700 or 1,000. Measures of land, in these contexts, probably refer to sowable land meant for barley production. In contrast, other fields were planted with olive or fig trees, or gardens. Presumably, these types of fields were more suitable for such uses as they were rockier or located on steeply sloping terrain. In the case of Murigu, records indicate some 28,000 measures of sowable compared to 8,000 measures for olive trees (TM.75.G.2340). This suggests that the village of Murigu was situated in an area comprising significant land suitable for barley fields, with about a third as much land better suited for olive groves (Archi 1992: 26). While most villages mentioned in these types of texts cannot be located based on modern toponyms, a potentially useful strategy could be to consider the topographic information implied by these lists as a proxy for the land-use practices around specific villages. For example, if a village is associated mainly with olive groves, it is unlikely that that village would be found in a predominantly flat-lying area best suited for barley cultivation. The topographic information contained in these lists may in some cases provide a further line of evidence to be used in locating the villages that make up the Ebla *chora*. Still, the potential utility of topographic information contained in these lists is perhaps too scant to allow serious attempts at their identification, and therefore this limits our ability to reconstruct the *chora* region directly managed by Ebla (Archi 1992: 26).

Members of the royal family and other palace officials were often allotted fields throughout the kingdom. Sometimes these allotments were distributed across numerous villages, but in certain cases, it appears that whole villages or towns were assigned to individuals (Archi 1992: 26; Schloen 2001: 270-271). According to Archi, the type of agriculture practiced in the Ebla *chora* was carried out over extensive areas, with certain allotments given to officials from the city, but at the same time much of the land was likely left to the local inhabitants for their
own use. This limited degree of administrative interference helped to preserve much autonomy
for the individual villages, and highlights the apparent dichotomy of the organization of the
Eblaite state: “maximum concentration of power at the center of the structure and maintenance of
the original social organization of the territory” (Archi 1992: 28).

This observation is critical for understanding Ebla as a hegemonic state. The fact that
even within the Ebla chor a attempts were made to preserve social organization, it is all the more
reasonable to anticipate a nuanced approach to governance in the periphery that relied heavily on
retaining local administrative institutions wherever possible. In short, that Ebla adopted a low-
cost, non-intrusive approach to local administration in villages near the state’s core polity, it
should be expected that a similar approach was adapted in order to deal with the administration
of subsumed states as Ebla’s influence grew beyond its own rural territory. An important caveat
to keep in mind, however, is that the resources extracted from Ebla’s periphery differed from
those obtained in the chora; while closer to home Ebla’s economy focused mainly on staples,
preciosities and especially metals probably lay at the core of extractive policies further afield.

4  Gift Exchange and Diplomacy

The Palace G archives have demonstrated the important role that Ebla played in the geopolitical
arena of Mesopotamia during the mid-third millennium. Ebla was on equal footing with the other
great kingdoms of the time, as evidenced by the marriage of the daughter of Ebla’s king to the
son of the king of Kiš, at the time the politically dominant city in Babylonia (Archi 2014: 161).
Most impressive was the princess’ dowry, which included thousands of animals ranging from
bulls to bears, all of which had to be delivered to Kiš, more than 1000 km from Ebla (Archi
2014: 161).
The texts attest to Ebla’s considerable involvement in gift-exchange with a large number of polities. The details of this network are preserved mostly in the MATs, which describe gifts sent by the royal palace to foreign courts. Gifts of textiles and other ceremonial items were reciprocated by deliveries of wines, animals and other goods to Ebla (Biga 2009: 33).

The earliest documents in the archives attest to Ebla’s commercial and diplomatic ties not only to Mari, but other important polities including Nagar, Kiš, Armi, Ḫarran, Carchemish, Emar and Tuttul. Armi and Mari are the most frequently mentioned toponyms in the corpus of tablets, attesting to the importance of both kingdoms. While Ebla engaged in marriage alliances with many of the major regional powers during the time of the archive, it is noteworthy that at no point does there appear to have been any such marriage alliance made with its rival Mari (Biga 2009: 33). Other kingdoms with which Ebla maintained a steady stream of contact are NIrar, Ra’ak, Kakmium, Dub, Lumnan and Ursa’um (Biga 2009: 33-34).

TM.07.G.201 records a series of deliveries from Ebla to cities and officials that were allied to Ebla. Archi dates the tablet to around Year 11 of Ibbi-zikir, thus in the years immediately preceding the campaign against Mari. The list of deliveries is summarized in Table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spearheads</th>
<th>Recipients</th>
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<td>2000</td>
<td>Na-gâṛki</td>
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<td>700</td>
<td>Kiški</td>
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<td>100</td>
<td>Da-a-šuṃ̣̣ki</td>
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<td>400</td>
<td>Gâr-mụki</td>
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<td>280</td>
<td>I-bî-bụ16ki</td>
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<td>200</td>
<td>Ur-sâ-uṃki</td>
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<tr>
<td>700</td>
<td>A-da-âški</td>
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<tr>
<td>530</td>
<td>Bû-ma-lik</td>
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<tr>
<td>200</td>
<td>En-âr-Ar-mi</td>
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<tr>
<td>700</td>
<td>Nu-ga-mụki</td>
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<td>120</td>
<td>Û-ti</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>5930</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 - Summary of spearhead deliveries recorded in TM.07.G.201 (after Archi 2008b: 2)
That both Nagar and Kiš received large deliveries of spearheads, while Mari is absent from the list is significant. These two regional states bordered Mari to the north and east. It appears that Ebla sought to secure alliances with the powerful rivals of Mari in an attempt to establish itself as a challenger to Mariote supremacy in northwest Syria. Also absent from this list is Armi, the regional state to the north of Ebla that features nearly as prominently in the archives as Mari itself. Why would Armi be excluded from such deliveries leading up to Ebla’s major clash with Mari? It would seem prudent for Ebla to secure an alliance with the only other regional power that could threaten Ebla from the north, yet Armi is absent from the list. While the eventual campaign against Mari was a success, this list alludes to Ebla’s short-sighted preparations. If Archi’s (2011: 25-27) hypothesis is correct, Ebla was forced to pull back from its push on Mari in order to attend to Ḫarran in the north, which had been attacked by Armi. Armi apparently took the opportunity to reassert itself in the north while Ebla was engaged against Mari in the south. Ebla’s inability to fully subdue Mari left open the opportunity for Mari to recover quickly, and exact retribution just three years later. Thus, Armi is perhaps indirectly the cause of Ebla’s downfall. Had Ebla pushed harder to secure friendlier relations with Armi leading up to its clash with Mari, it is possible that Armi’s attack on Ḫarran would have been avoided or at least delayed, allowing Ebla to take advantage of a relatively peaceful northern Syria to crush Mari completely. Instead, Armi was not included in Ebla’s diplomatic alliances with other regional states and kingdoms, and it clearly did not miss the opportunity to disrupt Ebla’s expansion by attacking Ḫarran, which had long been allied with Ebla. In short, gift-exchange was critical to alliance formation, and the geopolitical consequences of these activities were severe. Much can be inferred from the limited information provided by the texts that allude to Ebla’s gift-exchange practices.
The Geopolitical Setting

The Ebla texts not only provide information about Ebla’s internal structure, but they also serve as a source for the geopolitical events immediately preceding the destruction of Palace G. As the sequence of the AAMs and MATs became clearer, it was possible to begin describing the various campaigns initiated by Ebla against foreign cities. This has been the focus of much recent scholarship, particularly by Archi and Biga (2003; Archi 2008, 2010; Biga 2003, 2010), who have attempted to track Ebla’s military activities as a way of mapping the political history of the city, and assessing the expansion of its hegemony throughout the twenty-fourth century (Biga 2010: 41).

The picture presented in the texts is that of a series of competing kingdoms scattered throughout northern Syro-Anatolia and Northern Mesopotamia. Some kingdoms were ruled by a king (en), though other types of independent rulers are attested using different titles, such as badalum\(^{24}\) and lugal (Biga 2009: 30). Coincidentally, the texts also provide a complementary documentary source to the royal inscriptions regarding the growth of Akkad as a regional power in Southern Mesopotamia (Archi 2014: 162).

By the mid-third millennium, Mari had become fully engrossed in the political affairs of Southern Mesopotamia. A small, inscribed bead found at Mari contained a dedication to Dagan from Mesanepada of Ur. Neither Ur nor Mari were mentioned alongside those cities allied to Kiš, and Archi (2014: 163) proposes that their geographical positions—Ur being at the far south, Mari to the northwest—made these cities natural allies against the league of Mesopotamian cities headed by Kiš. The alliance between Ur and Mari would be mirrored a century later by a short-

\(^{24}\) The term badalum seems to apply only to rulers of cities located along an arc of territory stretching from north of Carchemish to the Western Khabur.
lived alliance between Ebla and Kiš. In the latter case, Ebla contained Mari’s expansion to the north, while Kiš pressured Mari from the south (Archi 2014: 163). Of course, Ebla’s allies were not always themselves on the friendliest terms. Sometimes Ebla’s allies and rivals experienced open conflict against each other. In particular, the texts document tense relations between Mari and Nagar, Mari and Kiš, Nagar and Adabig, and Mari and Garaman (Biga 2009: 34).

During Ibrium’s 18 years as vizier, he headed numerous military campaigns resulting in a major expansion of Eblaite influence. For example, he led a successful campaign against Kakmium, resulting in that kingdom’s full submission to Ebla, as evinced by the regular visits to Ebla by the leader of Kakmium (Biga 2009: 34). Ibbi-zikir, who also conducted regular campaigns, helped extend Ebla’s influence even further during his 17 years as vizier. Political relations with the regional state of Nagar were solidified during Ibbi-zikir’s time, as the vizier was ultimately able to secure Nagar’s support in Ebla’s campaign against Mari. Kiš was also brought into the fold in the time of Ibbi-zikir, meaning that in the final few years before its destruction, Ebla had established itself as a major force, sharing a similar status to the other major regional states of the mid-third millennium. These alliances would help Ebla achieve its greatest military achievement, the defeat of Mari, some three years prior to its own destruction (Biga 2009: 34). The relative chronology of the texts allow Ebla’s history to be reconstructed, such that this significant defeat of a major rival can be seen as the culmination of several decades of aggressive expansion and intense diplomatic activity. Ebla’s position grew progressively stronger during the reigns of its last three kings, and it was especially under its final two viziers, Ibrium and Ibbi-zikir, that Ebla truly emerged as a hegemonic state, dominating much of northern Syria. The following sections provide a chronological outline of the major events recorded in the texts relating to Ebla’s political rise and fall.
5.1 The Geopolitical Situation up to the Reign of Irkab-damu

According to Archi, by the early twenty-fourth century Ebla had already established itself as a regional state (2014: 164). To the northwest, Ebla dominated Alalaḫu and the Amuq Plain, and established control over Ḫaššum, probably associated with Tilbeshar, just to the south of Gaziantep. Ebla dominated parts of the Euphrates around Carchemish and points further upstream, while to the south it controlled a port, called MaNE in the texts, near Emar. To the south, Hama was a possession of Ebla, as was Tell Acharneh (ancient Tunip). The relationship with cities located further south, such as Homs and Qatna remains unclear. Neither Byblos nor Ugarit appear to be referenced in the texts, suggesting that Ebla’s sphere of influence extended no further west than the mountains on the western flank of the Orontes. Its closest possession to the sea was probably Alalaḫu (Archi 2014: 164-165).

The early years covered by the archives are more fragmentary and less formulaic than the documents dated to the periods of Ibrium and Ibbi-zikir. Only four AAMs can be dated to the time of Arrukum. These documents, like those dating to the first few years of Ibrium, do not contain much data compared to the annual accounts of the latter part of Ibrium’s time as minister, and especially those dating to Ibbi-zikir. The more recent documents list large sums of gifts sent by Ebla to various cities, and attest to the considerable wealth coming into the city in its last few decades. Moreover, the evolution of the AAMs speaks to the rapidly expanding hegemony of Ebla, which in the early days of the texts, did not document such lavish deliveries, most likely because there were none to record (Archi and Biga 2003: 8). Thus, the AAMs serve as an informative proxy for the growth of Ebla, and indeed can potentially be used to quantify this growth in economic terms. Still, two important tablets present crucial information about the geopolitical situation in northern Syria around the time of Irkab-damu’s reign. The first is the
Letter of Enna-Dagan, which provides an account of Mari’s earlier campaigns in northern Syria. This letter demonstrates that by the time of Irkab-damu, Mari’s territorial control had already started to wane somewhat, prompting the threatening letter to be sent. The second is the Treaty with Abarsal, which outlines the extent of Ebla’s hegemony, at least in the vicinity of Abarsal, and shows that Ebla had already gained control over a large region including parts of the Euphrates and points further east. These two documents thus serve as a starting point from which to understand Ebla’s expansion under Išar-damu and his viziers Ibrium and Ibbi-zikir.

By the time of Irkab-damu, Ebla controlled Alalaḫu in the northwest, which encompassed the Amuq Plain, and Carchemish to the northeast on the Euphrates. Ebla’s expansion was well underway by the end of Igrḫalab’s or beginning of Irkab-damu’s reign, as is demonstrated by the Treaty with Abarsal, a city that is probably to be located at Tell Chuera. In the list of cities under Ebla’s control that opens the treaty, Carchemish is listed after Kablul and Gudadanum. These latter two cities were apparently never under the direct control of Ebla, as they were ruled by their own kings throughout the period of the archives. Archi locates Kablul somewhere north of Carchemish. The southernmost city listed in the treaty as part of Ebla’s sphere was probably Haddu (’À-du⁷ᵏⁱ), which may have been east of the Euphrates, perhaps at Tell Malhat ed-Derû, along the border between the territories allied to Mari. At its height, Ebla’s power extended further south, encompassing Hamath (’À-ma-ad/du⁷ᵏⁱ), which is certainly to be modern Hama on the Orontes. Its western boundary probably did not extend beyond Alalaḫu, though that city may have provided access to the Mediterranean (Archi 2011: 5).

5.2 The Letter of Enna-Dagan

The Letter of Enna-Dagan (TM.75.G.2367) documents the expansionist program of Mari in the late twenty-fifth and early twenty-fourth centuries. Territories along the Euphrates between
Tuttul and Emar were the first to be subdued, followed by Emar itself, along with an Eblaite fort or outpost. Abarsal and Ḥaššuwan were subsequently defeated (Figure 13). Ebla, in response, paid tribute to Mari, delivering it to the aggressors at its river port at MaNE, near Emar. One of the implications of the letter is that it clearly shows that even during the reign of Igriš-ḫalab, Ebla’s territorial control extended at least as far as the Euphrates, and that Mari was not able to secure the entire course of the Syrian portion of the river, despite its military successes. Over time, Mari’s influence appears to have waned, as is implied by the diminishing sums sent as tribute from Ebla to Mari during the reigns of Iblul-il, Nizi, and finally Enna-Dagan himself (Archi 2014: 167).

The Letter of Enna-Dagan demonstrates that Mari succeeded in implementing an expansionist policy (Archi and Biga 2003: 1). Mari’s military activities were largely focused in the Middle Euphrates, though at times they campaigned further afield. For example, Iblul-il reached as far as Haššuwan, north of Carchemish. Ebla was forced to pay an annual tribute to Mari, which up to this point was clearly the more dominant polity. In the mu-túm (muDU) documents, such as TM.75.G.1953, deliveries to Mari are called gifts (nīg-ba), but in reality these were tribute payments. Particularly noteworthy are the amounts of these payments, which included significant amounts of gold and silver.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kings of Mari</th>
<th>Silver (kg)</th>
<th>Gold (kg)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iblul-il</td>
<td>547.23</td>
<td>42.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Elders”</td>
<td>86.61</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Envoys”</td>
<td>128.13</td>
<td>6.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nizi</td>
<td>72.61</td>
<td>8.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Elders”</td>
<td>23.26</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Envoys”</td>
<td>36.32</td>
<td>1.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enna-Dagan</td>
<td>72.29</td>
<td>3.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Elders”</td>
<td>25.28</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Envoys”</td>
<td>36.57</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals =</td>
<td>1,028.30</td>
<td>63.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5 – mu-túm deliveries sent from Ebla to three successive generations of Mariote kings, “Elders” and “Envoys” (After Archi and Biga 2003: 2)

Table 5 summarizes the mu-túm deliveries to three successive generations of Mariote kings, “Elders” (ábbā), and “Envoys” (maškim-e-gī). The kings listed include, from oldest to most recent, Iblul-il, Nizi, and Enna-Dagan. Enna-Dagan, the author of the letter of the same name, appears to have received considerably smaller tribute payments compared to Iblul-il, though his gifts were similar in quantity to his predecessor Nizi. These figures shed new light on the relationship between Ebla and Mari at the time, and indeed on the overall context in which the Letter of Enna-Dagan was composed. Essentially, the letter stands as a veiled threat against Ebla by the Mariote king. By reminding Ebla of Mari’s past conquests in the Middle Euphrates, it is attempting to dissuade Ebla’s expansion into previously controlled territory. The gradual reduction of Mari’s power seems to be implied by the decrease in deliveries of the burgeoning Ebla. The staggering amounts paid to Mari in the time of Iblul-il were greatly reduced, meaning either that Ebla was simply unable to sustain such payments, or more likely that Mari did not have the authority to enforce greater tribute payments in the time of Nizi and Enna-Dagan. These kings apparently had brief reigns, contributing to Mari’s slow decline during the period of the archives (Archi and Biga 2003: 9). Such documentation serves as evidence that Mari’s hegemony had peaked prior to the time of Enna-Dagan, and that by his reign, Ebla was already asserting itself on a regional scale, much to the detriment of Mari itself. Indeed, it may be that the payments, or “gifts,” sent to Mari constitute ceremonial exchanges between equal partners (Archi and Biga 2003: 2), but it is perhaps not coincidental that Ebla’s political expansion increased precisely at the time that its tributary payments started to decline.
5.3 The Treaty with Abarsal

One of the most important documents in the archive concerns a treaty signed between Ebla and Abarsal (TM.75.G.2420), one of its main north Syrian rivals. Archi and Biga (2003: 10) date the Treaty with Abarsal (Figure 14) to the reign of Igriš-ḫalab, or the first years of Irkab-damu. As the treaty prescribes Eblaite control of commerce conducted along the river, it is assumed that Abarsal was located somewhere east of the Euphrates. Archi proposes Tell Chuera as a candidate for Abarsal, given its location, prominent remains, and apparent decline during the twenty-fourth century, around the time that the one-sided treaty would have been put into effect. Pettinato (1976: 48; 1981: 81) originally thought that Abarsal should be read Assur, but Archi (1989: 15) and Sollberger (1980: 129-131) point out that this reading is impossible, based on the grounds that the final two signs in A-BAR.SÌLA$^k_1$ do not form a single compound sign, as would be needed to render the name as A-$š$ur$^k_1$. A more likely candidate for Assur is the toponym A-$\tilde{s}u\tilde{x}$ur$^k_1$, which is well attested in the texts (Archi 1989: 15).

The conditions outlined in the text greatly favor Ebla, attesting to the dominant position that it had attained in the Euphrates region at the time of the treaty. The Letter of Enna-Dagan indicates that Abarsal had previously been subordinate to Mari. Thus, assuming that the Letter of Enna-Dagan antedates Ebla’s treaty with Abarsal, it appears that at some point prior to the conflict between Ebla and Abarsal, Mari’s influence in the region had already been diminished, allowing Ebla to assert itself in the northern Euphrates and beyond (Figure 15).

The treaty begins with a preamble listing a series of cities “in the hand of the king of Ebla,” which already included Carchemish. These cities are not associated with local kings, and

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25 Concerning the relationship between Abarsal and Mari, the Letter of Enna-Dagan (TM.75.G.2367 r. V 14-VII 1) states the following: “Then GN and GN…Iblul-II, King of Mari, took possession; then, he defeated Abarsal near GN, and he erected 7 heaps of abandoned ruins” (translation by Archi [2014]).
therefore had probably been subjugated by Ebla at some earlier point, perhaps during the reign of Igriš-ḫalab. North of Carchemish were Kablul and Gudadanum, two kingdoms ruled by their own kings. The southernmost city mentioned in the treaty is Haddu, which Archi locates at Tell Malhat ed-Derû, east of the Euphrates, and along the frontier between Ebla and Mari (Archi 2014:164). This list is followed by another that outlines those places under Abarsal’s control. Therefore, the preamble to the treaty serves to delineate the zones of influence of each respective city. Geographically, those towns and fortresses (bâdki-bâdki) listed as belonging to Ebla are mostly located in and around the Euphrates, especially in the vicinity of Carchemish. It is likely that at the time of the treaty, Ebla’s hegemony did not extend much further to the east, but it is clear from the text that it formed a frontier with the kingdom of Abarsal somewhere in this area. Based on Abarsal’s being mentioned by Enna-Dagan as the subject of an earlier Mariote campaign, it is implied that that city’s power was at some point in the past much stronger than at the time of the writing of the treaty. Ebla’s expansion into lands flanking the Euphrates may have contributed to Abarsal’s regional decline, possibly as a result of the latter city losing access to important trade centers along the Euphrates that now fell under Ebla’s control (Biga 2009: 33).

### Settlements under Ebla’s control in the Treaty with Abarsal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kings attested</th>
<th>No kings attested</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adu</td>
<td>Arga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gudadanum</td>
<td>Za’ar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kablul</td>
<td>Uziladu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gargamis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tinnu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ladinu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tarulaba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dazaba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Garamu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Girada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AlasuNE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ra’as</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6 - List of places under Ebla’s control according to the Treaty with Abarsal (after Archi 1989b)

Table 6 lists the cities, towns and fortresses under Ebla’s control according to the Treaty with Abarsal. Three cities, Adu, Gudadanum and Kablul are listed as having kings (en), meaning that they remained at least semi-autonomous. The remaining towns on the list are mostly unidentified, but others, like Carchemish, are well-known. Many of these places were probably minor villages or fortresses on either side of the Euphrates. Archi (1989: 16) suggests that the list comprises not the territory under the direct control of Ebla, but rather the extent of its hegemonic sphere of influence (Figure 16). Still, this sphere appears to be quite extensive, given that Archi places Adu in the Khabur. However, it is important not to assume that Ebla’s influence would have spread evenly across the landscape. Even if Ebla’s influence stretched from the Euphrates to the Khabur, much of the intervening territory would have been dotted with independent or hostile cities and towns, much like Abarsal.

5.4 Ebla’s Expansion during the Reign of Išar-damu

Ebla experienced something of a succession crisis following the death of Irkab-damu, who left no male children behind. Išar-damu, the next king, would have been young when he ascended the throne, and therefore it was the vizier Ibrium who was responsible for much of Ebla’s governance in the interim. In Ibrium’s second year as vizier, Mari suffered an apparent defeat to an unknown enemy, and in the following year Ebla and Mari agreed to a peace treaty (Archi 2014: 177-178).

In the wake of Mari’s apparent decline, Ebla continued to expand under Ibrium. He led campaigns mainly to the north and the Euphrates. Still, Mari recovered quickly, achieving multiple victories against Nagar in successive campaigns, followed by further forays to the north. To the south, Uruk successfully campaigned against Kiš several times (Archi 2014: 178). Thus,
at the beginning of Išar-damu’s reign, Ebla found itself in a position to expand when the other regional powers to the east and south were comparatively weak or engaged in local conflicts.

5.5 Ibrium

Ibrium’s period as vizier was undoubtedly one marked by success for Ebla, as he expanded the kingdom’s hegemony over much of the territory previously dominated by Mari (Figure 17). Indeed, he had helped to elevate Ebla’s position among the regional states at the time, so that when Ibbi-zikir took up Ibrium’s mantle, the young vizier inherited a burgeoning regional state with a stable relationship with its chief rival. Further, the two cities—Ebla and Mari—had in fact made an alliance that was commemorated in a ceremony involving oil, which was typical of such events (Biga 2010: 47).

Ibrium campaigned against AN’arum and Ḫalsum in his final years (Biga 2010: 45). In his sixteenth year as vizier, Ibrium campaigned against Zaḥiran. In this effort, he was accompanied by Išar-damu, which appears to mark the first time that the Eblaite king took part in such an expedition. In this campaign, provisions for the army were supplied in part by Carchemish, and thus presumably Zaḥiran is to be located northeast of Ebla in the Euphrates area, or perhaps further east (Biga 2010: 45). That Carchemish provisioned the army speaks to the nature of Eblaite hegemony. Carchemish did not have a local sovereign, but rather was governed by an Eblaite official, at least in part. In addition to providing gifts or tribute to Ebla, subordinate polities were also apparently tasked with supporting Ebla’s military activities.

Ibrium conducted a campaign against Kakmium, and he was joined by several other kings. Kakmium was fully incorporated into Ebla’s sphere of control thereafter, as evidenced by the conquered monarch traveling regularly to Ebla to swear allegiance (Biga 2010: 45). In the final years of Ibrium, he carried out punitive campaigns against allied cities, resulting in their full
incorporation into Ebla’s kingdom. Ibrium’s sons Ibbi-zikir and Uti accompanied the vizier on these campaigns (Biga 2010: 44). Thus, by the end of Ibrium’s viziership, Ebla had started to engage in more direct governance and incorporation of its conquered periphery. Such strategies appear to be in line with a polity that is in the process of transitioning from a hegemonic to a more territorial state. Granted, there is little explicit information with regards to the types of investments made or measures taken to incorporate these peripheral territories outside of removing local rulers and installing Eblaite officials in their place. There are no references to the building of forts or garrisons in these formerly independent towns and cities, and so it must be assumed that maintaining the status quo was the de jure method of incorporation. This is in line with policies adopted by hegemonic states that are unwilling or unable to invest in the direct management of the periphery.

Ibrium died in his eighteenth year as vizier.26 Given his illustrious career, it is not surprising that the funerary gifts associated with Ibrium’s death were substantial. While numerous important figures are listed as having received gifts on the occasion of the vizier’s death, it is interesting that one of the most closely allied heads of state, queen Tiša-Lim of Emar, is conspicuously absent (Biga 2010: 46-47). Tiša-Lim had a close relationship with Ebla, and was even granted lands in Eblaite territory. Emar, moreover, occupied an important strategic position along the Euphrates, buffering both Ebla and Mari. Perhaps her exclusion from the list of recipients attests to a previously unmentioned rift between Ebla and Emar during the transitional phase between Ibrium and Ibbi-zikir’s vizierships.

Regarding Mari, Archi (2014: 168) notes that it sought to ensure that the states with which it shared a border were kept in check, particularly as rivals like Ebla grew in strength.

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26 Ibrium’s death is recorded in TM.75.G.1261 and 75.G.1923+ARET III 436, the latter document being the AAM for that year.
under Ibrium. During the time of Ibrium, Mari was apparently frequently engaged in campaigns against its southern rival Kiš, which were led by Uruk (Archi 2014: 168). On the other hand, Mari ensured its northern frontier was secure by sending frequent envoys to Ebla. To its credit, Ebla attempted to provide support, if limited, to Kiš.27 In Ibrium’s final year, another treaty was signed between Ebla and Mari as a result of the latter city’s defeat at the hands of either Ebla or an unnamed city (Archi 2014: 169). This attests both to Ebla’s strength by the end of Ibrium’s life, but also to the inherent volatility of the political relationships between regional powers at the time, and the constant need to reaffirm peace through mutual gift-exchange and treaties. Note, again, that Ibrium’s viziership arguably marks the most stable point in Ebla’s political hegemony, and especially in its relationship with its great rival Mari.

5.6 Ibbi-zikir

Regarding the textual sources for the political activities of Ebla in the time of Ibbi-zikir, some 30 MATs have been attributed to the first three or four years of his viziership, meaning that the documentation for this period is quite robust (Biga: 2010: 43-44). Ibrium was succeeded as vizier by his son, Ibbi-zikir, whose first twelve or so years in office were spent, much like his father, conducting military campaigns aimed at consolidating Ebla’s hegemony not only in northern Syria, but also along its southern frontier (Figure 18; Archi 2014: 179). A central focus of Ibbi-zikir’s Year 8-12 campaigns was establishing control over the Ibal confederacy (Figure 19). This region—essentially, the Orontes Valley and adjacent areas around Homs—was of utmost strategic importance as it stood as a buffer for the rear of Ebla’s army when it was engaged in the Euphrates. A hostile Ibal would have left Ebla’s military forces extremely vulnerable in such situations (Archi 2014: 179). In fact, Ebla had reason to be wary of both its frontiers, as Mari

27 ARET XII 1249 IV 3-6.
was again actively campaigning in the Euphrates, subduing Haddu and other polities. Mari’s aggressive expansion, coupled with Ibal’s persistent hostility, prompted Ebla to increase its diplomatic activity with the former city.

In the year of Ibrium’s death, or perhaps during the first year of Ibbi-zikir as vizier, Ebla mounted a campaign, apparently for the first time, against Alalahu (see below). In the same year, he initiated campaigns against Agagališ and Bahunu, two cities probably to be located between Uršum and a Taurus pass. Thus, under Ibbi-zikir, Ebla was engaging in aggressive expansionism on essentially all fronts. Ebla’s military victories were celebrated by Ibbi-zikir receiving numerous gifts, which are listed in the AAMs. As was the growing trend at this point, Ebla installed officials at these conquered cities (Biga 2010: 49), further attesting to Ebla’s changing policy towards the governing of its periphery, which gradually seems to have favored installing Eblaite officials in place of local rulers.

In his second year, Ibbi-zikir defeated the city of Sa’aru, whose location is unknown. The city was not mentioned in any earlier tablets, and thus Biga (2010: 49) concludes that it must represent a new area into which Ebla had expanded its political and economic hegemony. This interpretation fits with the hypothesis that Ibbi-zikir’s viziership was characterized by aggressive expansionism. Subsequently, in Ibbi-zikir’s third year, he mounted campaigns against Ilwum and Bagara. On the former campaign, he was apparently joined by Išar-damu, or it is possible that the king himself led the campaign, and that Ibbi-zikir was not a part of this expedition. Regardless, such involvement of the king in military affairs was rare (Biga 2010: 50). Bagara was probably located on the Euphrates, somewhere in the vicinity of Armi, or near to that polity’s sphere of control. Therefore, it is likely that the campaign against Bagara was a proxy war between the two regional powers. Biga (2010: 51) takes this campaign as evidence of Ebla’s growing opposition
to Armi. Conquering Bagara would have expanded Ebla’s control over trade along the major arteries of the Upper Euphrates region, much to the detriment of Armi (Biga 2010: 51). In this move against Bagara, Ibbi-zikir received strong support from Ebla’s allies. For example, officials (*ugula*) of fortresses belonging to Lu’atum received gifts following this campaign. Presumably, these officials helped provision Ibbi-zikir’s army. That Lu’atum was involved further signifies that Bagara is to be located in the Upper Euphrates region (Biga 2010: 52). Perhaps the most convincing evidence that the Bagara campaign was truly directed at Armi is the fact that in some cases the scribes refer to a campaign against Armi while discussing that against Bagara. While an assault on Armi itself appears unlikely, it is possible that Bagara was a secondary town in the regional state of Armi, perhaps on the periphery of Armi’s sphere of influence, and therefore Ebla sought to take advantage and weaken Armi by campaigning against Bagara (Biga 2010: 53).

Several texts, mostly dating to the last years of Ibbi-zikir, list the shipments that Ebla delivered to those cities who recognized Ebla’s hegemony, only a few of which can be positively located. NIrar is to be located somewhere north of Carchemish, as is Kakmiium. Ra’ak should be found south of Emar. Emar itself, located near the great bend of the Euphrates, was allied to Ebla during the reign of Irkab-damu through a royal marriage. Burman, Garmu and Lumnan are to be found on the Euphrates, presumably north of Emar but south of Carchemish. The identification of Dub (Tuba) with Umm el-Marra remains speculative. Urša’um (Uršum) is to be found at Gaziantep or in the vicinity between that city and the Euphrates. Utigu and Dulu are further north. Iritum, Ḥarran, Sanapzugum and Gudadanum are located along the modern Syro-

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28 ARET I 1-9 (no 2 + ARET IV 23; no 3 + ARET XII 146; no 7 + ARET XII 934+936), ARET I 224-225; and also TM.75.G.1731.
29 The text detailing this marriage alliance is published in ARES II 290.
Turkish border. These cities present an interesting case in that they are, as at Urša’um and Abarsal, associated not with kings (*en*), but rather a *badalum* (ba-da-lum), probably meaning official or minister. The next cities listed are Sarḫu, Arḫadu, and Ḫutimu, the latter two of which may have been independent. To the southeast, cities allied to or subordinate to Ebla included Šura-garru, possibly located near Lake Jabbul. In the same vicinity is Tišum, which Archi (2014: 165) describes as a fragmented political entity comprising several distinct settlements. Regarding Ibal—Ebla’s belligerent neighbor to the south—Archi (2014: 165-166) considers it to be a nebulous political entity, extending at least to the Rawda region. Further signifying Ibal as being located on the desert fringe are its attestations in the texts alongside the terms eden (of the steppe), Ŀú.pas (of the canal), and a-tuk (of the reservoir) (Archi 2014: 165-166).

Based on these lists of deliveries, Archi (2014: 166) concludes that Ebla controlled, or at least was allied with, some twenty other sovereigns, a geopolitical situation that is comparable to the later Amorite period. In terms of territorial extent, he sees Ebla as dominating an area larger than the second millennium kingdom of Yamhad (Archi 2014: 166), though he does not explicitly outline the nature of control throughout the territory dominated by Ebla. That is, Archi does not hypothesize the nature of Eblaite control, whether hegemonic or territorial in practice.

Further downriver was Tuttul, located southeast of Ebla along the Euphrates. Tuttul was the seat of the most important temple dedicated to the god Dagan. That there is no mention of a king at Tuttul in the Ebla texts, and further that it is not mentioned at all in the letter of Enna-Dagan, signifies that Tuttul was most likely a possession of Mari during the time of the Ebla archives (Archi 2014: 166). Despite the potential ambiguity of Tuttul’s allegiances, Ebla’s southeast frontier was largely demarcated by the territory of Mari. Well to the east of Ebla was the state of Nagar, which dominated the Khabur plains, controlling some ten major cities (Archi
To the northeast, Ebla’s frontier was marked by Armi (Armanum in Naram-Sin’s inscriptions), probably located near where the Euphrates turns eastward, in the steppes flanking the Taurus (but see below on the location of Armi). According to Archi, that Armi was able to maintain a constant presence of a significant cohort of merchants (lú-kar) at Ebla, and later needed to enlist the support of Nagar in a campaign against the kingdom, suggests that Armi should be considered a powerful regional state (Archi 2014: 166-167).

6 The Defeat of Mari

6.1 Parity Between Ebla and Mari

Ebla’s relationship with Mari was long and complex. From the beginning of the archives, it is evident that both cities engaged in commercial activity with each other. The main source of friction between the two cities involved their mutual desires to control the important trade networks situated along the Euphrates, but also in the Khabur. The Letter of Enna-Dagan outlines Mari’s previous activities in the Euphrates, and stands as a clear indication of that city’s intention of delineating territorial boundaries with an increasingly powerful Ebla. As a means of consolidating power, Ebla eventually allied itself with many kingdoms or cities that were previously under Mari’s hegemony, like Ra’ak, Emar, Shadab, and Haššuwan (Biga 2009: 33).

The early parity between Ebla and Mari is further attested in the record of an apparently successful military clash on the part of Ebla against its great rival.30 Dating to the reign of Irkabdamu, this text appears to document a defeat of Mari, possibly by Ebla. While this appears to have been only a minor conflict, it speaks to the changing nature of the relationship between both

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30 ARET VII 115.
cities, especially in light of the reduced value of the gifts Ebla sent Mari during Nizi and Enna-Dagan’s reigns (Archi and Biga 2003: 4).

Under Irkab-damu, Ebla allied itself with Emar, while Mari maintained controlled over Tuttul, just downriver. Thus, the border between both Ebla and Mari’s relative spheres of influence was probably located between Emar and Tuttul (Archi and Biga 2003: 10). Mari sealed a peace agreement with Ebla by taking part in a ceremony at the temple of Kura, Ebla’s chief deity. Armi also did this (Archi and Biga 2003: 10). Despite being at peace, Ebla opted to support Tuttul, at least indirectly, in its rebellion against Mari (Archi and Biga 2003: 11). These events continue to highlight the precarious political climate at the time. Peace never lasted very long, as each kingdom sought to opportunistically seize new territories or forge new alliances that ultimately forced conflicts to erupt between the burgeoning regional states.

Mari fought against Nagar in two successive campaign seasons, both of which saw Mari emerge as the victor. Mari was apparently wary of Nagar’s hegemony over the northern Khabur plains, and did not want it to spread southward towards the coveted confluence between the Khabur and Euphrates (Archi and Biga 2003: 11). Mari was also engaged in wars to the south, and contributed to a defeat suffered by Kiš in Ibrium’s fourth year. Further campaigns by Mari against Kiš were recorded in Ibrium’s eleventh year, with a decisive campaign taking place in Ibrium’s twelfth year. Following this Mari turned its attention to Ebla, and intensified commercial relations, much in the same way that Ebla intensified relations with Nagar and Armi following its later defeat of Mari (Archi and Biga 2003: 11).

Though Ebla and Mari were at peace for most of the period covered in the archives, it is clear that minor skirmishes took place. Temporary friendly relations notwithstanding, Ebla and Mari were rivals seeking to expand their regional hegemonies along the Middle Euphrates. At
least several instances record victories by Ebla over Mari, however minor, but the opposite is never true. Ebla is never listed as having suffered defeats at the hands of Mari, or any other city for that matter. This is a fact of the recording practices at Ebla. Defeats were never reported (Archi and Biga 2003: 12). Despite friendly relations, for the most part, Mari perhaps slighted Ebla by offering gifts of lesser value to Ebla upon the news of Ibrium’s death. Nevertheless, relations between Ebla and Mari intensified under Ibbi-zikir, and gifts continued to be exchanged frequently (Archi and Biga 2003: 12).

In the first ten years of Ibbi-zikir, the minister focused greatly on consolidating Ebla’s power along its periphery. He campaigned to the south against Ibal. Meanwhile, Mari concerned itself with consolidating its power in the Middle Euphrates, with a major campaign against Haddu in Ibbi-zikir year 10 (Archi and Biga 2003: 12). Two main routes provided access to Southern Mesopotamia: a northern route through Nagar and the Khabur, and a southern route through the Euphrates Valley, and Mari specifically. According to Archi and Biga (2003: 13), Mari could not prevent Eblaite expansion in large part because of its preoccupation with Nagar, to the north, and Kiš to the south. It is no surprise, then, that upon Ibbi-zikir’s victory over Mari, he hastily made alliances with the other regional powers surrounding Mari in an attempt to consolidate Ebla’s position along these important routes (Archi and Biga 2003: 13).

6.2 Alliance Formation and Preparations

Ibbi-zikir mounted a major campaign against Mari in his thirteenth year. Alliances were made with the following cities: Nlrar, Ra’ak, Burman, Dub, Emar, Garmu, Lumnan, Ibubu, Urša’um, Utig, Kammium and Iritum. After the successful campaign, each allied king received a plaque

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31 TM.75.G.1923 obv. xiii 1-7 records one such successful campaign against Mari, shortly after Ibrium’s death. This conflict was probably only a minor one.

32 These cities are listed in the following two documents: TM.75.G.2335, 2426.
or golden ingot of 1 mina (470 gr). The *badalum* (or ministers) of Ḫarran, Sanapzugum, Urša’um, and Gudadanum each received gifts weighing 392 gr. The alliance of states backing Ebla was found mainly on the north side of the modern Syro-Turkish border, save for Emar in the south. Following the campaign, golden plaques weighing 313 gr were delivered to Haddu, Nagar and Kiš, the three major states that surrounded Mari on the west, north and southeast, and who had supported Ebla in its campaign. The actual conflict took place near Terqa, where Ebla was able to defeat Mari’s army (Archi 2014: 169-170).

Given the scale of the expedition against Mari, Ebla’s preparations started early on in Ibbi-zikir’s thirteenth year, following his campaign against Ibal. Unfortunately, the evidence for Ibbi-zikir’s final five years are somewhat poorly preserved, and details of the actual campaign against Mari are only indirectly recorded in the same corpus of texts dealing with deliveries of garments and precious metals preserved in the MATs and AAMs.

6.3 The Defeat of Mari

The strategic alliances Ebla had forged with independent kingdoms surrounding Mari seem to have paid off, as in the lead up to the war between the kingdoms, Mari was surrounded on all fronts by hostile polities, including Kiš, Nagar and Haddu. Haddu’s alliance with Ebla was particularly troubling to Mari, who attempted to sway Haddu back into its camp. 33 Apparently, Haddu expertly played Mari and Ebla off each other, promising each city its loyalty at different times, but ultimately supported Ebla once it became clear that that city had the advantage in the actual conflict (Archi and Biga 2003: 15-16). This was apparently also the case with Kiš, who like Haddu, joined forces with Ebla only upon its advance on Tuttul on route to Mari. Nagar finally joined the expedition at Terqa, some 55 km upriver from Mari. It was at Terqa where

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33 These details are recorded in TM.75.G.2561.
Ebla’s coalition finally met Mari in the field, and won a decisive victory (Archi and Biga 2003: 16).

Despite the nature of Ebla’s victory at Terqa, Ebla did not advance further south, and the city of Mari itself was not besieged or attacked. Following its victory, Ebla proceeded to focus on solidifying its political alliances. Numerous gifts were sent to Ebla’s allies, most importantly Nagar and Kiš. Together with Ebla, these kingdoms formed what Archi and Biga call a Triple Alliance, with Ibbi-zikir taking the leading role (2003: 18).

7 The Destruction of Ebla

7.1 When Was Ebla Destroyed?

Ebla was destroyed three years after its victory over Mari (Archi and Biga 2003: 29). Consequently, Mari was conquered and destroyed by Akkad (Archi and Biga 2003: 29). Naram-Sin claimed to have destroyed Ebla and Armanum. The latter city was probably Armi, located to the north of Ebla. These western campaigns appear to have been Naram-Sin’s single greatest achievement (Archi and Biga 2003: 29). However, the evidence from Akkadian royal inscriptions poses several problems (Archi and Biga 2003: 29-30). First, Naram-Sin’s claims do not preclude the possibility that Sargon was responsible for Ebla’s destruction. More importantly, the Royal Inscriptions cannot be put into a strict chronology of events, whereas records like those in the Palace G archives can be arranged sequentially. Regarding Naram-Sin’s account of his campaign, it is noteworthy that Ebla and Armanum are always mentioned together. Archi and Biga state that Armi, despite being a regional state, probably only rose to prominence after Ebla’s destruction. Therefore, considering its importance as the focus of Naram-Sin’s boasts, Ebla must have already been greatly reduced by the time of his campaign.
In other words, Ebla’s destruction must predate Naram-Sin (Archi and Biga 2003: 30). Also important is the fact that Naram-Sin does not mention Mari, which was also violently destroyed some years after Ebla. It would seem probable that had Naram-Sin campaigned against Ebla and Armanum, he surely would have had to pass by Mari. Why, then, did he not conquer that city? It is likely that by the time of Naram-Sin’s western campaign, both Mari and Ebla had already suffered major defeats (Archi and Biga 2003: 34).

7.2 Who Destroyed Ebla?

According to Archi and Biga (2003: 35), Nagar and Ibal were incapable of destroying Ebla. Mari represents the only candidate that could have inflicted such complete destruction. This entails that Mari recovered quickly following its defeat at the hands of Ebla, and just three years later destroyed its great rival. This event would have been significant. Sealings of Mari’s king Išgi-Mari depict a great military victory, perhaps against Ebla (Archi and Biga 2003: 35).

The destruction of Ebla preceded the fall of Mari (Archi and Biga 2003: 31). Mari’s ultimate demise occurred 13 years after the destruction of Ebla (Archi and Biga 2003: 35). Thus, the current view sees Mari as the destroyer of Ebla, and not an Akkadian king, whether Sargon or Naram-Sin. By the time the Akkadian kings were campaigning in northwest Syria, Ebla had already suffered a major defeat at the hands of Mari. It was most likely this attack that destroyed the Royal Palace G and burned the clay tablets in the archive.

8 The Role of Armi in Ebla’s Destruction

8.1 Armi’s Attack on Ḫarran

Equally important as the question of who destroyed Ebla is the matter of how this destruction was accomplished. After all, Ebla had only recently asserted itself as a major regional power,
defeating Mari in a significant battle. How, then, could it have been completely annihilated just three years later?

In the texts, Armi appears as Ar-mi-um\textsuperscript{ki} in tablets dating to the time of Arrukum and earlier, and alternatively as Ar-mi\textsuperscript{ki} in the more recent texts dating to Ibrium and Ibbi-zikir (Archi 2011: 5; Bonechi 1990). The kingdom of Armi remained an independent kingdom for the duration of the 45 to 50 years covered by the Ebla texts. It is not mentioned in the Treaty with Abarsal, nor is it listed as an independent city allied to Ebla, or one of the other many cities that recognized Ebla’s hegemony.

Concerning the preparations for the campaign against Mari, Ebla was especially strategic in securing alliances with the kingdoms that it had long had friendly relations with. However, Ebla went further, giving gifts to cities that had previously been the focus of hostilities in the years leading up to the war against Mari. The MATs\textsuperscript{34} record the cities that received gifts, which included Ib-al\textsuperscript{ki}, Ib-al\textsuperscript{ki} lú Eden (“of the steppe”), La-sa-nu\textsuperscript{ki}, Da-ù\textsuperscript{ki} lú ’À-mu, Da-ù\textsuperscript{ki} lú igi-tùm and Si-da-(l)u\textsuperscript{ki}. Ibal was a significant threat to Ebla’s southern border. Sending gifts to Ibal and other hostile cities was probably meant to ensure that they would not cause problems while Ebla was engaged with Mari (Archi and Biga 2003: 25). Notably absent from this list is Armi, Ebla’s rival to the north.

Archi (2014: 169) suggests that an attack on Ḥarran—a city allied to Ebla—by Armi may have prompted a halt to Ebla’s advance on the city of Mari itself, as it was forced to deal with these matters further north. Ebla united with Nagar in an attempt to bring aid to their ally. This situation is curious, however, as during the reign of Irkab-damu, Armi had apparently been a close ally of Ebla. Given that Armi did not participate in the coalition against Mari, Armi’s

\textsuperscript{34}Specifically, TM.75.G.2335.
aggressive attack on Ḫarran seems opportunistic, and for Archi, these events may have indirectly led to Ebla’s eventual destruction just three years later. Had Ebla not been forced to retreat from its campaign against Mari in order to come to the aid of Ḫarran, it would have likely conquered Mari itself and prevented any future attacks from that city, at least in the short-term (Archi 2014: 169). Apparently, Ebla’s strong relations with Nagar and Kiš did nothing to prevent its own destruction (Archi 2014: 169-170).

Kiš is mentioned some 70 times in texts dating to the last ten years of the archives, attesting to the strong contacts between both cities at the time. Records indicate that Ibbi-zikir visited Nagar and Kiš following Ebla’s successful campaign against Mari. Prior to this victory, direct access along the Euphrates route through Syria was largely impeded by Mari. To connect Ebla with Kiš, messengers and merchants had to use a more northern and circuitous route that passed through Nagar. Perhaps this is why Ebla, in general, had such a northerly focus; it was trying to consolidate its long-distance network and to do so it had to circumvent Mari somehow, and this brought it into close contact with other northern kingdoms of the third millennium BCE, especially Abarsal and Nagar (Archi 2014: 170).

The MATs that date to the period of Arrukum can be dated to the last five years of that vizier’s career, but they cannot be placed in a more precise chronological order. Nevertheless, they contain some valuable information about the state of affairs at the time. For example, they indicate that messengers were sent between Ebla and Armī every two months or so, meaning that even at this relatively early stage, the two had very frequent contact, and were apparently on equal and friendly terms (Archi 2011: 7-12). Like most interpolity relationships of the time, however, this peace was tenuous, and certainly not lasting.

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35 ARET IX 94 §3.
8.2 The Location of Armi

In an attempt to locate Armi, Archi (2011: 5-7) notes that the territory outlined as belonging to Ebla in the treaty with Abarsal means that Armi must be located further still to the north. Specifically, the swath of territory stretching from Ursa’um and Ḫarran to Homs is taken as the core of Ebla’s territorial extent. However, while it is likely that Archi is correct in assuming that Armi, as a regional state, occupied a territory beyond this area, it is not impossible that the cities described as being allied to Ebla occupy not a contiguous territory, but rather a patchwork of allied or fully controlled cities scattered about the Euphrates and Orontes valleys, and places in between. In other words, there is no reason to assume that Ebla’s territorial control prohibited the presence of a hostile or at least neutral state located in and amongst friendlier cities. In fact, the very possibility of a network of allied states spread out like a patchwork across the landscape could very well have been an impetus for repeated insecurity and instability in the region throughout the period of the archives. This is especially so for the Euphrates and adjacent areas, which were all subject to significant political and military interest apparently on the part of not just Ebla and Mari, but at least two additional regional states in Nagar and Armi. This, of course, does not take into account the political and economic aspirations of those individual cities whose allegiances were so desperately sought after, as evinced by the frequent gifts exchanged between cities.

During Arrukum’s viziership, Ebla carried out a campaign against Adabig. ARET II 14 § 35 reads: \(Ar\text{-}mi^\text{ki}\, \text{hi-mu-túm} \, nīg\text{-}kas\text{₄} \, si\text{-}in \, A\text{-}da\text{-}bi\text{-}ig^\text{ki}\) (“[garments to someone from] Armi to be delivered for the military expedition against Adabig”). Adabig was a town associated with Alalaḫu, and is perhaps to be located in the Amuq Plain. If Armi was active in this region in the time of Arrukum, it stands as evidence that Alalaḫu had not yet come under the direct control of
Ebla. Indeed, the fact that Ebla is sending garments to Armi, meaning that it is supporting its military action against Adabig, suggests that Ebla and Alalaḫu were not on friendly terms even at this early date. Moreover, since the focus of this campaign, the Amuq Plain, is to the northwest of Ebla, it implies that Armi should be located further to the north and east, as opposed to the Euphrates region north of Emar. Thus, this text hints at the future activity in the Amuq Plain on the part of Ebla, whose policy became increasingly aggressive, especially with regards to controlling cities in the area where Armi also operated. Additionally, Ebla’s act of sending gifts to Armi, while hardly surprising given the common nature of the practice, confirms that both polities were allied at some point prior to Ebla’s increasingly expansionist phase under Ibrium and Ibbi-zikir. Perhaps relations between Ebla and Armi were strained as a result of the former’s seizure of territory between both kingdoms.

Further attesting to the stable, and perhaps amicable early relationship between Ebla and Armi are a series of mu-tūm documents dating to the time of Arrukum that describe deliveries to the central administration. The cities listed include Abarsal, Armi, Dub, Gudadanum, Haššuwan, Iritum, Kablul, Kakmium, Mari, NIrar and Ursa’um. Of these, Mari is the most commonly mentioned in the texts, followed by Kablul and Armi. Importantly, these deliveries appear to have come not only from cities allied to or under Ebla’s control, but also those that were independent, like Mari and Armi. This implies that even as early as Arrukum’s final five years as vizier, Mari and Armi had relatively stable relations with Ebla (Archi 2011: 9). This is corroborated by an annual account dating to the time of Arrukum suggesting that an Eblaite princess was sent to Armi as a bride.36

36 TM.77.G.730, which is also an early version of the AAMs.
In the texts, Armi is mostly associated with cities like Haššuwan and Ursa’um, which are located to the north of Ebla, perhaps signifying that it is in this general area, namely, north of the modern Syro-Turkish border, that Armi’s location should be sought. Archi (2011: 11) posits Tilbeshar as the location for Haššuwan, while suggesting that Gaziantep may be ancient Ursa’um. Otto (2006) has proposed that Armi be located at Tell Bazi-Banat on the Middle Euphrates, and this has gained support by Biga (Otto and Biga 2010).

8.3 Ebla and Armi Under Ibrium

Armi eventually emerged as a regional power, as evinced by its frequent contact with other major kingdoms, including Mari, Nagar, and Abarsal. Abarsal, by the time of Arrukum, had already come under the control of Ebla. Given Armi’s activity with these other cities, it is not surprising that its messengers feature prominently in the texts. Undoubtedly, Armi should be considered a major kingdom, on equal footing with the other regional states like Nagar and Mari (Archi 2011: 11). Further attesting to Armi’s status are the lists of gifts delivered to that city from Ebla. These are recorded as plates of gold, and other such items, reserved only for individuals of very high rank (Archi 2011: 12).

In the time of Ibrium, relations between Ebla and Armi had apparently cooled, as is implied by the relatively modest gifts exchanged between both cities (Archi 2011: 12). Ebla was a thriving kingdom under Ibrium. During his viziership, the cities that sent deliveries of gifts to Ebla were more numerous than in the earlier mu-túm documents dating to Arrukum. Under Ibrium, Armi remained independent, as did the city of Ursa’um. In fact, Armi may have even acted as a barrier to Ebla’s expansion to the north and east, as exemplified in several texts that

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According to Anne Porter (pers. comm.), Otto has recently reconsidered the association of Armi with Tell Bazi-Banat, following instead Archi’s identification of Samsat as the better candidate.
list gifts sent from Ebla to Hamazi, a kingdom located east of the Tigris.\textsuperscript{38} Presumably, these gifts had to be delivered through an intermediary from Armi, as it stood between Ebla and the polities which it desired diplomatic relations further east.

Ibrium campaigned regularly. During his viziership, he led campaigns against Mari, Gudadanum, Kakmium, Halšum, Sidarin, Zahiran and other cities, most in the Euphrates area. Armi, however, is not listed as a focus of Ibrium’s military activities. Despite the relatively lukewarm relations between both cities, Ebla was apparently unwilling or unable to expand into Armi’s territory, particularly as it sought to consolidate its power along the Middle Euphrates and against its other rivals further south.

8.4 Ebla and Armi Under Ibbi-zikir

Warfare increased in frequency under Ibbi-zikir (Archi 2011: 13). In his third year, he campaigned against Bagara, which may have been a proxy war against the nearby Armi. Despite these hostilities, the relationship between both cities appears to have improved remarkably, as in the following year, Armi took part in a peace ritual involving the renewal of the silver mask of the chief Eblaite deity Kura. No other city, before or after, took part in such a ritual. The strength of the alliance between Armi and Ebla is demonstrated by the frequent exchange of messengers and gifts in Ibbi-zikir’s fifth year. Only Mari had such frequent interaction with Ebla, attesting to the importance of Armi at this time (Archi 2011: 14).

The AAMs dating to Ibbi-zikir’s sixth year are mostly concerned with deliveries to Armi. The significant interaction between both cities apparently concerned the establishment of a shared border or boundaries for each polity’s sphere of influence. Išbudu, a messenger from Armi, was given a bracelet after fixing the boundary stones that marked the border between Ebla

\textsuperscript{38} ARET XIV 71 and ARET XIV 55.
and Armi (Archi 2011: 15). According to Archi (2011: 15), it is unlikely that the two cities bordered each other; rather, like the situation with Abarsal, it is more likely the case that these boundary stones were established within a buffer zone occupied by the different cities allied to either polity.

Also in Ibbi-zikir’s sixth year, Ebla campaigned against the city of Nabu, apparently located near both Kakmium and Armi. Despite the proximity of Nabu to Armi, the latter city supported Ebla’s campaign by providing them with aid. Armi or its allies ultimately captured the king of Nabu, and delivered him to Ebla. These events imply that Ebla and Armi were rather amicable during Ibbi-zikir’s sixth year (Archi 2011: 15-16).

Whatever friendly relations were shared between Ebla and Armi, peace was usually short-lived. By Ibbi-zikir’s eighth year, Ebla had continued its expansionist policies, turning especially to the south where it began a protracted war with Ibal. This policy strained relations with Nagar, Mari and Armi, who were undoubtedly nervous about Ebla’s growing power. Two Eblaite representatives traveled to Armi with the express purpose of outlining precisely which cities belonged to Ebla, thus establishing its border with Armi definitely. This act is reminiscent of the Treaty with Abarsal, though in the case with Armi there appears to be parity between the partners, and a real interest in mitigating each polity’s hegemonic ambitions. Thus, by year eight of Ibbi-zikir, Ebla found itself in an increasingly tense political environment. Expanding both to the north, where it pushed against Armi’s hegemony, and to the south against Ibal, Ebla was engaged with strong polities on multiple fronts (Archi 2011: 16). Armi, meanwhile, was not necessarily idle, but continued to assert an expansionist policy of its own. Moreover, its great rival Mari continued to present problems to the southeast.

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39 ARET XIV 83.
8.5 Ebla’s “Great Political Game”

The last four years prior to Ebla’s destruction are characterized by what Archi (2014) calls the “great political game" played between Ebla and Mari. In preparation for a major campaign against its rival, Ebla forged alliances with Nagar and Kiš, the two regional states bordering Mari to the north and south. Representatives from these two kingdoms accompanied Ibbi-zikir on the campaign, which defeated Mari at Terqa, within striking distance of Mari. Prior to the conflict, Ebla went to great lengths to assure the allegiance of its many client states, as evinced by the delivery of considerable gifts to the cities of Ra’ak, Burman, Garmu, Ibubu, Utig, Iritum, Kakmium, and Nitrar. The efforts to ensure a victorious campaign against Mari constituted a major investment. Upon achieving victory, Ebla’s newfound supremacy was solidified by an interdynastic marriage between the Eblaite princess Kešdut and the son of the king of Kiš (Archi 2011: 17). An alliance between Ebla and Nagar was further solidified by the interdynastic marriage of the Eblaite princess Tagriš-damu to a prince Ultum-huhu of Nagar (Archi 2011: 18).

Despite the alliances forged both prior to and following Ebla’s campaign against Mari, the former city continued to engage in new conflicts. The MATs dating to Ibbi-zikir’s viziership indicate that immediately after Ebla’s victory over Mari, it went to war with Armi. This action may have been in response to the events that transpired during Ebla’s campaign against Mari. As noted, Armi was not idle while Ebla extended its hegemony throughout the Euphrates and elsewhere. In the last years before the destruction of Ebla, Armi had apparently engaged in an aggressive expansion of its own, which included campaigns against cities allied to Ebla, like Ḥarran. Ebla undoubtedly intervened in such instances, but this action may have hamstrung Ebla’s military efforts against Mari.
8.6 Significance of Armi’s Strategy

The war against Armi is significant for a number of reasons. First, Ebla enlisted the aid of strong allies, including Nagar and Kiš. This implies that Armi was by no means a minor enemy, but rather a regional state that posed a major security threat to Ebla and its allies, especially Nagar. Archi (2011: 29) posits that Armi is to be located to the northeast of Ebla and north of Nagar, perhaps not too distant from Ḫarran. Also significant is the timing of the campaign against Armi. The campaign is mentioned on a tablet for the same month in which gifts were delivered to those cities who took part in the campaign against Mari. Archi and Biga (2003: 29-35) take this as evidence that Armi took advantage of Ebla, and attacked Ḫarran while Ibbi-zikir and his army were engaged against Mari at Terqa. Archi questions why Ibbi-zikir did not pursue the complete capitulation of Mari and attack the city itself. Following Mari’s defeat at Terqa, there do not appear to be any immediate impediments to Ebla’s advance. However, Ibbi-zikir may have been required to abandon his offensive campaign in order to come to the aid of his close ally Ḫarran. While successful in its war with Armi, Ebla was ultimately destroyed just a few years later, probably by Mari. Thus, Armi’s action against Ebla and its allies contributed to Ebla’s destruction. Had Ebla been free to continue its action against Mari, it may have prevented that city’s apparent resurgence (Archi 2011: 19). In other words, Ebla appears to have misplayed the “great game” by tying itself to allied cities whose vulnerability inhibited Ebla’s own expansion. Armi’s importance in these events, and especially its attacking of Ḫarran, should not be underestimated. According to Archi (2011: 27-28), the most important military victory of Naram-Sin’s later Syrian campaign was his conquest of the kingdom of Armanum. The fortifications of Armanum were impressive enough to warrant detailed descriptions in later Old Babylonian copies of Akkadian period sources (Archi 2011: 27). Archi argues that based on the
apparent impressiveness of Armı’s citadel, coupled with the geographical inferences from the Ebla texts and other sources, Armı cannot be located at Tell Banat-Bazi, but rather is best identified with ancient Samsat (Figures 20 and 21; Archi 2011: 29-30). Armı, in short, was a major polity bordering Ebla and Nagar, and its activities greatly influenced the fortunes of those polities located further south.

9 Ebla and Alalaḫu

9.1 Identification, Location and Attestations of Alalaḫu

The Ebla texts contain comparatively few references to the Amuq Plain. Of the towns and cities mentioned in the texts, few can be identified in and around the plain. The exception, however, is Alalaḫu, the major polity in the Amuq Plain, and identifiable with the well-known city of Alalakh of the second millennium. Alalakh is associated with the Middle and Late Bronze Age mound at Tell Atçana, along the south-central part of the plain, just east of the modern right bank of the Orontes. Third millennium levels had previously been identified at Tell Atçana by Woolley (1955), but these results have been called into question (see Chapter 7). As a result, the earliest Bronze Age occupation at Tell Atçana may date to the late third or early second millennium, meaning that its identification as Alalaḫu of the Ebla texts is untenable. Tell Tayinat, on the other hand, has substantial third millennium remains (Braidwood and Braidwood 1960; Welton 2011; 2014; Welton et al. 2011), and is situated only a few hundred meters to the northwest of Tell Atçana. Considering its proximity to Tell Atçana, it is probable that Tell Tayinat represents Alalaḫu of the Ebla texts, with that toponym transferring to the nearby mound during the second millennium following Tell Tayinat’s abandonment at the end of the EB IV and the emergence of Tell Atçana in the Middle Bronze Age (Figure 22).
The city of Alalahu is spelled in a variety of ways in the Ebla texts. Table 7 lists some of these variants and their attestations in published and unpublished texts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variations</th>
<th>Attestations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A-a-a-aḥki</td>
<td>ARET XII 909 v. iv 5, 937 r. iii 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-a-a-ḥu ki</td>
<td>MEE II 37 r. vii 1/ARET XV 10 vii 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-la-la-ḥu ki</td>
<td>TM.75.G.1653 r. iii 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Aṣ(NI)-a-ḥu ki</td>
<td>ARET III 31 r. iii 11 (or 10?); ARET XII 210 ii 4, 731 i 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Aṣ-a-la-ḥu ki</td>
<td>TM.75.G.1701 r. xiii 2; TM.75.G.1867 r. viii 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Aṣ-la-a-ḥu ki</td>
<td>TM.75.G.1527 r. x 5; TM.75.G.1708 r. vii 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Aṣ-la-la-ḥu ki</td>
<td>ARET III 370 iv 4; ARET XII 161 ii 4; MEE II 37 v. iii 8;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TM.75.G.1462 r. iii 4; TM.75.G.2361 v. v 3;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TM.75.G.10088+10182 r. xxi 4; TM.75.G.10280 r. vii 3;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ARET XII 667 iv 7, 1043 xiii 2; ARET III 325 r. ii 2; ARET XV 30 r. iii 1;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Aṣ-la-la-ḥu-um ki</td>
<td>ARET XII 825 r. iii 5, 830 iii 2; TM.75.G.10280 v. iv 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La-la-ḥu ki</td>
<td>TM.75.G.10088+10182 v. ii 6</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Table 7 - Variant spellings of Alalakh in the Ebla texts, and their attestations (after Archi 2006: 5)

9.2 Alalahu Up to the Time of Ibrigum

Archi (2006: 2-4) notes that Alalahu became subject to Eblaite control at least as early as the reign of Irkab-damu and the viziership of Arrukum, some 35 years before Palace G’s destruction. Carchemish was subdued around the same time (Archi 2011: 26). The uḵula assigned to oversee Eblaite affairs at Alalahu was named Ze-malik. He, along with other Eblaite figures, were occasionally given deliveries of textiles from Ebla. It is unclear if Ze-malik had replaced a local king, as no such ruler is attested in the texts. In fact, the Ebla texts do not appear to provide any further information regarding Ze-malik’s role or subsequent career, nor is it clear if he was a local resident appointed to the position of uḵula, or if he was an official from Ebla sent to oversee affairs at Alalahu.
Concerning the toponymy of the Amuq Plain, the second millennium corpus in the Alalakh texts are more restricted geographically, but nevertheless find parallels in the Ebla texts. Examples include Adabig, Iribu, Luban, Muraru and others, all of which are described as belonging to Ebla. Though few of these cities are identifiable, most are probably to be found in the region to the northwest of Ebla, all of which was apparently under Ebla’s control (Archi 2006: 2).

Dub (possibly Tuba), also mentioned in the Alalakh texts, is listed in the Ebla texts as having its own king, and thus remained at least semi-autonomous during the height of Ebla’s power. However, Dub’s location is yet to be confirmed, and it is likely that it should be situated not in the Amuq Plain, but rather at Umm el-Marra in the Jabbul. Regardless, the toponyms occurring in both corpuses, and apparently representing settlements in and around the Amuq Plain, appear to have belonged to Ebla at the time of its political height in the third millennium, and possibly as early as Arrukum. The textual evidence is too scant to say precisely when Alalaḫu came to be dominated by Ebla, but it is clear that by the reign of Irkab-damu Ebla had already established its hegemony over much of its northern periphery, stretching from the Amuq Plain to the Euphrates River at Carchemish.

This hegemony apparently lasted into the reign of Irkab-damu’s successor Išar-damu and his vizier I bribium. For example, TM.G.75.1462—attributed to the time of I bribium—records a list of deliveries to Ebla from some 40 cities. Alalaḫu is listed alongside cities that were either under Eblaite control, or, like Dub, were independent or semi-autonomous. Alalaḫu is recorded as having delivered 670 grams of silver compared to just 80 grams from Luban. This speaks not only to the considerable mineral wealth of Alalaḫu, but also to Ebla’s ability to extract such wealth from the formerly independent city in the form of tribute.
9.3 Did Alalaḫu Defeat Ebla?

While Alalaḫu was subordinate to Ebla early in the period covered by the archives, documents from the time of Ibbi-zikir show that Ebla’s hold over the former was somewhat tenuous. TM.75.G.1527 records another delivery from Alalaḫu to Ebla, but dating to a later time than the delivery recorded on TM.G.75.1462. In this subsequent delivery, Alalaḫu sent just 245 grams of silver, compared to its earlier delivery of 670 grams. The reduction in the quantity of the tribute is not insignificant. For example, under the Mariote kings Nizi and Enna-Dagan, Ebla’s annual tribute to Mari was significantly reduced compared to the deliveries made to Iblul-il. This is seen as evidence for the gradual decline in Mari’s power in the Euphrates region, as its weaker kings were unable to exact the larger tributes commanded by their predecessors. Moreover, it signals Ebla’s rise as a regional power, at the expense of Mari’s Euphratean hegemony. The reduction in Alalaḫu’s tribute can perhaps be interpreted similarly, meaning that Ebla’s influence over the Amuq Plain had started to deteriorate during Išar-damu’s reign. Given the limited data, it is difficult to make this assertion, but the trend seems to be that Ebla’s authority was beginning to weaken over time, at least in this corner of its periphery.

In addition to the reduction in tributary deliveries, perhaps the most important event signalling Alalaḫu’s growing insubordination concerns a clash between both cities in the time of Ibbi-zikir. TM.G.75.10280 records a delivery to an Eblaite official and a brief account of the outcome of the conflict: “1+1+1 garments to Ibdulu, the guard who brought news that Alalaḫu defeated (was defeated by) Ebla.” Though the syntax of this text—namely, the ambiguities surrounding the translation of “defeated/was defeated by”—can seem to imply that Alalaḫu was victorious over Ebla, this is very unlikely. Similar syntax is used to report the outcomes of other conflicts, and though it remains ambiguous, it is apparent that this was a common formulation
used to report victories. More to the point, nowhere in the texts does Ebla report its own defeats, and therefore it seems highly unlikely that this event details a military defeat at the hands of a previously dominated city in the Amuq Plain. Still, the fact that Alalaḫu was able to engage in a military operation against Ebla, coupled with its gradually reducing tribute payments, indicates that Ebla’s hold over the Amuq Plain had weakened by the time of Ibbi-zikir. One possible explanation is that like Armi, Alalaḫu sought to take advantage of Ebla’s single-minded focus on defeating Mari to engage in its own attempts at political expansion. Alternatively, Alalaḫu may have been trying to free itself from Ebla’s domination. However, Biga (2010: 47) states that this conflict represents Ebla’s first campaign against Alalaḫu, and she dates it to either Ibrium’s final year or the first year of Ibbi-zikir. Subsequent to this campaign, Alalaḫu features more prominently in the texts. Thus, it is possible that this campaign marks a significant expansion of Ebla’s control westward towards the Mediterranean, though the degree to which there was any direct contact with the sea remains uncertain.

MAT 75.G.1588 mentions several Ebla officials that were active in Alalaḫu, implying that it was already under the control of Ebla by this time. Biga dates this text to the first years of Ibbi-zikir based on the presence of the vizier’s name, but especially that of the queen-mother Dusigu, and the queen herself. As Dusigu died in Ibbi-zikir year 3, this account must date to the earlier part of his viziership (Biga 2010: 47). The defeat of Alalaḫu noted above is not recorded in the annual account of metals, perhaps indicating that this conflict was only minor, and not worthy of mention.40 At the very least, it does not appear to have resulted in substantial deliveries of gifts, as would be expected for a larger, more celebrated campaign, as evinced elsewhere in the archives (Biga 2010: 47-48). According to Biga, based on prosopographic data,

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40  75.G.2434+10280. These two tablets appear to join. It implies that as a result of the conflict, Eblaite officials could operate more freely in Alalaḫu’s territory.
this tablet may belong to the final year of Ibrium, whose name appears in the text (Biga 2010: 48).

Archi (2006:3) also argues that the conflict alluded to in TM.G.75.10280 would have been only a minor skirmish with little consequence to the tributary relationship between both cities, but it nevertheless highlights the tenuous nature of the arrangements. Moreover, since Alalahu was able to assemble its own force with which to confront Ebla, one wonders what kind of influence the Eblaite overseer Ze-malik, or any other such overseer, had on local governance. It seems unlikely that Ebla maintained a permanent military presence in Alalahu, at least prior to the recorded conflict, and instead it limited itself only to specific administrative functions, including the collection and delivery of tribute payments. Such practice reflects a policy inspired by a hegemonic approach to governance of peripheral territorials, as proposed by the Territorial-Hegemonic Model.

9.4 Cities Associated with Alalahu

Alalahu is mentioned in two different texts as delivering tribute to the royal palace at Ebla. Numerous other cities are also listed in these texts, some of them subject polities, but others were also independent or semi-autonomous, like Dub and Ḫarran. Importantly, Alalahu is listed as having delivered to Ebla a tribute payment consisting of 670 grams of silver in the first text, and just 240 grams in the second text. In contrast, the city of Luban delivered just 80 grams of silver to Ebla.

Some important observations can be made based on this information. First, Archi notes that its inclusion alongside independent kingdoms like Dub and Ḫarran is suggestive of Alalahu’s importance as the main city in the Amuq plain (2006: 3). This is also supported by the considerable amount of silver delivered to Ebla by Alalahu, compared to that of Luban.
However, unlike Dub, Ḫarran, and numerous other independent kingdoms mentioned in the texts, Alalaḫu did not have its own king. Rather it was governed by the Eblaite ugula Ze-malik. Its association with these other independent kingdoms implies that Alalaḫu was an important city, and possibly only recently lost its autonomy. It is impossible to determine whether or not Alalaḫu had previously been ruled by a king or some other type of local sovereign, but its association with other independent cities hints at its importance.

9.5 The Nature of Ebla’s Control Over the Amuq Plain

Based on the scant details preserved in the texts, the following summary of the relationship between Ebla and Alalaḫu may be presented. At some point during the vizierships of either Arrukum or Ibrium, Alalaḫu became a tributary of Ebla. By the time of Ibbi-zikir, an Eblaite overseer was installed at Alalaḫu. Annual deliveries of silver were sent from Alalaḫu to Ebla. The amount of silver making up these payments appears to have declined around the same time that Alalaḫu engaged Ebla in a minor skirmish. It remains unclear whether Alalaḫu had previously been ruled by a king who had been removed by Ebla. Further, the frequency of the skirmishes between Alalaḫu and Ebla is also unclear, though perhaps such events were commonplace.

What do these events reveal about the nature of Ebla’s control over the Amuq Plain? By considering these details from the perspective of the Territorial-Hegemonic Model, Ebla’s indirect approach to peripheral governance becomes apparent, though it also suggests that it may have been transitioning towards more direct forms of control akin to territorial states and empires. Unlike those polities that were still ruled by their own kings, but were subordinate to Ebla and regularly delivered tribute, Alalaḫu’s governance was put directly under the purview of an Eblaite official. Admittedly, the functions of an ugula like Ze-malik are still unclear. Outside
of ensuring the timely delivery of tribute, the texts reveal nothing about Ze-malik’s role in
governing Alalahu. Local administrators must have been in place, even if a king was not present.

The reference to a clash between Alalahu and Ebla presents a number of problems. First,
Alalahu’s ability to confront Ebla militarily implies that it still managed its own armies or
militias and was able to mobilize them freely. This situation makes sense for an autonomous or
semi-autonomous polity that was responsible for its own security, as is the case for peripheral
states in hegemonic systems. However, Ebla had previously installed its own ugula at Alalahu,
yet this did not prevent conflicts between both cities. Perhaps this suggests that the role of the
ugula was restricted to tribute collection, and local government was left largely intact. This
interpretation leaves open the question regarding the lack of a king at Alalahu, and it further
suggests that even when Eblaite officials were present in a subjugated polity, significant degrees
of local autonomy were retained.

The textual references to Alalahu in the Ebla texts indicate that even in cases where Ebla
had installed its own officials, much local autonomy was retained. As a result, it must be
concluded that Eblaite policy towards the government of even its most highly integrated
peripheral states was largely hegemonic in nature. The function of the ugula at places like
Alalahu was focused on tribute extraction. There is no indication that Ebla sought to manipulate
local production or to invest in local infrastructure. There are no references to Eblaite buildings,
whether palaces, forts or garrisons, in or around Alalahu. In short, Ebla’s strategy in the Amuq
Plain was largely extractive. Even with its own officials operating in the region, Ebla opted not
to invest in further measures of incorporation. While it is possible that the presence of an ugula
could be taken as a sign that Ebla was in the process of transitioning towards more territorial
management strategies in the Amuq Plain, Alalahu’s reduced tribute payments and apparently
frequent military clashes point to weak integration attempts on the part of Ebla. In other words, Ebla’s peripheral governance was limited to hegemonic strategies that involved low-cost, low-reward outcomes.

10 Summary Observations

In this chapter, the geopolitical context of Ebla’s expansion was explored through a detailed examination of the documentary evidence stemming from the Palace G archives. Through careful ordering of the texts, Ebla scholars have been able to establish a relative chronology of the tablets, making it possible to reconstruct some of Ebla’s political history. This history records that over the course of 40 or 50 years Ebla gradually expanded its hegemony over a considerable territory. A combination of strategic alliances and military campaigning resulted in Ebla establishing control over a series of client states. Many of these subordinate polities remained autonomous or semi-autonomous, while Eblaite officials were installed at others. Upon review, however, it is apparent that even in cases where Ebla exercised more direct forms of control over client states, much local autonomy was retained.

Analysis of the social organization of the Eblaite chora reveals that even in Ebla’s immediate hinterland, a “hands-off” approach may have been the norm. This is echoed in the treatment of Ebla’s periphery as that state extended its power into new regions. In the case of the Amuq Plain, Ebla installed its own *ugula*, or overseer, at the main regional polity of Alalaḫu, but this functionary’s duties appear to have been limited to tribute exaction, and Alalaḫu was able to maintain a level of autonomy that enable it to mount military campaigns against Ebla.

The overview of Ebla’s political history presented in this chapter reveals that Ebla approach to governing was largely based on mutual gift-exchange, though military action was also possible. As for important regional powers like Nagar, Mari and Kiš, Ebla occasionally
engaged in interdynastic marriages. These efforts were mainly oriented towards securing alliances and fidelity between Ebla and its client states, or in the case of the regional powers, its peers. However, even in situations where client states were governed by Eblaite overseers, gift-exchange continued. Ebla’s management strategies, therefore, appear to have been largely hegemonic rather than territorial in nature. Though the installing of overseers at client states can be understood as a step towards more direct governance of the periphery, the transition towards more territorial strategies was never completed prior to Ebla’s destruction.

In summary, this chapter served to demonstrate that despite Ebla’s rapid growth into a regional power in the time of Ibrium and Ibbi-zikir, it continued to adhere to policies that are best understood as hegemonic, and not territorial. Despite frequent campaigns against both large and small polities, much of Ebla’s approach to diplomacy was based on co-option rather than coercion. There remains little evidence in the archives of direct management of the periphery, such as references to palaces or administrative units being constructed in subjugated cities. Likewise, there appear to be no direct references to forts or garrisons being built in foreign cities. Ebla did, indeed, install its own officials in certain cities, like Alalaḫu and Carchemish, but it remains unclear whether these officials had responsibilities other than exacting tribute from the local population.
Chapter 5
The Setting and Regional Surveys

The world of Ebla comprised a complex and diverse set of local environments and ecological zones, including river valleys, high mountain ranges, arid to semi-arid steppes, undulating plains, and marshes. Our ability to reconstruct this world is in large part due to the many extensive geological and archaeological surveys that have been conducted in the Northern Levant and Syro-Anatolia. The first part of this chapter examines the geography, climate, flora and fauna of the major regions connected to Ebla. This is followed by a discussion concerning the impact of local environmental conditions on the development of economic and subsistence strategies in Ebla’s periphery, focusing on the notion of a “zone of uncertainty” and its relationship to the textile economy of the EBA.

The third part of this chapter summarizes the major regional archaeological surveys conducted in these same areas. Three geographical and climatic sub-regions are reviewed: the Orontes Watershed and Western Syria; the Middle Euphrates and Balikh River; and the Western Jazira and Khabur Basin. Concerning regional surveys, four sectors are examined, corresponding to the territories most impacted by Ebla’s expansion. Each sector is treated according to cardinal orientation from the core polity at Ebla.

I conclude this chapter with a summary of the key environmental dynamics and an assessment of the quality of the regional survey data—both in terms of coverage and representativeness of settlement pattern data. Though limitations exist, I argue that the regional survey data stemming from the Amuq Plain can be used to assess the impact of Ebla’s hegemony on the settlement patterns along its northwestern periphery.
1 The Environmental Context

Ebla and its immediate neighbors like the Amuq Plain are situated in the northwestern corner of the Fertile Crescent. This region is bounded to the west by the Mediterranean Sea and coastal ranges including the Amanus, Jebel al-Ansariyah, Lebanon and anti-Lebanon mountains. To the north lies the Taurus range, while the south and southeast is demarcated by the arid and semi-arid steppe zone. Further to the east, Upper Mesopotamia is bordered by the Zagros range. Between the mountains and steppe zones, the landscape is made up of relatively flat-lying plains divided by several major rivers, including the Orontes, Euphrates, Balikh, Khabur and Tigris (Wilkinson 2003: 74-99; Lawrence 2012: 21).

Ebla and its neighbors experienced a seasonal Mediterranean climate with hot, dry summers, and cool, wet winters (Kadıoğlu 2000; Casana 2008; Ur 2010b: 10). Depending on physical geography, local climates were highly variable. Most of the rainfall in the region originates from weather systems in the Mediterranean. The coastal ranges such as the Jebel al-Ansariyah and Lebanon mountains prevent much of the moisture from reaching further inland, so the trend is that precipitation decreases from west to east. Elevation plays a significant role in the amount of annual rainfall in a given area. For example, precipitation levels are considerably higher in the Taurus and Zagros Mountains compared to the lowland basins of northern Syria and Iraq (Lawrence 2012: 22). The inland plains have highly variable annual rainfall patterns, with wetter areas receiving around 500 mm per annum, while drier, desert regions receive only about 100 mm (Wilkinson 1997b).

It is debatable to what degree we can project modern precipitation data into the past, particularly in light of the meagre proxies for major parts of the Near East, and also because of the highly variable local conditions that could impact rainfall. Still, general patterns do emerge
from varves taken from Lake Van and speleotherm samples from Sorek Cave in Israel, which point to a wet period at the beginning of the third millennium, followed by a gradual shift towards increasing aridity (Wilkinson et al. 2004). Weiss and others (1997; Weiss et al. 1993) have argued that micromorphological analyses of soils from the Jazira point to a sudden aridification event sometime around 2200 BCE, possibly the result of a major nearby volcanic eruption. Similar data now show paleoenvironmental disruptions towards the end of the Uruk period as well, and in both cases there appears to have been corresponding socio-political upheavals (Brustolon and Rova 2007). However, the matter of climatic changes and aridification episodes in the Early Bronze Age remain hotly debated. A tentative consensus has been reached that accepts a trend towards greater aridity in the latter centuries of the third millennium, and it must be assumed that such changes, however gradual, would have been accompanied by changes in social organization by the people living in the Fertile Crescent at the time (Bar Matthews and Ayalon 2011).

1.1 Orontes Watershed and Western Syria

The region west of the Middle Euphrates valley comprises a heterogeneous landscape with coastal mountain ranges, low relief plains, river valleys, and steppe land. The Lebanon, Anti-Lebanon, Jebel al-Ansariyah and Amanus ranges divide the Mediterranean coast from inner Syria. These mountains are the product of the same tectonic activity that produced the Dead Sea and Jordan Valley to the south. Running from south to north is the Orontes River, the most prominent waterway in the northern Levant and western Syria. This river continues on a northward course from its source in the Beqa’a until it hooks dramatically southwestward in the Amuq Plain, ultimately reaching the sea to the west of the modern Antakya (Lawrence 2012: 243-244).
In the south, the Orontes is flanked by marl soils and alluvial deposits, as well as several basaltic uplands near Homs. This part of the river appears to have remained relatively stable throughout the Holocene (Lawrence 2012: 245). To the east lies the North Syrian Plateau, which corresponds with the Jazira, as it is called to the east of the Euphrates. Further to the north along the Orontes are the well-watered plains around Lake Qatina, and the Ghab and Amuq valleys. Along this stretch of the river, beginning around the vicinity of Ebla, the calcic soils give way to the more fertile Terra Rossa soils. The northernmost stretch of the Orontes enters the Amuq Plain from the south. The plain is separated from inner Syria by the Massif Calcaire and Jebel Zawiya. In its northern reaches, the Orontes exhibits a much more volatile recent past. Its course appears to have shifted considerable over the past few millennia, resulting in distinctive shifting settlement patterns that have major sites moving alone with the changing position of the waterway (Casana and Gansell 2005: 158-159).

The Orontes Watershed, and western Syria in general, exhibits a similar trend in terms of climate compared to the Middle Euphrates region, except that in the former case aridity increases as one moves from west to east, whereas in the latter case aridity increases from north to south. The Amuq receives between 700 and 1500 mm of annual precipitation, while the plains around Ebla and Qatna receive about 300 mm (Casana 2007; Lawrence 2012: 245). In contrast, al-Rawda lies below the 250 mm isohyet, and thus near the threshold for dry-farming (Castel and Peltenburg 2007). The increasing dryness of inner Syria is in part due to the imposing coastal ranges in western Lebanon and Syria that prevent much of the moisture from reaching further inland.

In terms of subsistence, it is difficult to assess the situation in the Orontes watershed and adjacent areas mainly due to a lack of adequately published reports on the flora and fauna.
recovered from excavated sites. The general picture appears at least preliminarily to follow the same trends as those observed in the Middle Euphrates. That is, barley, sheep and goat represent the agricultural focus of the more arid regions around places like Qatna and Al-Rawda, whereas in the wetter areas like the Amuq Plain, there is a greater preponderance of cow and pig, but also wheat and legumes (Riehl 2007; Castel and Peltenburg 2007; Yener, Edens, Harrison et al. 2000). Modern data from the Amuq Plain shows that irrigated crop production is most commonly practiced today. Cotton, wheat and corn are the main cultivars. However, rainfed agriculture was still commonly practiced only a century ago, with cereals being found mostly in the lower elevations, while olive orchards and vineyards could be found in the foothills and uplands surrounding the plain (Casana 2003: 54). This type of traditional agriculture may have been similar to that practiced in the Amuq Plain and Orontes watershed in antiquity.

1.2 Middle Euphrates and Balikh Rivers

The Middle Euphrates includes the section of the river stretching from south of Keban Dam in the north to the confluence of the Euphrates and Balikh in the south. This region also includes significant swaths of land adjacent to the river valley, spanning the eastern edges of the Jabbul and Qoueiq plains in the west, and the Balikh river to the east (Lawrence 2012: 113-115).

The Middle Euphrates is characterized by narrower and wider parts of the valley. In the narrower sections, settlement is limited to a small strip next to the river, which is flanked by steep cliffs on either side. On the other hand, a few key sections are comparably wider, and have much greater flood plains. There are four main areas where the valley opens widely, and these are areas with particularly large and dense Bronze Age settlement histories. Samsat-Lidar, Carchemish, Banat and Tabqa are all areas with one or more major settlements, and these
correspond to relatively wide, open sections of the Middle Euphrates flood plain (Lawrence 2012: 115).

The Middle Euphrates region is characterized by two distinct vegetation zones. The first is the well-watered river valley itself, which supports riverine forest along its entire course. The second zone is found adjacent to the river valley, and it is highly variable depending on local precipitation patterns. In the Samsat-Lidar region to the north, modern annual precipitation levels average about 450 mm, while in the south near Tell Banat and Tell es-Sweyhat, precipitation ranges from 200 mm to 300 mm annually. These latter settlements are located at the edge of the dry-farming zone. From north to south, vegetation gradually shifts from deciduous oak woodlands to almond woodland steppe (Wilkinson 2004: 13).

The disparate environments in the Middle Euphrates led to local adaptations in terms of agricultural production. In the north sector around Samsat-Lidar, greater emphasis was placed on the cultivation of wheat, with minimal barley production (Wilkinson 1990: 46). This relationship gradually reverses as one progresses downriver into the dry-farming fringes around Sweyhat and Banat, where barley is the predominant crop, and wheat production is very minimal (Miller 1997: 100). Paleobotanical analysis from excavated sites in the Middle Euphrates confirms this trend for Early Bronze Age levels (Cooper 2006: 36). Growing wheat as a primary crop further south would likely have required irrigation, but surveys point to the LBA as the earliest evidence for such practices in this sub-region (Wilkinson et al. 2004: 38).

Similar to the patterns observed in staple production, the types of fauna exploited in the Middle Euphrates changed from north to south. Cow and pig predominate in the northern, wetter sector around Samsat-Lidar, while sheep and goat form the major percentage of animal remains in the Sweyhat and Banat region. This implies a greater reliance on pastoral economy in the
south, which may be largely a reflection of the local ecological conditions that could not support the higher water requirements of cow and pig (Lawrence 2012: 117).

1.3 Western Jazira and Khabur Basin

Ebla’s sphere of interaction reached Tell Brak, ancient Nagar, the most important mid- to late-third millennium state in the Khabur area. The Khabur basin, along with the surrounding Jazira, are some of the most thoroughly investigated regions in the Near East. The first systematic archaeological surveys conducted in the area were performed by Mallowan (1936) in the 1930s, and investigations have continued more or less continuously to the present day, albeit with much greater emphasis on remote sensing and geoarchaeology in recent years (Ur 2010b; Weiss 1986; Wilkinson and Tucker 1995; Wilkinson 2003).

The Jazira and Khabur region is delimited by the Taurus Mountains in the north, the Jebel Abd al-Aziz and Jebel Sinjar in the south, the Balikh in the west, and the Tigris in the east. The Khabur and its many tributaries flow from north to south, with the main branch passing between the southern ridges of the Jebel Abd al-Aziz and Sinjar, ultimately forming a confluence with the Euphrates. The main rivers in the region are the Khabur itself, along with the Jaghjagh. These two rivers, together with many smaller seasonal wadis, drain the large undulating plains that characterize the whole region (Ur 2010b: 7). Other geomorphological features include a number of basalt uplands, and a marshy area to the north of the Jebel Sinjar. Between the well-watered basins of the Balikh and Khabur lies a much more arid steppe land. In this part of the Jazira, the soils are thinner and incapable of the productive agricultural outputs of the more fertile river valleys on its flanks (Kouchoukos 1998: 356).

In general, the Jazira and Khabur follow a similar pattern to that of the Middle Euphrates in that there is a marked decrease in annual rainfall from north to south. The northern edge of the
region around Tur Abdin receives around 500 mm of precipitation annually, while the southern margins around the confluence of the Khabur and Euphrates receive only about 250 mm (Ur 2010b: 10). Still, this latter figure lies within the assumed limit of precipitation needed for dry-farming, meaning that most of the Khabur falls within an area where irrigation is not essential for sustaining a large urban population. Nevertheless, some areas, especially those situated within the 250 mm isohyet, would have been particularly susceptible to crop failures in drier years (Wilkinson 2007).

The agricultural regime of the Khabur region is characterized by its flexibility. Though exhibiting similarities to the Middle Euphrates, the Khabur and its environs thrived on a combination of wheat and barley production which varied greatly both in space and through time. Such variability may be indicative of shifting political or economic circumstances at the time. For example, evidence from Tell Mozan demonstrates a transition from two-row barley to free-threshing wheat production at the end of the EBA (Riehl 2010). This shift may also reflect a response to changing environmental conditions, perhaps the result of increasing aridity. Still, the staple crop for much of the Khabur basin during the third millennium was two-row barley, and this signifies a relatively homogeneous agricultural repertoire throughout the region.

In terms of faunal remains, sheep and goat make up the majority of the animals exploited in the Khabur basin (Zeder 1998). Cow and pig are present at most sites, though they are much less frequent in the Middle Khabur, which is dominated by sheep and goat, as well as wild animals. Overall, there is greater homogeneity in the faunal remains in the Khabur compared to the Middle Euphrates, which varies more markedly from north to south.

Overall, the Jazira and Khabur present an enduring landscape featuring large mounded settlements and other visible archaeological remains that have remained relatively well-preserved
in this part of the Fertile Crescent compared to other areas ravaged by modern development and other destructive factors. The region has been especially fruitful as the subject of remote sensing investigations, especially the use of CORONA satellite imagery for documenting the archaeological landscape prior to major development over the past few decades (Ur 2010b: 16). Pedestrian surveys have also been influential for detecting archaeological remains, especially flat sites that often elude other detection methods.

Despite a certain homogeneity in terms of climate, flora and fauna, the archaeology of the Jazira exhibits significant diversity with regards to settlement morphology. Most noteworthy are the kranzhügeln of the western Jazira, which lie much closer to the sphere of influence of Ebla. These are crown- or wreath-shaped settlements dating to the EBA containing a large, circular perimeter wall circumscribing a central high mound. Kranzhügeln have been known as a hallmark type of settlement in the western Jazira for over a century, yet they remain poorly understood, and it is unclear if their unique morphology reflects social, economic, or other factors. In general, kranzhügeln are limited to the steppe region between the Balikh and Khabur drainage systems, and around the Jebel Abd al-Aziz, with the major exception of Tell Beydar in the Upper Khabur (Kouchoukos 1998; Lebeau and Suleiman 1997; Wilkinson 2000c).

One of the most prominent features of the archaeological landscape of the Khabur region is the presence of liner hollows, or hollow ways (Wilkinson 1993). Hollow ways are shallow, linear depressions that extend out in radial patterns from settlements. They were created by the movement of both people and animals, and appear to represent the pathways emanating from a town and the routes between the adjacent agricultural fields. Most hollow ways fade out several kilometers from their starting points near settlements, though some extend all the way to

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41 Archi identifies Tell Chuera, one of the most well-known of the kranzhügeln sites, with the important city of Abarsal (2011: 5).
neighboring settlements (Ur 2003; Ur and Wilkinson 2008). These have been documented mainly through the use of aerial photography and satellite imagery, and they provide useful ways of analyzing inter-site communication networks in the EBA. While some evidence of hollow ways have been discovered in the Middle Euphrates at Carchemish, and further west in the Qoueiq Plain, these features are best represented in the Khabur basin (Wilkinson et al. 2004: 148).

2 Landscape, Economy, and the Zone of Uncertainty

The physical landscape, as outlined above, played a major part in structuring the economy of the northern Fertile Crescent during the third millennium BCE. Despite the diversified ecologies of the various floodplains, marshes, steppes, and other landscapes, agricultural production can be understood as having been oriented towards one of three principal strategies, including staple production, olive and grape cultivation, and animal husbandry. Staple production entailed the cultivation of wheat, barley and lentils, mainly through dry-farming practices. Olive and grape production characterized the economy of the wetter upland regions that flanked the dry-farming plains. Finally, animal husbandry, specifically the herding of sheep, goat, pigs and draft animals for their primary and secondary products, was centered especially on the semi-arid regions adjacent to the more fertile rainfed plains of inner Syria and the Jazira (Stein 2004: 67; Wilkinson et al. 2014: 50).

In general, the agricultural plains of Syro-Anatolia and the Northern Levant received comparatively little rainfall, resulting in low crop yields. The large areas that constituted the agricultural plains defrayed these deficiencies (Weiss 1986), but periods of drought remained a persistent problem, and many areas focused on rain-fed cultivation were susceptible to occasional crop failures (Jas 2000: 250-251; Wilkinson et al. 2014: 50-51). The largest of these
 plains was located in the Khabur basin, but substantial upland plains were also located to the west of the Euphrates, including the Quweiq and Jabbul plains to the north and east of Ebla (Wilkinson 2007), and the Amuq, Orontes and Ghab valleys to the west. Archaeologically, the agricultural plains are characterized by landscapes of tells. In the Khabur and Jazira of Upper Mesopotamia, these sites could reach 100 ha or more, while in the more restricted plains of western Syria, the largest sites normally did not exceed 50-60 ha. In the narrower corridors and alluvial valleys of the Euphrates, Orontes and Afrin Rivers, tells often did not exceed 3 ha (Casana 2007; Wilkinson et al. 2014: 52).

Less fertile, semi-arid plains are also found in abundance in the study area, including the Western Jazira between the Balikh and Khabur Rivers, and also the plains of central Syria. These are more volatile landscapes that are largely unsuitable for rain-fed agriculture. However, they represent an important ecological zone with high potential for grazing, and thus factor significantly in the economy of the third millennium. Wilkinson and others have dubbed this area the “zone of uncertainty,” as its exploitation entailed considerably higher risk strategies than those employed in the better-watered and more fertile plains to the north and west (Wilkinson et al. 2014: 53).

The zone of uncertainty is the semi-arid belt of land in central Syria and northern Iraq that receives less than 200 mm of rainfall per annum (Figure 23). Land use strategies in the moister agricultural plains tended to gravitate towards cereal production, such as wheat and barley, but with some tracts reserved for vineyards and olive groves (Wilkinson 2000c). The drier zone, however, was predominantly used as pasture land for the herds of nomadic or semi-nomadic pastoralists. Cereal cultivation in this drier region, while possible, would have entailed considerable risk, with minimal potential gain. As grazing land for sheep and goat herds, on the
other hand, the zone of uncertainty represents an area of high economic potential, albeit with the persistent levels of risk inherent in most agro-pastoral practices (Wilkinson et al. 2014: 53-54).

Strategies to mitigate against the risk of agro-pastoral activities in semi-arid regions included diversifying crop types or intensification of cultivation by means of irrigation (Marston 2011: 191). The Bronze Age states that emerged along the edges of these marginal areas appeared poised to take advantage of the risky, yet potentially profitable strategies that sought to exploit the agro-pastoral potential of the semi-arid steppe (Wilkinson et al. 2014: 55). In the case of Ebla and other regional states, this strategy appears to have been motivated in large part by the economic potential associated with the secondary products of sheep and goat husbandry, and in particular the use of wool in the production of textiles.

The shift towards a specialized economy oriented towards sheep and goat herding was gradual, yet profound. Zooarchaeological data has been used to show that during the third millennium, there was a steady decline in pig rearing in more arid regions, which tended to be used almost exclusively for agro-pastoral activities focused on sheep and goat herding (Stein 2004: 70; Zeder 1995: 29). Moreover, a lack of butchery marks, along with age at death data confirm that sheep were largely exploited for their secondary products, namely wool, evincing the increasing importance, and indeed the commodification of textile production (Doll 2010: 280; Dobney et al. 2003: 428; Wilkinson et al. 2014: 55; Porter 2012: 19-21). That this economic transition corresponds precisely with the emergence of urbanism and large, territorial and hegemonic states in the third millennium, as part of what has been called the second urban revolution, cannot be understated.

Zooarchaeological data further show that the northern boundary between the zone of uncertainty and the more fertile agricultural plains corresponded not only to the 200 mm isohyet,
but also to the point in space that marked the transition between pig rearing and caprid herding (Wilkinson et al. 2014: 56). This implies that those settlements located in the moister regions retained more diversified economies that mitigated risk, while those that were in or near the zone of uncertainty embraced the risks of a specialized economy. Ebla’s elites, perhaps cognizant of both the risks and potential rewards of such specialization, chose to adopt an aggressive approach by focusing on intensive agro-pastoralism. Undoubtedly, this was a contributing factor to Ebla’s expansion into the semi-arid regions to its east and south, though its desire to control trade routes and the flow of prestige goods, especially metals, was also likely a major factor.

The Ebla texts evince the central importance of textile production to its economy simply by the frequency with which textiles and their exchange are mentioned in the texts. Such production was, at least in part, under the purview of the royal palace. Estimates place the state-owned sheep herds at between 670,000 and 2 million (Milano 1995; Pettinato 1991: 82; Wilkinson et al 2014: 58). Regardless of the actual figures, the flocks administered by the state were considerable by any scale, and would have required extensive pasture land to be sustained. If one accepts the lower estimate for the size of the palace’s herds, the land needed for grazing would still have occupied about a 100 km radius around Ebla (Wilkinson et al 2014: 58). Competition with farmers would have necessitated the expansion of grazing lands deep into the zone of uncertainty, and perhaps in areas much further afield (Castel and Peltenburg 2007: 613). The texts also reveal that contemporaneous polities were similarly engaged in agro-pastoral activities related to textile production, meaning that competition for pasture land was likely a source of conflict and interaction as states expanded.

Schloen points out that large amounts of land were allotted to officials in the Eblaite administration. His calculations of the sizes of these tracts is based on his reading of the term
GÁNA.KI, which he equates to Sumerian iku, measuring about 0.36 ha (Schloen 2001: 272). As a result, some of the land grants appear to be enormous, encompassing whole villages or towns. If we interpret these allotments as encompassing not only lands meant for cultivating cereals, but also for grazing of large herds, they become more sensible. Still, the point is that these allotments represent significant amounts of land that likely extended far into the periphery of Ebla, whose chora could only have accommodated local agricultural production.

Further regarding land tenure, the queen of Emar, Tisha-Lim, was granted a significant amount of land, presumably within the buffer zone between Ebla and Emar (Cooper 2010: 89). This allotment is difficult to interpret, but it may represent a negotiated solution relating to disagreements over possession of grazing lands situated between both polities. As Ebla’s hegemony expanded eastward toward the Euphrates valley, it would have encroached on the hinterlands of foreign kingdoms, perhaps striking hostilities. In the case of Emar, Ebla seems to have appeased the local sovereign by negotiating boundaries, which is framed in the texts as a gift or donation to Tisha-Lim (Schloen 2001: 272). The dynamics of this type of interaction, however, are difficult to discern in the texts. Regardless, given Ebla’s central focus on textile production, it can be assumed that the acquisition of grazing lands was a major impetus for its expansion into the semi-arid zones that lie between it and the Euphrates, and this expansion would have put it into direct interaction with other states. While this interaction may have been manifest as open conflict over the control of these lands, it is also plausible that Ebla negotiated with local kingdoms for rights to use such lands for its large herds, with gifts—whether in the form of land grants or preciosities—being exchanged between friendly or neutral sovereigns. In this sense, the exploitation of the zone of uncertainty may have provided Ebla with new potential for forging alliances with its Euphratean neighbors.
Despite the difficulties in uncovering the dynamics of Ebla’s expansion into the zone of uncertainty, it appears that at Ebla sheep and goat herding formed the specialized basis of the political economy, and this provided the impetus for territorial expansion into previously unexploited lands flanking much of the northern Fertile Crescent.

3 Summary of Regional Surveys

The following section describes the major regional surveys carried out in and around Ebla’s periphery. Figure 24 contains a map showing the locations of the surveys. While several important regional surveys have been carried out along the Khabur and neighboring regions, these areas were under the control of Nagar in the mid-third millennium. Though not discussed in the following sections, the results of these regional survey have been summarized previously by Wilkinson (2000a) and Lawerence et al. (2016).

3.1 Amuq Valley

Braidwood carried out the first systematic survey of the Amuq Plain in the 1930s as part of the Syrian Expedition of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago (Braidwood 1937; Braidwood and Braidwood 1960). The survey coincided with excavations at three important sites, Çatal Höyük, Tell Judaidah, and Tell Tayinat, resulting in a ceramic sequence that could be used to date surface pottery collected during the survey. Braidwood identified 178 mounded sites, and devised a periodization consisting of fourteen phases dating from the Neolithic through Islamic periods. Phases IX, X and XI, recovered mainly at Tell Judaidah, corresponded to the third millennium, and allowed Braidwood to identify 38 sites with Early Bronze Age occupations, though an additional 15 sites probably dated to the same period.
Braidwood’s efforts represent the first systematic survey carried out at a regional scale in the Near East. Political circumstances prevented much subsequent work in the Amuq Plain, and it was only with the establishment of the Amuq Valley Regional Projects (AVRP) in the mid-1990s that archaeological work in the region resumed on a large scale (Yener, Edens et al. 2000; Yener 2005; Casana 2003). Archaeological surveys revisited many of the areas explored previously by Braidwood, though emphasis shifted to exploring the Orontes Delta, the area once occupied by the now dried Lake Antioch, and an intensive survey of Tell Tayinat and its vicinity. The AVRP also focused on exploring the geomorphological characteristics of the Amuq plain, and the relationship between dynamic landscape features and the region’s settlement history (Wilkinson 1997a; Wilkinson et al. 2001; Batiuk et al. 2005: 175-176). While much of the AVRP’s early seasons focused on the Bronze and Iron Age remains in the plain, more recent work has continued to explore the Prehistoric, Classical and post-Classical occupational history of the plain (Gerritsen et al. 2008: 241).

The AVRP survey complemented Braidwood’s earlier efforts by adding new sites to the inventory, especially in areas that were previously unexplored or inaccessible. A major advance was the ability to use CORONA satellite imagery to detect previously unknown sites. Combined with other survey techniques, the AVRP was been able to increase the total number of sites in the Amuq Plain to 346 (Casana and Wilkinson 2005a). In addition to the regional survey, excavations have been carried out by separate site-focused projects at key sites like Tell Kurdu, Tell Tayinat, and Tell Atçana. Couple with detailed reassessments of the archaeological data from the Syrian Expedition, these excavations have helped to refine the initial ceramic sequence produced by Braidwood and Braidwood (1960).
The results of the AVRP survey indicate that at least 53 sites were occupied during the Early Bronze Age (Amuq Phases G to J). Mounded settlements dominate the Bronze and Iron Age landscape in the plain, and these tend to be nucleated clusters located mainly in the valleys of the Orontes and its tributaries. Figure 25 shows the total area covered by archaeological remains in the Amuq Plain. Clear settlement hierarchies are also observed, with Tell Tayinat and Tell Atçana representing the first tier, followed by a few secondary centers like Tell Judaidah and Çatal Höyük, and many smaller third-tier sites ranging from 1 to 5 ha in size (Casana and Wilkinson 2005b: 37-39; Batiuk 2007: 52).

3.2 Ugarit and the Jebleh Plain

Preliminary survey results covering the Latakia area were published by Saadé (1964). A total of 38 sites were included in this inventory, which spanned the Mediterranean coast and the environs of Ras Shamra-Ugarit. However, these initial investigations were non-systematic, and even though recent updates have increased the number of sites to 43, further work is necessary to get a more complete picture of the local settlement history (Saadé 2011: 413-422). Twenty-five sites contained Bronze Age pottery, including Ras el-Bassit, Ras Ibn Hani, Tell Siano, and Tell Sukas, which were targeted for stratigraphic excavations. These four mounds, along with at least nine other sites, have yielded Early Bronze Age material. Most recently, geomorphological surveys were carried out in an attempt to evaluate the development of ancient harbors in the area (Al-Maqdissi et al. 2010: 47-49). Further survey work in and around Ugarit had been planned, but recent political events have forced these efforts to be postponed.

Systematic surveys in the Jebleh Plain were carried out in 1958 in the vicinity of Tell Sukas (Riis 1959: 111), and then further afield from 1958 to 1963. A total of 55 sites were detected, though only five of these can be definitively associated with the Early Bronze Age
(Courtois 1973: 56-57). More recently, investigations in the Jebleh Plain have turned to questions concerning the geomorphological and environmental history of the region (Thuesen 2004: 22). Prospections around Tell Tweini provided evidence that the site functioned as the ancient port for Ugarit, and demonstrated that the coastline has undergone significant alteration over the past few millennia (Al-Maqdissi et al. 2007: 6).42

3.3 Akkar Plain

Sapin (1980) published the first major study of Early Bronze Age settlement patterns in the Akkar Plain. In the 1980s, Al-Maqdissi and Thalmann conducted intensive surveys in the area of Tell Arqa, resulting in numerous publications (Thalmann and Al-Maqdissi 1989; Thalmann 2000; 2006; 2007). These surveys demonstrated that a floruit of settlement in the Akkar Plain occurred in the latter part of the Early Bronze Age, which the investigators interpreted as the full-scale agricultural exploitation of the fertile plain corresponding with a peak in urban development. Focusing on the southern, Lebanese part of the Akkar Plain, Bartl’s (1998-1999) 1997 survey added more sites to the inventory, though this part of the plain did not contain any major Bronze Age centers comparable in scale to Tell Arqa, Tell Kazel and Jamous, located further to the north.

3.4 Hama

Hama and the Middle Orontes was recently the subject of an intensive survey led by Al-Maqdissi and Bartl (Bartl and Al-Maqdissi 2007; 2008). The survey was largely motivated by the need to document sites threatened by the expansion of modern agricultural activity in the vicinity of

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42 While included in this discussion, it should be noted that it is unlikely that Ebla’s hegemony extended to the Mediterranean coast. It is generally accepted that Ugarit is not mentioned in the Ebla texts, despite the attestation of several toponyms that share similarities with the name of the Late Bronze Age kingdom situated at Ras Shamra (Astour 1988: 144, note 38).
Hama. The objective of the project was also to track settlement patterns over the long-term. A total of 175 sites were recorded, including tells, flat settlements, sherd and lithic scatters, tombs, monuments and other features. These sites dated from the Neolithic through Ottoman periods. Few sites dated to the EB I-III, but there was a dramatic increase in settlement during the EB IV, which continued in the subsequent MB (Bartl and Al-Maqdissi 2007: 244-247).

3.5 Ghab Plain

Further to the north, Fortin (2007) surveyed the Ghab over several seasons as part of the Canadian Archaeological Project at Tell Acharneh. Courtois (1973) had previously surveyed the area in 1970, but the results were insufficient, warranting further exploration. Many Bronze Age tells were revisited or newly discovered, though they mainly showed continuous occupation throughout the EBA (Fortin 2007: 25).

Courtois’ (1973: 63-81) survey focused on the southern part of the Ghab, at the point where the Orontes turns northward. Sites were documented on both sides of the river, though only four were recorded as containing EBA material, including Tell Acharneh, the largest site in the Ghab (Courtois 1973: 70).

Courtois (1973: 55-56) surveyed the right bank of the Orontes in the northern reaches of the Ghab, though an earlier, non-systematic reconnaissance was conducted in the region by Thoumin (1936: 490). Only 9 sites were located on Courtois’ map, but these included important Bronze Age mounds such as Tell Ibrahim, Tell Amqiye, Tell Qleidin, Tell Qastun, Tell Qarqur, and Tell et-Tell.

3.6 Rouj Plain

The Rouj Plain connects the Middle Orontes and northern Syria. Like the Ghab, the first systematic exploration of this plain was conducted by Courtois (1973). His work documented
significant EBA remains spanning most of the third millennium. The most prominent mounds are Tell el-Kherkh, Tell Hassane, and Tell Daud (Courtois 1973: 98-99). More recently, a Japanese team conducted a survey of the Rouj Plain from 1990 to 1992, with the intention of documenting longer-term trends in settlement that Courtois’ earlier work had ignored. This work resulted in an inventory of 33 sites ranging from PPNB to the Byzantine periods, and a local sequence divided into ten phases. The EBA settlements were largely constrained to medium-sized tells, with no major urban center located in the plain. This has been interpreted as the effect of an external, regional power influencing EBA settlement in the plain, with the most likely culprit being nearby Ebla (Iwasaki et al. 1995).

3.7 Homs and the Homs Gap

Beginning in 1999, Philip and Jabour initiated a joint British-Syrian investigation into the settlement history and landscape of the Homs region. Like the AVRP and LCP, the Settlement and Landscape of the Homs Region (SHR) project involved both systematic surveys using traditional site detection methods, but also the extensive use of remote sensing data to identify both mounded sites and off-site features. Greater emphasis was also placed on geoarchaeological studies of the region, in an attempt to document the anthropogenic features of archaeological landscapes that are often overlooked in surveys employing traditional methods of site detection (Philip et al. 2002; Philip et al. 2005; Philip et al. 2007; Philip 2007; Philip and Bradbury 2010; Bradbury and Philip 2011).

A major contribution of the SHR project has been to conduct investigations in disparate geological-geographic zones in order to assess the different settlement systems and subsistence strategies represented in distinct ecological zones (Bridgland et al. 2003). For example, in the region dubbed the Southern Study Area (SSA), 101 sites were detected within a marl landscape.
Of these sites, 80 were flat, while 21 were mounded settlements. The former dated mainly to the Greco-Roman and Islamic periods, while the tell-based sites contained Bronze and Iron Age materials. The mounds were located along now-dried wadis east of the Orontes (Philip et al. 2005: 30-32).

In the Northern Study Area (NSA), the landscape and settlement history differed markedly to that of the SSA. Three categories of sites were detected: tells, structures, and cairns (Philip and Bradbury 2010: 141). Unlike the SSA, the tells in the NSA date to the Hellenistic and later periods, though these occupations may obscure earlier levels. On the other hand, the many structures detected, which ranged in form from sub-circular to the rectilinear, appear to date largely to the Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age. The cairns were especially prominent in the basalt landscapes to the west of the Orontes (Bradbury and Philip 2011: 173-176).

The Homs Gap was systematically surveyed by a joint Syrian-Lebanese-Spanish expedition in 2004-2005. Using topographical maps, CORONA satellite imagery, and other methods, the team identified 132 sites dating from the Paleolithic through Ottoman periods. Twenty sites yielded Bronze Age materials, and these were mainly located along an east-west route along the southern stretch of the Homs Gap, connecting inner Syria to the Coastal Plain. Notably, they did not find evidence for a single, large settlement dominating this east-west corridor (Haïdar-Boustani et al. 2005-2006; 2007; Ibáñez et al.2008).

3.8 Qatna

As part of the excavations at Qatna (Tell Mishrifeh), du Mesnil du Buisson conducted the first surveys in the vicinity of the site, focusing mainly on Tell Hana, Tell Ghazali, Tell Ruehini, and Tell Ada (1929: 244-247). The first systematic explorations in the area were executed by a joint Syrian-Italian-German team headed by Al-Maqdissi and Morandi Bonacossi (2005; Al-Maqdissi
et al. 2008). The major focus of this survey was to examine the land use patterns in Qatna’s hinterland during the period of that site’s floruit in the mid-third to early second millennium. Archaeological and paleoenvironmental studies resulted in the documentation of 25 sites (Morandi Bonacossi 2007: 71).

Settlement patterns in the mid- to late-third millennium involved the establishment of at least 17 1-2 ha sites along tributary wadi systems. The result was a two-tiered settlement hierarchy, with Qatna serving as the main urban center and central place in the EB IV (Morandi Bonacossi 2007: 72). Excavations at Tell Mishrifeh-Qatna’s upper mound revealed significant investment in mid- to long-term staple storage, and it is proposed that these installations were constructed in line with the increased production provided by these smaller agricultural settlements. The steppe areas between wadi systems are believed to have been exploited by pastoralists, as part of the larger economic framework (Morandi Bonacossi 2007: 71-72).

3.9 Al-Rawda and the Syrian Steppe

Systematic surveys in the Al-Rawda region were initiated in order to explore the development of EB IV centers in the transitional steppe regions of inner Syria (Castel et al. 2008). The project involved a multidisciplinary approach focused on archaeological surveys and excavations, but also archaeobotanical, archaeozoological, geoarchaeological and environmental assessments. The surveys revealed a four-tier settlement hierarchy, including Al-Rawda as the major urban center. Secondary centers measured 8-10 ha, followed by a series of 1 ha sites, and many seasonal and ephemeral sites, including encampments and enclosures (Castel et al. 2008: 39).

Like the explorations near Al-Rawda, the steppe regions were thoroughly explored to the south and southeast of Aleppo as part of the Marges Arides de la Syrie du Nord project from 1995 to 2002 (Gatier et al. 2010; Geyer et al. 2007). The arid margins represent the important
landscape of interaction between sedentary farmers and nomadic pastoralists. Survey results demonstrated that in the EB IV, there was an expansion of agricultural activities into these marginal areas. Sites tended to be large, and often featured enclosures. The encroachment into the margins has been interpreted as the exploitation of microenvironments, and the development of a new type of agro-pastoral economy operating on a regional scale (Geyer et al. 2007: 277-280).

In addition to documenting settlement shifts along the margins, the Marges Arides project traced a feature called the Très Long Mur for over 220 km. The wall is built of dry-laid stones measuring about 1 m in thickness. Dating the wall is problematic, but it may have been constructed in the EB IV, and it is proposed that it served as a symbolic means of marking the frontier between the territories occupied by farmers and herdsmen (Geyer et al. 2007: 279).

3.10 Jazr Plain

The Jazr Plain is in close proximity to Ebla, and it is strategically located at the crossroads between coastal and inner Syria. Systematic surveys in the plain were initiated in the 1980s, first by Egami (1983) in connection to the investigations at Tell Mastuma, and later by Ciafardoni (1992), followed by Mazzoni (1999), as part of the excavations and surveys in and around Tell Afis. A total of 22 sites were discovered, with only 7 percent dating to the EBA. Settlement peaked in the MB I-II and IA I-II. Preliminary surveys were also conducted around Tell Deinit, and results indicated that it may have been the primary site in the plain at various points. More recent investigations in the Jazr Plain have focused on the vicinity of Tell Afis, with emphasis placed on recording the geoarchaeological and geomorphological characteristics of the plain (Mazzoni 2011).
A pottery sequence stemming from the stratigraphic excavations at Tell Afis has allowed for some reinterpretation of earlier data collected during surveys in the Jazr Plain. Refinements to the dating have allowed for more EB IVB to be assigned, though preceding EB III and IVA levels are relatively few (Mazzoni 2005: 6-8). Continuous occupation during the third millennium was documented only at Tell Suffane. Like many other fertile plains in Syro-Anatolia, the Jazr Plain appears to have experienced a gradual increase in settlement from the Late Chalcolithic through Early Bronze periods, as farming activities extended into new well-watered areas.

3.11 Aleppo and the Quweiq Basin

In the Early Bronze Age, Aleppo was located along a primary east-west route connecting Upper Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean. Aleppo itself served as a regional capital at various points, and it controlled an extensive and fertile hinterland capable of supporting significant populations. The region has most recently been the subject of an intensive survey focusing on the pre-Classical remains of Aleppo and its environs, with special emphasis placed on the relationship between the urban center and settlement patterns in the periphery (Del Fabbro 2012: 206). The Archaeological and Geoarchaeological Investigation of the Aleppo Hinterlands Project, directed by Kohlmeyer (1986; 1984), aimed to explore a 30 to 35 km area around the city of Aleppo, using a combination of remote sensing, geoarchaeological and other methods to detect sites. This work has been delayed due to political reasons.

Another fertile region in the Aleppo hinterlands is the Quweiq Basin, which forms a triangular area between Aleppo, Bab, and Azaz. The first systematic investigations of the basin were undertaken by a British team headed by Matthers in the 1970s (1981; Matthers et al. 1978). The regional survey stemmed from the earlier Tell Rifa’at excavations in the 1950s and 1960s.
Matthers explored much of the Quweiq drainage area as far south as the boundary with the Matkh. Twenty-two EB IV sites were recorded, based on ceramics collected bearing strong connections to Tell Mardikh IIB1 types found in the Royal Palace G at Ebla (Matthers 1981: 327).

3.12 Islahiye

The first major expedition to the Islahiye region was conducted by the Germans in and around Zincirli Höyük around the turn of the century, and was only followed by a minor survey by the British Institute of Archaeology in Ankara in 1949 around Coba Höyük and Sakce Gözü (du Plat Taylor et al. 1950: 59-61). The Turkish Historical Society, the Turkish Directorate of Antiquities and Museums, and the University of Istanbul subsequently carried out a systematic survey of the Amanus region from 1955 to 1972 (Alkım 1969). These surveys documented a range of sites dating from the Chalcolithic through Roman periods, including many mounded settlements with third millennium occupations. Third millennium sites were often located along important routes and passes through the Amanus, connecting Cilicia with inner Syria (Alkım 1969: 282). Important sites found in the Islahiye region include Tilmen Höyük, Gedekli Karahöyük, and Kırıškal Höyük (Marchetti 2011: 12-19).

3.13 Oylum and Gaziantep

Archi, Pecorella, and Salvini (1971: 10) explored parts of the Oylum area in the early 1970s, and renewed surveys were carried out in the early 2000s, as part of the Oylum Regional Project (Özgen et al. 2002). The objective of the more recent survey was to determine the relationship between Oylum Höyük—the largest mound in the region—and the various smaller settlements in its vicinity, in addition to establishing a ceramic sequence based on stratigraphic excavations at the main center. A total of 65 mostly pre-Classical tells were recorded, while many of the flat
sites dated to the Hellenistic and later periods. At least 26 of the recorded tells date to the Early Bronze Age, which is the most represented period in the region (Özgen et al. 2002: 218-219).

The main focus of Archi, Pecorella, and Salvini’s (1971) survey was to document the pre-Classical sites of the Gaziantep region. Using German topographic maps and ground survey, 216 sites were recorded, though likely many more would have been detected if not for the rugged nature of the landscape. Dating of the sites was mostly accomplished by collecting samples from open pits and cuts into tells, and the classifying of sites into periods should be taken as preliminary at best. Still, some 63 sites attest to Bronze Age occupation (Archi et al. 1971).

3.14 Jabbul Plain

The Jabbul Plain is a major part of Aleppo’s hinterlands. The first archaeological survey conducted in the Jabbul took place in 1939 by the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem by Maxwell Hyslop (Maxwell Hyslop et al. 1942). This survey recorded 114 sites spanning the Chalcolithic through Islamic periods. A total of 44 sites were dated to the Bronze Age, with most having continuous occupation from the Chalcolithic through Roman periods. Early Bronze Age remains were less common, being found definitively only at three sites, including Tell Ghayariye, Tell Hmaine Zrir, and Tell Stabel.

Systematic investigations of the Jabbul were resumed in the 1990s by Johns Hopkins University and the University of Amsterdam (Schwartz et al. 2000). This joint team conducted excavations at Umm el-Marra and regional surveys of the Jabbul in an attempt to shed light on the development of urbanism and socio-political complexity in the Early Bronze Age (Schwartz et al. 2012). The 1996 campaign resulted in the recording of 144 sites, about a third of which had previously been identified by the British survey. Five sites contained EB I-III material, compared to 47 sites yielding EB IV remains (Schwartz et al. 2000: 447-450).
3.15 Carchemish and the Sajur Basin

Sanlaville’s (1985) survey in the Sajur reached as far as Jerablus Tahtani, about 5 km south of Carchemish. Algaze conducted a survey in the Carchemish region as part of a salvage operation prior to the construction of the Birecik and Carchemish dams (Algaze et al. 1991). Over 100 tells, flat sites, quarries, cemeteries and other ruins were detected. Nine sites contained early third millennium material, while only five sites dated to the later EB (Algaze et al. 1994). Algaze’s survey suffered from a lack of adequate ceramic sequences, meaning that some of the chronological associations of sites may be called into question. These problems were recognized early on, and so the subsequent Land of Carchemish Project (hereafter, LCP) was initiated in order to revisit and reassess the Syrian side of the Carchemish area. Crucial to the LCP’s methodology was a greater emphasis on the landscape of the area, and not just on the mounded settlements. For site detection, the LCP followed the AVRP model of using varied approaches, such as CORONA satellite imagery, and this was critical in allowing the survey to record features like canals and other flat sites. The results of the survey confirmed a trend observed elsewhere in Syria, involving a Bronze and Iron Age landscape dominated by tells, followed by a dispersal of sites in Classical and Byzantine periods (Peltenburg 2010: 541; Wilkinson and Peltenburg 2009: 33). The third millennium landscape in the Carchemish region was characterized by a four-tier settlement hierarchy. This period also marks a high point in urbanization in that part of the Euphrates valley. Notable sites in this system include Carchemish at the top, followed by secondary centers like Amarna, and finally smaller mounds like Tell Jerablus Tahtani (Wilkinson, Peltenburg et al. 2007: 227).

The Sajur Basin comprises a small but fertile area between the Euphrates, the Syro-Turkish border, and the Sajur. The region was first investigated by a French team in the 1970s,
covering about 1250 km sq. Fifteen EB I-III and 17 EB IV sites were recorded. The main floruit of settlement, however, dates to the succeeding MB period, which contained at least 36 sites (Moore 1985: 45-66; Copeland 1985: 67-98; de Contenson 1985: 106-108).

4 Summary Observations

The quality and representativeness of archaeological survey data from the study area is highly variable. The reasons for this are often obvious: some areas have been more thoroughly explored than others. However, coverage of a survey area is not necessarily proportional to the amount of surveying conducted in a region. That is, not all surveys are equal in terms of their ability to detect and record archaeological sites and landscape features. Some of the most intensive surveys conducted in Syro-Anatolia have been carried out in recent decades as a result of salvage projects initiated in advance of major dams being constructed, especially along the Euphrates and Khabur Rivers.

Methodologically, Near Eastern surveys have benefitted tremendously in recent years from advances in remote sensing technologies, especially the use of aerial and satellite imagery. However, more important than the availability of new technologies, archaeologists have refined their research designs to reflect a greater interest in documenting not only tell-based settlements, but also flat sites, sherd and lithic scatters, upland sites, subsurface features, and other types of sites. In addition, greater efforts have been made to gather data about past environments, for example paleogeomorphology, as changes to local conditions impacted not only the types of settlements in an area, but also their detectability. Understanding how the landscape evolved over the longue durée is crucial to adjusting our expectations for the representativeness, or coverage, of regional survey data.
The Amuq Plain stands as one of the more thoroughly investigated Near Eastern landscapes, having been the subject of regional surveys from the 1930s and again more recently in the 1990s to the present. The survey work carried out by the Amuq Valley Regional Projects represents a prime example of a regional survey designed with a concern toward landscape processes and their effect on site detectability. Nevertheless, even with advanced remote sensing and geomorphological tools at hand, several limitations persist that warrant discussion. Namely, physical and cultural transformations within the Amuq Plain render site detection more difficult, if not impossible in some cases. These transformations, moreover, make it difficult to assess site size and cultural phasing, meaning that any diachronic assessment of settlement patterns must be considered preliminary.

The two most prevalent physical transformations affecting site detection in the Amuq Plain involve settlement erosion resulting from rivers and channels cutting across the plain and its flanks, and the burying of sites by alluvium and colluvium eroded from the foothills along the edge of the plain. The number of settlements that have become obscured due to these processes is impossible to discern with any certainty, but it is apparent that physical transformations are not uniform across the plain. For example, some parts of the valley floor have become buried in significant deposits of colluvium, where it can accumulate as much as 1m per millennium. Other parts of the plain may be completely devoid of colluvial or alluvial processes, meaning that the Bronze Age landscape may be well preserved at the surface. In short, survey data stemming from the Amuq Plain must take into account the impact that physical transformations can have on site detection, especially for those sites located within proximity to volatile rivers and channels, and in loci of significant colluvium and alluvium deposition. Such dynamics should be expected
within similar environments, including along the flanks of the Euphrates and Orontes Rivers, where alluvial deposits may have resulted from those rivers’ annual floods.

As for cultural transformations, the most pressing issue in the Amuq Plain and elsewhere concerns the modification of mounded and unmounded sites due to agricultural activities. Bulldozing of sites in an effort to create flatter land that is more amenable to irrigation is becoming more and more common. A number of examples from the Amuq Plain stand out, including the heavily damaged sites of Karatepe, Tell Malta, Tell Wasfe, Tell Kurdu, and Tell ‘Imar al-Jadid al-Sharqi, all of which have been partly cut by bulldozers as local agriculturalists aim to increase their arable land. Behind such activities lies the economic pressure of modern residents to increase productive output of cash crops, especially cotton (Harrison 2000: 192-195). Such is the case even at the largest sites in the plain, like Tell Tayinat, where the aforementioned Neo-Assyrian residence has been largely destroyed or obscured by the construction of a modern cotton processing facility (Harrison and Osborne 2012: 128). Smaller sites in the Amuq Plain have fared even worse, as many have apparently been completely lost to land-levelling activities throughout the plain.

Apart from agricultural activities, another major threat to the archaeological record in the Amuq Plain has been the rapid expansion of modern settlements. Antakya and Reyhanlı represent two pertinent examples of large modern cities obscuring ancient settlements like Antioch and Imma, respectively, but this problem is hardly restricted to the Amuq Plain. Outside of the Amuq Plain, sites like Tell Rifa’at along the Qoueiq River, Hama on the Orontes, and countless other mounds have become increasingly threatened by modern settlement.

Most dramatic, perhaps, among the cultural transformations of the landscape in the study region has been the impact of major dam building projects, especially along the Euphrates and
Khabur Rivers, as part of large-scale efforts to improve the water-based infrastructure in modern Syria and Turkey. While salvage surveys and excavations took place prior to the construction of the Tabqa and Tishrin Dams, these can hardly be considered exhaustive, and invaluable archaeological data to the north of each dam are now inaccessible, submerged under modern reservoirs. Still, the salvage projects have made incredible contributions to our understanding of the archaeology of these regions, thanks especially to the diligent work of the surveyors and archaeologists responsible for carrying out the work. Without their data, our understanding of the third millennium cultural sequences in north Syria and southeast Turkey would be greatly diminished.

Coverage in archaeological surveys remains difficult to assess, though recent work by Banning et al. (2017) has shown that in some cases archaeologists tend to overestimate their abilities to detect sites. It is sometimes assumed that once an area has been surveyed, whether by field walking or some other method, everything that could be detected in that area has been recorded. This does not appear to be the case; rather, coverage in archaeological survey is considerably lower than previously expected, especially with regard to certain site types, like flat sites and scatters.

Mounded settlements are more likely to be recorded in traditional pedestrian surveys, as these stand out fairly prominently in some areas. As the third millennium landscape was dominated by tell-based settlement systems, the surveys listed above probably present relatively high coverage for this time period. Despite the challenges facing regional surveys with regard to physical and cultural transformations of the archaeological record, exemplary surveys carried out in areas like the Amuq Plain equip us to carry out analyses of Bronze Age settlement patterns with a considerable degree of confidence.
Chapter 6

Exploratory Network Analysis of Toponyms in the Ebla Texts

This chapter attempts to demonstrate the potential of exploratory network analysis to examine patterns and relationships in the toponymic data from the Ebla texts. These texts contain a repertory of more than two thousand unique toponyms referring to cities, towns, and villages spanning much of northern and western Syria, northern Iraq, and southeastern Turkey. The toponymy of the Ebla texts constitutes our most important resource for studying the historical geography of the northern Levant and Upper Mesopotamia during the Early Bronze Age. While the majority of places mentioned in the texts cannot be securely identified, a small number of cities and towns are well-attested in later sources or in modern place-names.

Given the considerable size of the toponymic repertory, patterns and trends in the organization of place-names within the texts is not always obvious. An exploratory network approach permits the visualization of the toponymic data as a network graph, allowing some features of the overall structure of the network data to be observed. Statistical analyses of the network also allow for some organizing principles to be identified. My primary research objectives are to identify how the toponyms in the Ebla texts are grouped, and to determine the reasons behind this patterning. Specifically, I attempt to discern the relative roles that political status and geographical distance of a city or polity played in the organization of the toponyms as they appear in the broad range of texts from the Palace G archives. For example, are cities grouped in the texts according to a logical, geographical itinerary, or are they grouped because of

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43 Network analysis has become increasingly popular among archaeologists in recent years. Several recent review articles (e.g., Brughmans 2013; Knappett 2011; Mills 2017) outline some of the more important case studies, potential, and limitations of network approaches to archaeological data. A full review of network approaches to questions of archaeological interest is beyond the scope of the present study.
a shared political status with relation to Ebla or each other? Though my results point to some answers to these questions, this research is preliminary in nature. As an exploratory network approach, I aim to show that by looking at the toponymic repertory in the Ebla texts as a form of data, new insights can be made about the administrative practices in terms of how place-names were recorded in the texts.

1 Toponymy in the Ebla Texts

The Ebla texts are mostly a collection of records detailing the deliveries of specific commodities to Eblaite and foreign officials (Klengel 1992: 21-38; Pettinato 1991: 55-56). Most often, the texts are concerned with the movement of textiles and metals, though agricultural products are also attested (Liverani 2014: 123-126). The highly formulaic texts often do not provide much contextual information beyond the quantities of deliveries and their recipients’ names, positions and cities of origin. As a result, the texts preserve the names of numerous cities, towns and villages, along with their associated officials. In some cases, Ebla dealt with independent kingdoms, and occasionally these places are associated with kings. In the texts, kings are referred to by the title en, including the kings of Ebla. However, as Ebla’s hegemony spread, many cities and towns came into their fold. Some places under Eblaite control retained significant degrees of autonomy, which was manifest in the preservation of local rulers. Therefore, some cities within Ebla’s sphere of influence are still referred to in the texts as having a local king (or en), but in reality these sovereigns were subject to Eblaite power.

On the other hand, some polities were more directly controlled by Ebla (Cooper 2010). Several cities or districts were apparently governed by a lord, which in the texts are called lugal. More common, however, are Eblaite administrators called overseers (or ugula). These administrators were apparently tasked with implementing Ebla’s policies within subject polities,
though it remains uncertain to what degree local elements retained administrative roles. Specifically, while some polities are clearly not associated with local kings, the precise role of the Eblaite *ugula*—beyond extracting resources for the core polity—are not unambiguous. The following sections provide a summary of the types of rulers and officials associated with the toponyms in the texts. While there are other types of officials mentioned in the texts, the most important are the *en* and the *ugula*. Places ruled by a king/en represent autonomous or semi-autonomous cities or kingdoms, while places governed by an Eblaite overseer/ugula represent cities under the purview of Ebla itself. Thus, the presence or absence of each type of ruler or administrator can help us to map out the distribution and nature of Eblaite power across the landscape.

1.1 Places Associated with Overseers (*ugula*)

The term *ugula* is most commonly translated as “overseer” in discussions of the Eblaite administration. The types of overseers listed in the texts are many, with some being charged with managing certain palace affairs, such as stables or labor groups. However, the term *ugula* is also used as the title or role of officials serving as administrators at cities under Ebla’s direct control. The following is a list of cities in the Ebla texts that are associated with Eblaite overseers (Table 8), based mostly on the list provided by Archi et al. (1993), but updated to include Alalaḫu (’as-la-la-ḫu*ki*).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>a-a-lu<em>ki</em></th>
<th>da-mi<em>ki</em></th>
<th>mu-zu-gu<em>ki</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a-ba-su<em>ki</em></td>
<td>da-na-dē<em>ki</em></td>
<td>mug-rī<em>ki</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a-ba-tum<em>ki</em></td>
<td>da-ra-ḥa-tī<em>ki</em></td>
<td>na-bū<em>ki</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a-ba-x-da-nu<em>ki</em></td>
<td>da-rī-fī<em>ki</em></td>
<td>NE-’ā-ra-du<em>ki</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a-bar-sal<em>ki</em></td>
<td>da-rī-nu<em>ki</em></td>
<td>ne-ba-ra-du<em>ki</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a-da-ās<em>ki</em></td>
<td>da-sa-ād<em>ki</em> (da-sa-du<em>ki</em>)</td>
<td>ne-ir<em>ki</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phrase</td>
<td>Translation</td>
<td>Reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a-da-bi-igₖi</td>
<td>da-ùₖi</td>
<td>NI-a-NE-inₖi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a-da-ti-igₖi</td>
<td>das-nuₖi</td>
<td>NI-da-tumₖi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a-dar-ki-zuₖi</td>
<td>dag-ba-alₖi</td>
<td>NI-la-akₖi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a-du-luₖi</td>
<td>du-ra-suₖi</td>
<td>NI-la-la-darₖi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a-ga-agₖi</td>
<td>du-ubₖi</td>
<td>NI-la-luₖi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a-ga-ga-li-isₖi</td>
<td>du-zu-mu-nuₖi</td>
<td>NI-ra-arₖi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a-la-gaₖi</td>
<td></td>
<td>NI-rí-baₖi (NI-rí-ba-aₖi)</td>
</tr>
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<td>a-la-mi-gúₖi</td>
<td>ga-saₖi</td>
<td>NI-sa-ga-u₉ₖi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a-la-zuₖi</td>
<td>gár-raₖi</td>
<td>NI-ti-rí-umₖi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a-lu-luₖi</td>
<td>gár-ra-muₖi</td>
<td>NI-za-ru₁₂ₖi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a-lu-ru₁₂ₖi</td>
<td>gi-li-šuₖi</td>
<td>nu-ba-duₖi</td>
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<tr>
<td>a-na-aₖi</td>
<td></td>
<td>nu-ga-muₖi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a-ru₁₂ₖi</td>
<td></td>
<td>sa-mu-duₖi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a-ru₁₂ₖi</td>
<td></td>
<td>sa-sêₖi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a-sa-al₆ₖi (a-sa-luₖi/₆-sa-laₖi)</td>
<td>gú-ḥa-tiₖi (gú-ḥa-ti-umₖi)</td>
<td>sal-baₖi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a-sa-sa-ba₄ₖi</td>
<td>ḥa-ḥu-bùₖi</td>
<td>sar-ḥuₖi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a-suₖi</td>
<td>ḥa-lamₖi</td>
<td>si-na-muₖi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a-[su]-úrₖi</td>
<td>ḥa-sa-sarₖi</td>
<td>si-zuₖi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a-za-duₖi</td>
<td>ḥa-zu-wa-nuₖi</td>
<td>su-NE-nuₖi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>á-du-ra-timₖi</td>
<td>ḥar-tiₖi</td>
<td>su-ti-gúₖi (su-ti-igₖi/su-ti-gúₖi/zu-ti-gúₖi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'à-a-ma-duₖi</td>
<td>ḥar-zì-zaₖi</td>
<td>ša-ba-ḥaₖi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'à-da-ga-timₖi</td>
<td>ḥu-ti-muₖi (ḥu-ti-umₖi)</td>
<td>ša-da-duₖi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'à-maₖi ('à-ma-duₖi)</td>
<td>ḥu-za-anₖi</td>
<td>šu-aₖi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'à-na-ga-nuₖi</td>
<td></td>
<td>šu-a-gúₖi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'à-ru₁₂₆-gúₖi</td>
<td></td>
<td>ti-naₖi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'à-suₖi ('à-suₖi)</td>
<td></td>
<td>ū-gú-na-am₆ₖi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'as-da-tumₖi</td>
<td></td>
<td>ū-gul-za-duₖi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ū-nu-bùₖi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ū-ra-za-duₖi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.2 Places Associated with Governors (lugal)

The following is a list of toponyms in the Ebla texts associated with lugal officials. These officials are less numerous than overseers, and probably maintained a higher status in the administrative hierarchy. Like an overseer, governors were put in charge of various administrative functions both at Ebla and among its client states.

Places associated with governors are assumed in this study to be under Ebla’s direct control. However, the functions of the lugal are somewhat more difficult to identify in contexts where these officials were installed in foreign cities. For example, it is unclear whether the lugal was in charge of an entire region comprising several polities, or simply in charge of a single but important city. Regardless, the lugal represents the least common of the three officials considered in this study (Table 9).
Table 9 – Sites associated with governors (lugal) in the Ebla texts

1.3 Places Associated with Kings (en)

The following is a list of toponyms in the Ebla texts associated with the term en (Table 10), which is most commonly translated as “king.” Porter (2012: 201-203) notes that this translation is problematic as the term “king”—or, alternatively, “leader” or “ruler”—implies absolute power and ownership over most of a state’s property. Further, she argues that the en at Ebla headed a sort of “first family” that occupied a central role in a network of families, rather than a hierarchy of families as in the Schloen’s (2001) Patrimonial Household Model. However, the position of en is listed for a large number of polities, and it is likely that the responsibilities of the role took on various characteristics that more or less resembled that of a king in general. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, the traditional translation and understanding of en—that is, as “king”—are followed. Places associated with kings may have been subordinate to Ebla, but the majority of these kingdoms were likely autonomous or semi-autonomous entities. The list is based on the two lists of kingdoms provided by Bonechi (1990: 160-163) and Archi et al. (1993: 31-32).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a-bar-sal₉ ki</td>
<td>ḥa-ma-za-₉ ki (ḥa-ma-zi-im₉ ki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a-bu₉-um₉ ki</td>
<td>ḥa-ra-an₉ ki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a-da-bi-ig₉ ki</td>
<td>ḥa-su-wa-an₉ ki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a-du-ur₉ ki</td>
<td>ḥal-sum₉ ki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a⁻ha-na-LUM₉ ki</td>
<td>ḤAR-ba-tum₉ ki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a-ma-ri-im₉ ki (a-ma-rum₉ ki)</td>
<td>ḥar-da-gum₉ gum₉</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a-ša₉ ki</td>
<td>ḥu-ma-zu₉ ki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a-sa-lu₉ ki</td>
<td>ḥu-ti-mu₉ ki</td>
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<tr>
<td>a-zú₉ ki</td>
<td>ḥu-za-an₉ ki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'a-du₉ ki</td>
<td>i-bu-bu₉ ki (i-bu-₉fb₉/i-bu₁₆-bu₉/i-b₉fb₉bu₁₆ ki)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'a-za-an₉ ki</td>
<td>i-la-[a]r₉ ki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>áb-šu₉ ki</td>
<td>i-ma-ar₉ ki (i-mar₉ ki)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ar⁻ha-du₉ ki</td>
<td>ib-a₉ ki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ar-mi₉ ki</td>
<td>ib-la₉ ki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aš-dar-da-lum₉ ki</td>
<td>i⁻ri-TUM₉ ki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aš-dar-lum₉ ki</td>
<td>i⁻ri⁻ba₉ ki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bur-ma-an₉ ki</td>
<td>kab-us-ul₉ ki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>da-bu₁₄-nu-gu₉ ki</td>
<td>kak-me-um₉ ki (kak-mi-um₉ ki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>KIŠ₉ ki</td>
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<tr>
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<td>lu⁻ba-an₉ ki</td>
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<tr>
<td>dal-la-zu-gur₉ ki</td>
<td>lu⁻lum₉ ki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>du-gu-ra-su₉ ki</td>
<td>lu⁻mu-na-an₉ ki (lum-na-an₉ ki/ lum-na-nu₉ ki)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DU-lu₉ ki</td>
<td>lu⁻ri⁻lim₉ ki (lu⁻ri⁻lum₉ ki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>du-ub₉ ki</td>
<td>ma⁻nu-ti-um₉ ki (mu⁻nu-ti-um₉ ki)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ga-kam₉ ki</td>
<td>ma⁻nu-wa-ad₉ ki</td>
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<tr>
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<td>ma-ti₉ ki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gär-mu₉ ki</td>
<td>ma⁻ša-du₉ ki</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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2 Geographical Proximity vs. Political Status

In a footnote from his 1988 article on the geographical and political structure of the Eblaite state, Astour (1988a: 141, note 23) refutes the equation of the toponyms ‘A-ma, ‘A-ma-ad and ‘A-ma-du with ancient Hamath, modern Hama, stating that “to judge by the cities with which it is associated in the texts, ‘A-ma and its district were located in the northern part of the kingdom of Ebla, approximately between ‘Azaz and the Quweyq River.” In other words, there is a perceived geographical order to the appearance of toponyms when they occur together on a given tablet or tablets. Similar statements are common throughout the literature, and the role of geographical proximity is taken for granted, though rarely explained further. While this reasoning has certain merit, it places too much primacy on geographical proximity at the expense of other potential structuring factors for toponym co-occurrence.

Another factor that may have influenced the way that toponyms were grouped concerns the political status of the cities or towns that are mentioned together. For example, in a 2006 article discussing the relationship between Alalaḫu (third millennium Alalakh) and Ebla, Archi (2006: 4) notes that while it was administered by an Eblaite overseer, or ugula, at the time of the archives, its association in the texts with cities like Harran, which were independent of Ebla and ruled by their own kings, perhaps indicated a heightened status of Alalaḫu, or even hints at its former status as an independent kingdom.

In order to test the relative influence of both geographical proximity and political status on the grouping of toponyms in the Ebla texts, I have generated co-occurrence networks for five
sites: Alalaḫu, Hama, Emar, Ibal and Tunip. Each network comprises a set of nodes representing the various toponyms in the sample, and the links or edges connecting the nodes indicate when both toponyms occur together on a given tablet. The networks are then displayed graphically. Figure 26 provides a simplified example of a co-occurrence network. Nodes (or vertices) represent individual toponyms mentioned in the tablets. Those mentioned on the same tablet are connected by a line, known in network terminology as a link or edge. In the five case studies presented, each example has a focal node or ego. In the example for Alalaḫu, that toponym occurs on every tablet in the sample. The network is then constructed from those tablets by linking the rest of the toponyms to Alalaḫu and each other. Other toponyms may occur on each of the tablets in the sample, meaning that they can occupy similar structural positions as the ego, suggesting a strong link with the focal node that may have some real-world significance. However, this is not always the case, and those most frequently occurring toponyms are seen to be more closely linked than those that occur less frequently. By visually displaying the data as a network graph, some of these relationships become more obvious, though explaining any apparent patterns in the distribution of the toponyms remains difficult to assess without further contextual data.

In addition to their graphical display, the network case studies can also be analyzed statistically in order to identify the most important—or central—nodes in the network. Once identified, these nodes can then be assessed based on both their geographic distance from the central node of each network, as well as their political status, to determine the relative importance of each variable on their appearance together in the texts.
3 Approach to Toponym Data Collection and Analysis

3.1 Why Networks?

In recent years, the number and variety of archaeological and historical studies employing network analysis has grown substantially. This is due in part not only to the broad applicability of network concepts and analytical tools to a diversity of social scientific and humanistic data, but also to the persistent appeal of the network graph as a means to the visual exploration and interpretation of large and complex datasets. My study aims to take advantage of the suite of analytical and visual tools offered by network science to examine some patterns in the toponymic data from Ebla. While this study is preliminary, I maintain that network science has a significant part to play in the analysis of textual and archaeological data stemming from the Near East.

3.2 Data Collection

Data for this study were collected using the University of Venice’s Ebla Digital Archives, which offers a searchable database for the entire corpus of Ebla texts published in the Archivi Reali di Ebla—Testi, or ARET series, as well as other volumes. The archive is free to use, though it requires the user to create an account. Data can be exported from the archive to be analyzed in more robust statistical programs.

A query was performed for the sign “KI,” the Eblaite determinative indicating geographic names. Only those toponyms deriving from administrative texts dealing primarily with textiles and metals were included in the study. The resulting list contained 11,169 entries, including approximately 2,000 distinct toponyms. Fragmentary place-names were eventually excluded from the sample. Some toponyms may also represent variations in the spelling of the same place,

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44 For a review of recent applications of network approaches to archaeology data, see Brughmans’ (2010) and Mills’ (2017) overviews.
and so only an approximate number of toponyms can be given at this time. For example, the toponym Alalaḫu is written at least nine different ways in the texts (Archi 2006: 5). I have attempted to consolidate the database to minimize the number of variants being treated as distinct toponyms, but this task is certainly difficult, and errors undoubtedly persist. Figure 27 shows an example of a query results screen in the Ebla Digital Archives. Note the determinative “KI” in the query box, and the displayed results which all correspond to words belong to the geographical name category (GN). These results are all place-names, and their reference information—specifically, the tablet upon which each entry was impressed—is indicated in the far-left column.

Following initial editing and cleaning of the data, information regarding the types of rulers or administrators associated with each site was added. Sites associated with kings are by far the most frequently attested in the texts. Figure 28 shows the distribution of toponyms according to total number of attestations. The left side of the graph is dominated by kingdoms, indicated in red, whereas the long tail to the right is largely made up of sites associated with overseers, shown in blue. As the texts from which these toponym data derive are the product of an administrative apparatus centered at the Royal Palace at Ebla, it is perhaps unsurprising to discover that foreign kingdoms like Mari or Nagar make up the bulk of the total attestations in the texts, at least when limited to just these three categories. However, it is important to take note of this distribution when interpreting the toponym network of an individual site, as any deviation from a kingdom-dominated distribution could be significant.

To convert the toponym data into a network, each node was assigned a unique identification number, and a table generated indicating the links between each node. Each link is represented by a single row in the table, which includes a source node and a target node, the type
of link represented, and its weight. The weight of a link corresponds to the number of times two toponyms occur together on a tablet. Once compiled, this data was imported into the network analysis application.

3.3 Data Visualization

For this study, I used Gephi 0.9.2, which is one of a number of free and open-source options for creating and analyzing network data. Gephi was selected for its easy-to-navigate user interface, and robust support community. In addition, its data importing options are relatively straightforward. Node and link information is displayed as a table in the Data Laboratory window, as seen in Figure 29. From this workspace, new data can be added to the network, existing data can be edited, and the resulting work can be exported into a variety of formats.

Once imported, a preliminary network graph is generated in the Overview window. Figure 30 shows the raw ego network for the site of Hama in Gephi’s Overview window. From this workspace, the graph can be manipulated using different display algorithms, features like node size and color can be modified to reflect specific attributes, and various statistical operations, such as identifying the centrality scores of nodes, can be performed on the network.

3.4 Centrality Measurements

A major focus of network studies involves the identification of node centrality. In many real-world networks, certain nodes occupy privileged structural positions, making them important for connecting disparate node clusters and for conveying information across whole networks. Often the identification of these important nodes is self-evident when visually inspecting a graph, but in some large networks further measures are needed. Centrality scores measure the role and influence of a given node within a network. There are an increasing number of approaches to
measuring centrality. In this study, I analysed the case study graphs using three different centrality measures: betweenness, closeness and eigenvector centrality.

Betweenness centrality is a measure of how frequently a node occurs along the shortest paths between each pair of nodes in a network. While there may be numerous paths across a graph by which pairs of nodes can be connected—this is especially so for densely connected graphs—the shortest paths between these pairs may frequently pass through a select group of particularly well-located nodes. Hypothetically, these nodes are the great connectors in a network, linking often disparate nodes or node cluster along their shortest paths of communication. Betweenness centrality is a classic method of determining node influence.

Closeness centrality is another way to measure node influence. It considers a node’s centrality as the sum of the shortest paths between the focal node and all other nodes in the graph. In a sense, it is a measure of how “close” that node is to all other nodes in the graph executed by counting the minimum number of steps that it would take for information conveyed from that node to reach all nodes. Like betweenness centrality, measures of closeness are considered a classic approach to determining node centrality in network science (Du et al. 2015). Closeness centrality—and by association, farness centrality, which is the conceptual opposite to closeness—is largely dependent on whether or not a graph is directed or undirected. Directed graphs are networks where the links between nodes are not assumed to be mutual. For example, in a typical social network describing groups of friends, friendship is assumed to be mutual between both parties. However, in a directed graph, the links between nodes are unidirectional. In my study, the links between nodes are determined by the co-occurrence of toponyms on a set of tablets. Therefore, the networks presented here are undirected. However, future studies may
be able to include directional data by considering the flow of commodities between nodes as they appear in the texts.

The third centrality measure that I consider is eigenvector centrality. This approach to centrality is similar to both betweenness and closeness in that it measures the influence of a given node according to shortest paths, except that it weights its scores to account for the relative nature of a node’s connections (Solá et al. 2013). That is, a node’s eigenvector is a measure of not just its overall connectedness or position along shortest paths, but also a measure of the connectedness of its neighboring nodes. Thus, it emphasizes that a node will be considered to have a high centrality score if those nodes to which it is most immediately connected also have high centralities. In this sense, eigenvector centrality is a measure of how well-connected a node’s connections are.

4 Results: Ebla Toponym Networks

4.1 General Co-Occurrence of Toponyms

In addition to the five ego networks discussed below, I attempted to generate a much larger sample of the total toponymic data in the archives. To build this network, I created a list of all the toponyms that occur in three published corpuses of administrative texts from Ebla. These included those tablets in ARET volumes III, XII and XV. The texts themselves are primarily administrative, focusing on the exchange of textiles, metals and other items between the royal palace, foreign polities, and officials operating within Ebla’s borders. The initial sample was taken from 635 tablets containing over 5000 toponyms if we count multiple instances of a site name on a single tablet. To make the data set more manageable, duplicate occurrences of a toponym on the same tablet were discarded, and a minimum threshold of 10 attestations was
applied. This resulted in a list of the 89 most frequently occurring toponyms in the corpus with at least 10 occurrences on different tablets, and a total of approximately 2800 attestations in all. I estimate that this sample constitutes between 15% and 20% of the total toponymic data in the texts.

Figure 31 shows this larger co-occurrence network. It differs from the ego networks below in several ways. First, it is much denser, and the greater number of connections between each site means that instead of distinct clusters forming between specific groups of toponyms, we have instead only a single, giant cluster. Also, in this graph, node color does not delineate communities or clusters, but rather the type of ruler associated with each toponym in the network. Purple nodes are places identified with kings, whereas green nodes are sites governed by overseers or some other official. Also grouped into the green nodes are sites that do not have explicit information about the type of ruler at the site. Thus, while we do not have evidence for the clustering of nodes into distinct communities, we can at least observe a few general characteristics of the network as a whole. Namely, sites associated with kings tend to form the core of the network, while sites not associated with a king make up the bulk of the periphery. For example, Alalaḫu—a place associated with an uguła, Ze-malik, in the texts—occupies a position on the outskirts of the network. On the other hand, the four other sites highlighted—Dub, Kablul, Ḥutimu and Ibubu—are associated with kings in the text, and they are found in more central positions nearer to the core of the network. This pattern can also be demonstrated quantitatively based on centrality measures.

In Figure 31, node size is proportional to betweenness centrality. Alalaḫu does not act as a primary hub connecting groups of toponyms on disparate tablets in the wider corpus. Figure 32 shows a plot of the sites contained in the network in Figure 31 arranged according to their
betweenness values. Sites ruled by kings dominate the higher ranked nodes, while the other sites, including Alalaḫu, form the tail of lower ranked nodes. There is some overlap in the middle, however, and this could indicate a rather fuzzy distinction in terms of how each type of site might have been viewed in the eyes of the Eblaite administration. At the very least, the separation of sites into distinct categories is perhaps not as clear-cut as one would hope.

An iteration focusing on closeness centrality provides an unsurprising picture, as observed in Figure 33; here again, Alalaḫu is quite distant from all other nodes compared to the more central sites like Dub. The plot of closeness centrality values in Figure 34 exhibits the same pattern of distribution, and by now it is quite clear that the connection between Alalaḫu and sites ruled by kings breaks down significantly.

Similar to the previous examples, when considering eigenvector centrality (Figure 35), Alalaḫu exhibits a low degree of influence within the network. A few green nodes appear to be more influential than expected. Figure 36 shows the distribution of eigenvector values, and it again confirms the structurally distinct positions occupied by Alalaḫu and places like Dub and Kablul.

As will be seen below, when comparing Alalaḫu’s structural position within its immediate toponymic context to its place in the broader network of site names contained in the Ebla texts, its connection to other important sites ruled by kings is greatly diminished. Indeed, Alalaḫu turns out to be a peripheral toponym, and less central than would be expected for a site exhibiting significant autonomy. However, while this comparison demonstrates that we must be cautious when using an ego network approach to determine a site’s political significance, we must also be mindful of the inherent biases in the data set responsible for the larger co-occurrence network. Specifically, the Ebla texts are generally focused on the Euphrates region.
Toponyms located outside this core region are common, but on a large scale these places should be expected to make up the periphery of the network since they are mentioned less frequently. Thus, their positions in the network reflect their lower total number of attestations in the corpus. This does not necessarily reflect a reduced political significance for a given site. In other words, the single dense cluster that represents the distribution of the most commonly attested toponyms in the Ebla texts is dominated by those sites associated with kings. However, this may not be the case for specific places, and it is important to examine the individual ego networks of toponyms to determine if the pattern is repeated in a more specific context.

4.2 Alalaḫu

Figure 37 shows the network for the toponym Alalaḫu. Archi (2006) identifies this toponym as the third millennium equivalent to the well-known Alalakh of the second millennium. As a result, it is assumed that Alalaḫu was the dominant city in the Amuq plain at the time of the Palace G archives, though several factors complicate this association. For example, third millennium remains at Tel Atçana (ancient Alalakh) are scant (Welton 2011: 19), suggesting that this site was only a minor settlement during Ebla’s peak. On the other hand, the nearby Tell Tayinat was the largest settlement in the region at the time, and given its proximity to Tel Atçana, it seems plausible that the toponym Alalaḫu should be attributed to that site. In this and in all subsequent network graphs, node color is meant to represent the type of ruler or administrator associated with the site. Red nodes are kingdoms. Blue nodes are sites with an Eblaite ugula or overseer. Green nodes denote the presence of a lugal, or governor. All other nodes, indicated in yellow, are not associated with these three types of officials in the Ebla texts. Node size is proportional to degree, meaning that the larger a node in the graph, the greater the number of links connected to that node.
The Alalaḫu network is based on ten tablets containing references to that site. A total of 88 distinct toponyms are mentioned on these tablets, resulting in 975 links. Two primary clusters can be seen in the bottom left and top right of the graph, the latter being characterized especially by its high concentration of yellow nodes—that is, its high number of toponyms not associated with kings, governors or overseers. Alalaḫu, which was administered by an Eblaite ugula, is indicated by the large blue node in the center of the graph. Several of the most important nodes—that is, those with the greatest link density and centrality within the network—are also indicated, including Ursa’um, Dub, Kablul and Haššuwan. All of these are kingdoms.

4.3 Hama

Figure 38 shows the network of toponyms associated with ‘A-ma, most commonly equated to ancient Hamath, or modern Hama (Astour 1988: 141, note 23). This network was generated by sampling 12 tablets from the database containing references to ‘A-ma, which like Alalaḫu is associated with an Eblaite overseer. There are 156 nodes connected by 3377 links. The central core of the network is dominated by kingdoms like Ibal, Ebla, Armī and Mari, and these nodes represent the best connected and most closely associated toponyms to ‘A-ma, though they are not necessarily proximal in a geographic sense. Sites associated with an ugula and unaffiliated nodes make up the bulk of the periphery of this network. Such a distribution may simply be a reflection of the overall distribution of kingdoms in the texts, though on the other hand ‘A-ma’s association with these important kingdoms may have been deliberate.

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45 ARET XII 909 v. iv 5, 937 r. iii 4; MEE II 37 r. vii 1/ARET XV 10 vii 1; TM.75.G.1653 r. iii 2; ARET III 31 r. iii 11 (or 10?); ARET XII 210 ii 4, 731 i 3; TM.75.G.1701 r. xiii 2; TM.75.G.1867 r. viii 3; TM.75.G.1527 r. x 5; TM.75.G.1708 r. vii 2; ARET III 370 iv 4; ARET XII 161 ii 4; MEE II 37 v. iii 8; TM.75.G.1462 r. iii 4; TM.75.G.2361 v. v 3; TM.75.G.10088+10182 r. xxi 4; TM.75.G.10280 r. vii 3; ARET XII 667 iv 7, 1043 xiii 2; ARET III 325 r. ii 2; ARET XV 30 r. iii 1; ARET XII 825 r. iii 5, 830 iii 2; TM.75.G.10280 v. iv 8; TM.75.G.10088+10182 v. ii 6.
4.4 Emar

Emar (I-mar₄), unlike the previous examples, was an important kingdom identified with Tell Meskene on the Euphrates, to the east of Ebla. A sample of ten tablets produced the ego network in Figure 39, which contains 62 nodes, only two of which are associated with an ugula. Most nodes represent kingdoms, and those most closely connected to Emar are highlighted. The lack of sites with an ugula in this network are perhaps indicative of the role that political status played in the grouping of toponyms, but this could also be the result of a sampling bias. Further work, and particularly a larger sample of tablets is needed to clarify this issue.

4.5 Ibal

Ibal, like Emar, is an important kingdom mentioned frequently in the texts. It is most often associated with the region around Qatna, and marks the southernmost extent of Ebla’s sphere of interaction. Ibal’s toponym network (Figure 40) is generated from a sample of ten tablets consisting of 69 nodes and 876 links. Like Emar, important kingdoms form the core of Ibal’s network—its most closely connected toponyms being Emar itself, but also Ebla and Mari. There are a greater number of sites associated with an ugula in Ibal’s network compared to that of Emar, but again, this may reflect a sampling bias, and not necessarily the larger structure of Ibal’s toponym network.

4.6 Tunip

Figure 41 depicts the toponym network for the site of Du-ne-ib, most likely third millennium Tunip (Schloen 2001: 275; Archi 1993b: 13), located downriver from Hama on the southern end of the Ghab Plain. Unlike the other sites in this case study, Tunip is not listed as an independent kingdom, nor is it associated with the seat of an Eblaite overseer. This may account for its somewhat exceptional network, which is not dominated by kingdoms, but rather appears
to be largely associated with toponyms of similar status. The network derives from 11 tablets containing 75 distinct nodes and 1163 links. The highlighted nodes are, in general, not very well attested in the texts compared to the central nodes of the other graphs discussed in this study.

5 Discussion

5.1 Distances Between Nodes

Following the creation of the network graphs for these five selected toponyms (Figure 42), the distances were measured between each subject node and those toponyms included in its network whose definite or general locations are known or widely accepted (Figure 43). Distances, measured in kilometers, were then compared to the weighted degree and Eigencentrality measures for each node in order to determine if they were correlated, and therefore provide a quantitative measure of the relative importance of geographic proximity in the organization and grouping of toponyms.

A possible interpretation of the correlation between distance and weighted degree or Eigencentrality is that it indicates that geographical proximity played an important role in certain toponyms occurring together frequently in the texts. Conversely, a strong negative correlation would indicate that distance had a negligible impact on toponym co-occurrence. Weak or no correlation, finally, would represent an inconclusive result that neither supported nor rejected the grouping of toponyms based on geographical proximity. Weighted degree and Eigencentrality, as explained below, are measures of a nodes importance within a given network. Correlations between distance and centrality are understood to be representative of some underlying structure of the toponymic data, though this may not have necessarily been the case. In short, there are considerable limitations to the current approach, but the overriding notion is that a statistically-
oriented analysis of the toponymic data may at least point to some important patterns and structures in the data set. Whether these patterns relate to real-world phenomena expressed in the Ebla toponymy requires further exploration.

5.2 Weighted Degree and Eigencentrality

Weighted degree and Eigencentrality are two different metrics used to describe the role that a node plays in a given network. Weighted degree is a simple score determined by counting the total number of connections to a node, and accounting for links with a weight higher than one. That is, if two toponyms occur together on only one tablet, the edge connecting them would have a weight equal to one (Wasserman and Faust 1994: 178-183). However, if these toponyms occur together on two different tablets, they would have an edge connecting them with a weight equal to two, and so forth for each additional tablet upon which the same set of toponyms occur. Edge weights can impact the results of display algorithms that take weighted degree into account. In the schematic example depicted in Figure 44, the node has a weighted degree of five, because one link has a weight of two, whereas the other three only have weights of one.

Centrality measures come in many different varieties and emphasize different attributes of node position and influence in a graph. Eigencentrality (Bonacich 1987) stresses a node’s connections to other important or well-connected nodes, and not simply its total amount of connections. Thus, a node can have a higher Eigencentrality score than a node with many more connections, provided that the first node’s connections are to other, well-connected nodes. These two measures were included in this study in order to ensure that different approaches and definitions regarding what constitutes an important node in each toponym network was accounted for.
Correlations Between Distance, Degree and Centrality

Correlations between each set of variables were calculated using R Studio, and an example of the output is provided in Figure 45 for the toponym ‘A-ma. The correlation between distance and both weighted degree and Eigencentrality is quite weak, totalling -0.214 and -0.155 respectively.

Similarly weak correlations were observed for each of the five subject networks studied. These are summarized in Figure 46. The highest positive correlation was found between distance and Eigencentrality in Ibal’s toponym network. The correlation between distance, weighted degree and centrality in the Alalaḫu, Emar and Ibal networks is slightly positive, while in both the ‘Ama and Tunip networks the correlation is slightly negative. In both cases, the correlation is weak. This suggest that if geographic proximity was factored into the grouping of toponyms, it may have only been a minor consideration. On the other hand, a visual inspection of the network graphs indicates that political status may have been a significant factor in the grouping of toponyms. For example, both of the kingdoms of Ibal and Emar were strongly associated with other kingdoms, whereas this association was reversed for Tunip—a site that is associated with neither a king nor an overseer.

However, it is important to note that while all of the graphs were generated using the same layout algorithm in Gephi, alternative algorithms can produce graphs that exaggerate or minimize the clustering of certain nodes. Also note, however, that in certain cases, the differences in layout can impact peripheral parts of a graph, while leaving the core of the network relatively unchanged. In short, selecting a layout algorithm can significantly impact the way that the data is displayed, and therefore influence how we interpret a graph visually.
5.4 Interpretations

The weak positive and negative correlations between distance and weighted degree and Eigencentrality suggest that the current results cannot satisfactorily address the question of the amount of influence distance between nodes played in their grouping in the Ebla texts. Further work must be done to explore these relationships in greater detail.

Despite these caveats, it can be stated, albeit preliminarily, that there do not appear to be strong correlations between distance and weighted degree and Eigencentrality in the present dataset. These findings suggest that distance is only a secondary factor, if at all, in the grouping of toponyms in the Ebla texts, and that the primary structuring factors should be sought elsewhere. Based on visual inspection of the network graphs displayed in this chapter, I suggest that a city’s status played a more important role in how Ebla’s scribes organized their tablets. That is, cities ruled by kings are more likely to occur together on a given tablet, regardless of the distance between them. Likewise, cities of lesser status, perhaps governed by an Eblaite ugula, are also more likely to occur together.

However, there are several problems with these interpretations. Foremost is the problem presented by the overrepresentation of cities ruled by kings. These tend to make up the bulk of the toponymy of the Ebla texts. While there may be about one hundred or so distinct kingdoms mentioned in the texts—of which only a handful are frequently attested—there are at least several thousand distinct toponyms in the repertory. Most of these latter places are only known from the Ebla texts, where they may be attested only once or twice. As a result, the Ebla toponymy presents an enormous repertory, but one dominated by a small group that tend to be kingdoms. This is perhaps not surprising given the nature of the texts themselves, which document deliveries to and from cities and towns within and beyond Ebla’s borders.
would have been more frequent between Ebla and other major towns and cities, and thus they occur more frequently in the texts. This means, however, that statistical analysis of the Ebla toponymy will undoubtedly reveal the skewed nature of the data that is biased toward the most commonly attested places, like Armi and Mari. In other words, it should be expected that the core cluster of any network graph based on the co-occurrence of toponyms in the Ebla texts should exhibit a strong bent towards large kingdoms with which Ebla was in frequent contact over the duration of the period covered by the archives.

5.5 Limitations

This study aims to identify patterns and relationships in the toponymy of the Ebla texts through the use of network analysis. Network analysis relies largely on various network metrics to determine node clusters and to identify key nodes or hubs. In other words, the structure of the network can help to identify which toponyms or groups of toponyms occur together most frequently, thus allowing the researcher to infer real-world relationships between discrete places mentioned in the texts. These relationships can be geographic, meaning that toponyms often occur together because they are proximal in space, and the scribes maintained some sense of spatial order while recording administrative and other accounting information. On the other hand, toponyms may have been grouped according to the status of the towns or cities mentioned. Network metrics allow us to statistically assess these factors and to determine the extent to which they influenced the organization of toponyms in the texts.

However, the network graph itself remains central to network studies, and this can be analyzed visually by the researcher in an attempt to quickly identify some general features or structures of the network that can then be explored more rigorously through statistical
procedures. Despite these advantages, the current study suffers from several limitations that warrant discussion.

A major challenge results from the fact that very few of the toponyms in the Ebla texts can be securely located. Many places appear to have been small towns or villages that were likely located near Ebla, and these frequently do not appear in other contemporary or later texts. Moreover, most toponyms have not survived into modern times, and therefore cannot be located based on the current toponymy of northwest Syria and southeast Turkey. As a result, determining the extent to which geography impacted the organization of the toponyms in the Ebla texts remains problematic, as it is restricted in part by the use of well-known places like Carchemish, Emar, Mari, Nagar, Ebla and so on. In this study, toponyms were selected in part because their locations were already known, but this is not necessarily representative of the toponymic repertory. For example, even the location of the important kingdom of Armi, which is one of the most frequently attested toponyms in the texts, remains uncertain. Nevertheless, this study attempts to gauge geography’s role in the texts by using a sample of the more securely located places mentioned together in the texts. Further work will be needed to determine if such a method could be used to further draw insights into the organization of the texts, and indeed whether a network approach might be useful in locating previously unidentified towns or cities.

Further limitations concern the types of relationships represented in the present network study. The co-occurrence of toponyms on a given tablet may signify a specific relationship between the places mentioned and Ebla, whether geographic or status-based, but co-occurrence is not the only relevant data present in the texts. For example, the texts frequently document deliveries of goods or gifts—mostly metals and textiles, but also agricultural goods and corvée laborers—both to and from Ebla. These deliveries provide useful information about the types of
relationships that Ebla enjoyed with its contemporaries. Most important, when considered in the context of network analysis, these data can be used to determine the direction and weight of edges linking nodes in a graph. Such information should be incorporated into future network analyses of Ebla’s toponymy.

In short, the present study presents a somewhat superficial investigation of the network of toponyms in the Ebla texts. Further types of data may contribute to significant insights, but as a preliminary assessment, it is apparent that a network approach can be useful for identifying patterns in the toponymic data. Whether or not these patterns are significant, or reveal some underlying structure or principles relating to Eblaite administrative or scribal practices, remains to be seen.

6 Summary Observations

In this chapter, I presented a preliminary analysis of the network of co-occurring toponyms contained in the Ebla texts. The results suggest that geographic proximity may have been less influential in the grouping of toponyms compared to other factors, such as the political status of a city. By exploring the toponym data from a network perspective, it is possible to provide a more nuanced, quantitative description of a given site’s importance and its connections to other sites in the texts. However, concerning the underlying reasons for the patterns in the distribution of the toponym data, future work should aim to incorporate a greater number and variety of variables in the analyses.

A city’s status may have been more important in the presentation of the toponymy in the texts. That is, kingdoms tend to occur together with other kingdoms, while secondary towns governed by overseers are more likely to be grouped with other secondary towns, and so on. However, the significance of these factors—distance and status—remain to be more fully
explored. The preliminary results presented in this chapter offer some insight into the potential of a network approach to exploring the toponymic repertory of the Ebla texts. However, many limitations prevent the results from being taken at face value. Issues of sampling and the inclusion of many unidentified sites renders the preceding research preliminary at best. In order to make sense of the large number of places mentioned in the texts, specifically how they are grouped together on a given tablet, a more holistic approach is perhaps needed. A settlement’s role within the larger economic network should be taken into consideration. For example, a settlement located in a metals-producing region might have had particularly close relations to secondary centers where metal goods were manufactured or processed, and this might be reflected in the texts. The Ebla texts provide some important information about different site’s political and economic alliances, and these contextual data should be considered in conjunction with basic details like geographic distance. As it stands, it is premature to rely too heavily on purely statistical analysis of the toponymic data in explaining the co-occurrence patterns in the dataset. Sites were grouped according to a range of factors, and in some cases such groupings could have been random. Nevertheless, teasing out patterns remains an important task, and network analysis provides a means for identifying these patterns.
Chapter 7

Continuity and Change in the Amuq Plain

1 Introduction

This chapter presents the archaeological evidence for the impact of Ebla’s hegemony in the Amuq Plain. A review of Early Bronze Age settlement patterns reveals a shift in overall settlement from the center of the plain to the southern edge of the region by the mid-third millennium, and the foundation of new sites along the main east-west corridor linking the area to Inner Syria. The extent to which Ebla’s political expansion directly impacted settlement trends in the Amuq Plain is difficult to discern archaeologically. An indirect influence is more likely.

The archaeological phases at Tell Tayinat corresponding to the height of Ebla’s power have only been exposed in a few areas, largely due to the extensive Iron Age remains overlying the earlier levels. Late third millennium architectural remains uncovered during recent excavations at Tell Tayinat evince large scale, possibly public buildings, but these date to the post-destruction phases at Tell Mardikh, and therefore highlight only that Tell Tayinat/Alalaḫu continued to prosper in the wake of Ebla’s demise. To date, there are no clear indications of an Eblaite presence at the Amuq Plain’s main settlement, despite textual evidence that attests to Eblaite officials operating there. However, this is unsurprising given that the archaeological correlates for the type of soft power exerted by hegemonic states like Ebla remain poorly understood. Direct evidence of an Eblaite presence may be entirely lacking, meaning that the impact of Ebla’s expansion into the Amuq Plain may only be detectable indirectly.

Looking slightly beyond the Amuq Plain, a review of the distribution of seal-impressed jars points to the impact of Ebla’s hegemony on the regional economy. However, the connections
between the royal palace and these vessels remain tenuous, in part due to the particular nature of the seal-impressed vessels, which appear to have functioned as both storage containers and cooking pots interchangeably.

The chapter concludes with an overview of the archaeological evidence in light of the Territorial-Hegemonic Model, arguing that there is only limited and indirect evidence that Ebla invested in infrastructural modifications in the Amuq Plain, as would be expected from a more territorially-oriented empire or state. Rather, as a hegemonic entity, Ebla appears to have maintained a “hands off” approach to managing its northwestern periphery. This has resulted in an ephemeral material legacy of Ebla’s hegemony in the region, as the archaeological record has yet to reveal any discernible indicators of a direct Eblaite presence in the Amuq Plain, despite the textual evidence attesting to the contrary. These findings are in line with the expectations of a hegemonic polity, as defined by the Territorial-Hegemonic Model.

2 The Physical Environment of the Amuq Plain

The Amuq Plain forms an approximately triangular shaped plain about 30 km by 30 km. It is flanked by the Amanus Mountains on the west, and by hilly uplands to the east, south and southwest (Figure 47). The plain constitutes a northern extension of the Dead Sea Rift Valley that defines much of the Levant’s coast topography. The three main river systems found in the plain are the Orontes in the south, the Afrin in the east, and the Kara Su in the north. The Orontes provides the most water of these rivers, and its importance is highlighted by the presence of the plain’s two most important sites, Tell Atçana and Tell Tayinat, along its right bank (Yener, Edens, Harrison et al. 2000: 168-169). Precipitation in the plain ranges from 500-700 mm per annum, permitting rain-fed agriculture or dry farming. The western part of the plain was dominated by Lake Antioch, which was a shallow, freshwater lake with surrounding marshlands
until the 1960s when it was deliberately drained (Casana and Wilkinson 2005b: 28). The AVRP surveys around the now-drained Lake Antioch indicate that the lake was restricted from the fourth through first millennia BCE, and that the archaeological features found in and around the lake probably initially developed on dry land, and not in marshy or shoreline environments as had been previously thought (Yener, Edens, Harrison et al. 2000: 178).

Much of the plain remains devoid of woodland cover, except for portions of the uplands, especially the Amanus Mountain. The Amanus contains several distinct vegetation-land use zones, including lower elevation zones used primarily for cereal crops and olive and grape orchards. At higher elevations, cereal crops cannot be supported, and eventually even the orchards give way to evergreen woodlands. The highest stretches of the Amanus comprise an alpine zone devoid of trees (Casana and Wilkinson 2005b: 29; Wilkinson 1997a). In addition to providing timber, the Amanus Mountains also served as a source for gold, serpentine, copper and other minerals, though evidence of their exploitation dates only from the Roman period and later. In the east, the hills along the Gaziantep-Urfa platform served as a source for building materials and vesicular basalt for the production of ground stone tools (Wilkinson 2000b: 168).

Although the Amuq Plain is relatively flat, its geomorphology is complex. The floor of the plain is characterized by a patchwork of alluvial and colluvial deposits that is far from uniform. While some of the material eroded on the upland slopes has gathered within tributary valleys and behind agricultural walls, much has reached the floor of the plain as well, often burying archaeological sites in the process. Some parts of the plain have as much as 3 m of sediment accumulation dating to just the last few thousand years. Other parts of the plain show no aggradation at all, meaning that the landscape in some areas retains many of the features that
are contemporaneous to the local Bronze and Iron Age sites (Casana and Wilkinson 2005b: 30; Yener, Edens, Harrison et al. 2000: 168-179).

The parts of the plain exhibiting minimal aggradation present optimal conditions for archaeological surveying. Other areas, namely the Orontes and Afrin alluvial zones, and the Amanus fringe alluvial fans, are subject to much greater sedimentation, and therefore the burial of archaeological sites, especially from earlier phases. In short, the dynamic nature of the plain’s sedimentary history must be taken into consideration when evaluating settlement patterns, as some areas rich in archaeological deposits may be the result of ideal preservation conditions and not necessarily representative of the whole area. Some regions may be underrepresented archaeologically simply because the documentation of archaeological remains in areas of significant sedimentation is more challenging (Wilkinson 2000b: 169).

3 Regional Settlement Patterns

3.1 Amuq Plain Surveys

In addition to revisiting sites documented by Braidwood (1937), the AVRP survey also sought to document new settlements and off-site remains in the uplands surrounding the Amuq Plain. Though Braidwood’s survey was focused on mounded sites in the plain, it was conducted prior to the establishment of the Hatay as a Turkish province, meaning that 24 of the sites documented in the earlier survey could not be revisited by the AVRP, as they are now located within Syrian territory. This is especially the case for the eastern stretches of the Amuq region and the Afrin valley (Yener, Edens, Harrison et al. 2000: 179). Sites recorded during the AVRP, including those that were previously identified by the Chicago survey but were revisited in the more recent
fieldwork, were dated based on surface ceramics (Figure 48; Yener, Edens, Harrison et al. 2000: 180).

The results of the 1937 Chicago survey indicate an increase in settlement from the Chalcolithic through Middle Bronze Age, with a major decline in the Late Bronze Age. Iron Age settlement density rebounded to levels similar to the Middle Bronze Age. Finally, there was a considerable increase in the number of sites in the Roman and Islamic periods (Yener, Edens, Harrison et al. 2000: 180). In general, settlements in the plain tend to cluster around the east-central and southern parts of the plain, but also along the Kara Su, Kizil Irk, Afrin and Eski Afrin. There are comparatively few sites along the western part of the plain and Lake Antioch (Yener, Edens, Harrison et al. 2000: 180), where sedimentation conditions are less than ideal for site detection.

The Bronze Age landscape of the Amuq Plain is dominated by tells, much like elsewhere in the contemporaneous Near East. However, unlike the more arid parts of northern Syria and Iraq, where Bronze Age remains are often observed at the surface of mounds, these levels are frequently obscured in the Amuq Plain by considerable overburden of Iron Age and later occupations. Further limitations to surveying the Bronze Age landscape of the Amuq Plain stem not only from the expansion of modern settlements onto the mounds, but also intensification of modern agricultural activities. Cotton cultivation and irrigated fields obscure many of the mounds previously identified by the Braidwood survey and revisited by the AVRP. The result has been that many Bronze Age mounds that were surveyed yielded relatively few diagnostic pottery sherds for certain periods (Casana and Wilkinson 2005b: 37).

Casana and Wilkinson (2005b: 37) note that due to settlement stability in the plain, many of the Bronze Age mounds have considerable Iron Age deposits overlying their earlier layers.
Pottery counts were, therefore, dominated by Iron Age examples. Even in cases where significant Early Bronze Age levels are attested, their contribution to the surface ceramics collected during surveying can amount to just 2% of the total. As a result, the final report of the AVRP survey does not provide a period-by-period breakdown of settlement patterns in the Amuq Plain. Rather, the analysis of the settlement patterns focuses on the alternating phases of settlement stability and dispersal, and these phases span numerous archaeological periods.

Compounding the issue of generating phase maps with any degree of certainty is the over- and underrepresentation of specific ceramic types. For example, Red-Black Burnished Ware (also called Khirbet Kerak Ware or Early Transcaucasian Ware) makes up the majority of ceramics collected that date to the mid-third millennium (Amuq Phase H, but also later), but its distinctive colors and surface treatment mean that it is more identifiable in the field, and therefore more likely to be collected during surface collections. In contrast, plain wares with long temporal ranges are much harder to identify and date, even though they can often comprise the bulk of a given assemblage. While this discrepancy has implications for understanding the broader settlement trends in the plain—for example, the overrepresentation of Amuq Phase H sites compared to Late Bronze Age sites due to the latter having less readily identifiable ceramics—these limitations also affect the finer scale analysis of settlement patterns. In the third millennium, major polities were developing as part of the second urban revolution, and it is important to examine the effect of these socio-political developments on local settlement patterns. However, this requires high resolution data that takes into consideration the phases immediately preceding and following peaks in urban development. This is not always possible, even in cases where the survey and excavation data are robust. In the Amuq Plain, an area that has been the subject of two major regional survey efforts, high resolution data is only available
for a few key sites. Other sites remain obscured by modern urban or agricultural expansion, or in some cases are situated in politically sensitive areas that are inaccessible to archaeologists. Casana and Wilkinson (2005b: 38) assert that some of these limitations could be alleviated if larger ceramic collections for all sites could be acquired. However, as it stands, only a few sites have yielded enough ceramic evidence to make the identification of their occupational histories more certain, while most other Bronze Age mounds can only be tentatively dated given their modest surface collections. Despite these chronological limitations, considerable effort has been given to sorting out the third millennium settlement patterns in the Amuq Plain. These efforts have proven successful in part due to the comparatively robust regional survey data, but also as a result of increasingly nuanced understandings of the chronology and distribution of specific third millennium ceramic assemblages.

3.2 Phase G (Early Bronze II)

Amuq Phase G corresponds to the terminal Chalcolithic through to the Early Bronze II (ca. 3500-2800 BCE). In this phase, settlement is concentrated in the center of the plain (Figure 49). Prior to Phase G, Tell Kurdu (Yener, Edens, Casana et al. 2000; Ozbal and Gerritsen 2004) had been the largest site in the plain, but it appears to have been abandoned at this time. In its place, the main center was located nearby at Tell ‘Imar al-Sharqi (AS101) (Batiuk 2007). Beyond the center of the plain, the Kara Su and Afrin valleys were sparsely settled, though an increase in settlement along the “proto-Afrin” and Kizil Irk is observed (Figure 50; Yener, Edens, Harrison et al. 2000: 183). Considering that both the Kara Su and Afrin correspond to major conduits connecting the Amuq Plain with adjacent regions in Syro-Anatolia, this suggests that in Phase G, interregional interaction was limited, but the Amuq Plain was not completely isolated.
Around ‘Imar were a series of small settlements ranging from 2 to 4 ha in size, possibly forming a simple two-tier settlement hierarchy. Given this two-tiered system and the concentration of settlements in the center of the plain, Welton (2011: 20) considers Phase G to represent a period of relatively low integration characterized by limited communication and trade with regions beyond the Amuq Plain.

3.3 Phase H (Early Bronze III)

The AVRP reported a significant increase in settlement during Phase H. However, Yener, Edens, Harrison et al. (2000: 184) note that this higher frequency of sites may be the result of the presence of Red Black Burnished Ware, which is considerably more recognizable. Thus, sites dating to this phase in the survey may be overrepresented. In addition to an increase in the total number of sites, settlement also shifted considerably toward the southern edge of the plain, forming an arc-shaped pattern (Yener, Edens, Harrison et al. 2000: 184; Figure 51). New sites are also found along the hillier margins of the plain, especially in the Afrin Valley (Batiuk 2005: 100; 2007: 53).

Previously, in Amuq Phase G, settlement was concentrated more toward the center of the plain, with the two major sites of Karacanlık and ‘Imar dominating the region. In contrast, the major settlements in Amuq H were found to the south, at Daudpasa (AS 164), Judaidah (AS 176) and Çatal Höyük (AS 167) (Yener, Edens, Harrison et al. 2000: 184). Surveys at Tell Tayinat, conducted by Timothy Harrison (Harrison and Batiuk 2001; Batiuk et al. 2005), collected considerable quantities of Red Black Burnished Ware on the north and east sides of the large mound, showing that the site was occupied, probably along its entire 400 by 500 m stretch, during Phase H. Therefore, Tell Tayinat should be counted among the major Phase H settlements.
in the Amuq Plain. In fact, Tell Tayinat seems to have emerged as something of a primate city at this time, similar to the regional settlement system around the Ebla *chora* (Figure 52).

The shift in settlement concentration to the south during Phase H is noteworthy also for the limited amount of Red Black Burnished Ware on mounds with Phase G occupation (Figure 53). That is, many Amuq Phase H sites represented new foundations. Though made locally, this assemblage originates from Eastern Anatolia and the Caucasus, and its presence in the Amuq Plain and elsewhere in the Levant has been linked to the migration of new groups of people into the Near East from the Caucasus region (Batiuk 2005: 237). Also notable are the types of settlements characteristic of Phase H. There are few large sites dating to this period, yet the total number of smaller sites increased significantly. Yener, Edens, Harrison et al. (2000: 184) point out that this is in contrast to contemporaneous trends elsewhere in the Near East, where most regions were undergoing processes of intense urbanization characterized by settlement nucleation.

Welton (2011: 20) suggests that the settlement hierarchy developed from the two-tiered system of Phase G into a three-tiered system during Phase H. Perhaps most significant, the settlements along the southern edge of the plain correspond to the main east-west route connecting northern Syria to the Mediterranean coast. This shift, from the center of the plain to the southern edge, suggests the growing importance of interregional trade and communication, precisely at a time when large, urban centers and regional states were forming throughout the Northern Levant and Upper Mesopotamia. The influence of extra-regional contact is also suggested by the appearance in the Amuq Plain of Red-Black Burnished Ware in considerable quantities, though as noted this may indicate the movement of migratory peoples and not necessarily trade or other forms of interaction.
In addition to Red-Black Burnished Ware, Plain Simple Wares were also abundant in the Amuq Plain during Phase H. These are common throughout much of Western Syria and Syro-Anatolia in the mid- to late-third millennium (Mazzoni 1985). Considering the widespread distribution of Red-Black Burnished Ware and Plain Simple Ware, Welton (2011: 20) suggests that this signifies the integration of the Amuq Plain into the larger cultural milieu that encompassed much of the northwestern Fertile Crescent. However, despite the wide distribution of Red-Black Burnished Ware along the Levantine coast as far as Palestine, it is less commonly found in Inner Syria, including at Ebla where it was found in very limited quantities. Again, considering that this ware is easily identified, gaps in its distribution are unlikely to be the result of survey coverage or detectability issues. Thus, while some components of the ceramic cultures of both the Amuq Plain and Inner Syria are held in common, there were some considerable variations suggesting unique cultural assemblages in both areas.

Most of the major sites identified in the Amuq Plain are found on the valley floor, but there are exceptions. The site of Temel Kızılkaya (AS 208) is located on a hilltop overlooking a route that traverses the eastern side of the valley. Surrounding the site are a series of tombs, cisterns and caves. The site consisted of a fortified structure measuring 62 by 16.4 m following a trapezoidal layout (Yener, Edens, Harrison et al. 2000: 184). A mix of Early and Middle Bronze Age pottery was collected at the site, including Red-Black Burnished Ware. The building was constructed of massive, roughly dressed blocks, in a style that is described as not conforming to that of fortified structures of the Roman and Byzantine periods (Casana and Wilkinson 2005b: 244). Given the pottery found at the site, Temel Kızılkaya was probably founded in Phase H or I, and thus represents a rare example of a hilltop site built around the approximate time of Ebla’s expansion.
3.4 Phase I (Early Bronze IVA)

Phase I corresponds to the EBIVA (ca. 2500-2250 BCE). Settlement in the Amuq Plain shows significant continuity with Phase H (including ceramic distribution, see Figure 54), though Welton (2011: 21) argues that Phase I exhibits greater population agglomeration into larger sites like Tell Tayinat (Figure 55). Moreover, her k-means analysis of settlements shows that unlike in the preceding Phase H, which yielded three distinct settlement clusters, Phase I was characterized by a single settlement cluster centered at Tayinat. This is certainly due to Tell Tayinat’s comparatively large size, which is bolstered by its extensive lower town. As the center of the only major cluster of sites, and given its size, Tell Tayinat can be accurately described as a primate city by Phase I. It dominates the plain, and represents the Amuq’s only major urban center at the time when Ebla was also at its peak. This is the Alalahu of the Ebla texts. According to Welton (2011: 21), the material culture associated with Phase I demonstrates a strengthening of ties with regions outside the plain, and this is perhaps to be expected given that Phase I corresponds to the period of maximum urbanization and state formation during the Early Bronze Age.

3.5 Phase J (Early Bronze IVB)

Phase J corresponds to the Early Bronze IVB and the end of the Early Bronze Age in the Amuq Plain (ca. 2250-2000 BCE). There is a decrease in the number of settlements in the Amuq during this phase, though Tell Tayinat remains the predominant center (Figure 56). According to Welton (2011: 21), Tell Tayinat’s dominant position is even more pronounced during Phase J, suggesting perhaps that the settlement was able to expand its influence in the plain in the wake of Ebla’s destruction at the end of the EB IVA. Further evidence for this hypothesis stems from the apparent decline in settlement along the Afrin Valley, which would have served as the main
route connecting the Amuq Plain to Ebla. Perhaps the decline in settlements along the Afrin reflects the reduced role of interregional trade and communication following the removal of Ebla as a regional power. As the hegemony of Ebla was lifted, Alalaḫu was better positioned to assert control and consolidate power in the Amuq Plain. This consolidation was manifest, in part, by more limited contact with polities located to the east.

3.6 Post-Early Bronze Age Settlement Patterns

At the end of the Early Bronze Age and leading into the Middle Bronze Age (Amuq Phases K and L), Tell Atçana emerged as the plain’s dominant settlement (Levels VIII-XIV), while Tell Tayinat was abandoned (Yener, Edens, Harrison et al. 2000: 185). Tell Atçana is located less than a kilometer southeast of Tell Tayinat, and thus represents only a minor shift in the plain’s main settlement. Moreover, the settlement patterns follow similar trends to those of the Early Bronze Age, though in the Middle Bronze Age settlements are more evenly distributed throughout the plain. This is perhaps related to strategies on the part of Alalakh and the kingdom of Mukish to maximize agricultural productivity in the plain. Settlement clusters are most profound along the eastern part of the plain, which is perhaps explained by Mukish’s vassal status to the kingdom of Yamkhad to the east. Settlements may have arisen along the main route connecting these two kingdoms, namely through the Afrin (Yener, Edens, Harrison et al. 2000: 185-186).

In the Iron Age, Tell Tayinat again became the main settlement in the plain. The cyclical shifting of roles between Tell Tayinat and Tell Atçana, coupled with their close proximity, led Yener, Edens, Harrison et al. (2000: 189) to call them “twin settlements,” with the population shifting from site to site periodically. Specifically, Tell Tayinat was occupied during Phases H-J and N-O, while Tell Atçana was occupied during Phases K-M (Yener, Edens, Harrison et al.
By the third or second century BCE there is another major shift in the Amuq Plain settlement system, with the plain’s primary settlement transferring to Antioch beyond the plain to the southwest, but along the main western route connecting Syria with the Mediterranean.

3.7 Discussion

It is helpful to consider the settlement trends in the Amuq Plain in relation to Ebla’s emergence and sudden decline. Specifically, we can observe several key shifts occurring before, during and after Ebla’s development into a large expansionist state, and these can be compared to changes attested in other regions impacted by Ebla’s hegemony. The foremost of these shifts involves the development of the southern edge of the plain during Phase H in the EB III. The decline of Karacanlk and ‘Imar al-Sharqi in the center of the plain, combined with the emergence of sites to the south, especially Tell Tayinat, signifies a major transition in the region at the beginning of the third millennium. This period also witnessed the introduction of new cultural traditions exemplified by the appearance of Red-Black Burnished Ware, likely signifying the arrival new peoples from outside of the Amuq Plain (Batiuk 2005). Importantly, the developments during Phase H indicate that both endogenous and exogenous elements shaped the archaeology of the region at this time. Unlike the isolation that characterized the region during Phase G, Phase H is characterized by a sort of ‘opening up’ of the Amuq Plain and the introduction of new cultural elements.

The shift in settlement to the southern edge of the plain cannot be directly connected with the rise of Ebla as a regional state, which occurred later in the EB IV. That is, while the re-organization of settlements in the Amuq Plain may have been contemporaneous to similar processes of urbanization and political integration in the Ebla chora, settlement trends in the former cannot be attributed to the political or hegemonic activities of the latter. The shift in
settlement to the south of the plain was not the result of a top-down initiative on the part of a single political entity either within or beyond the Amuq Plain. Such entities, though forming at this time, are probably best described as nascent states yet to achieve the more complete forms of integration that are characteristic of expansionist states in subsequent periods, particularly Phases I and J.

Yener, Edens, Harrison et al. (2000: 184) note that Phase H settlement in the Amuq Plain was characterized not by settlement nucleation, but rather dispersal and the founding of many new, smaller sites. Such a trend seems unexpected for a region supposedly undergoing processes of political or economic integration. More specifically, it is difficult to reconcile settlement dispersal with any strategy oriented towards intensification of production, which might be expected of a fully-fledged state. Indeed, this trend is not observed elsewhere in the contemporaneous Near East, where settlement nucleation is widely attested (Yener, Edens, Harrison et al. 2000: 184), coinciding with intense state formation. Thus, in the period immediately before Ebla’s political rise, the Amuq Plain underwent a transformative process characterized by a shift towards the south of the plain, and the foundation of new but small sites, but with little indication of any large-scale state apparatus directing these transformations. Such changes cannot be attributed to the influence of Ebla, which had yet to expand beyond its own core region. The influence of interregional trade in shaping settlement patterns, however, can at least be inferred by the alignment of new sites along obvious routes connecting the Amuq Plain with the rest of western Syria, especially the Afrin. Interregional interaction was increasing in Phase H, but this should be seen as a contributing factor to and not the outcome of political and economic developments in subsequent periods.
By the beginning of the EB IV, Tell Tayinat emerged as the main urban center in the Amuq Plain. This emergence would mark the beginning of a trend that saw either Tell Tayinat or the nearby Tell Atçana serving alternatively as the dominant site in the region until the end of the Iron Age (Casana and Wilkinson 2005b: 39). A rank-size curve (Figure 57) demonstrates how from the EB IV onward the region was characterized by a site hierarchy headed by a single primate settlement followed by a series of secondary settlements. Factors affecting this process of settlement nucleation may have included a desire to increase access to communal fields (Casana and Wilkinson 2005b: 39).

On the opposite side of the rank-size curve are the smaller settlements in the valley that range from 1 to 5 ha. These number about 90 in total, and thus form a long tail at the end of the curve. Evidence of continuous settlement at these smaller sites is less obvious, though they appear to be relatively stable in terms of occupation through the Bronze and Iron Ages, much like the larger settlements in the plain. The distribution of smaller sites in the plain is also important. They tend to be spaced at regular intervals around larger settlements, indicating long-term structural stability, especially during the Bronze Age (Casana and Wilkinson 2005b: 39-40).

Phases I and J are characterized by a well-articulated three or four-tier settlement system. A similar four-tier system has been observed around the Ebla chora (Meyer 1996; Schloen 2001: 276). Regardless of whether the number of tiers in a settlement system can be connected to particular levels of socio-political complexity, the effect of such organization was likely an increase in the efficiency of local economic production, especially with regards to staples. However, connecting the formation of a four-tier settlement system in the Amuq Plain to the spread of Ebla’s hegemony remains difficult, if not impossible. A re-organization of settlements into a four-tier system can easily be understood as an endogenous process initiated either locally
among the secondary settlements, by the burgeoning state apparatus at Alalaḫu/Tell Tayinat, or some combination of these two elements. An external influence is plausible, but the archaeological evidence presented in settlement pattern analysis cannot discern between endogenous and exogenous forces. Ceramically, the Amuq Plain retained its own cultural traditions (see Coastal “culture area” in Figure 58) while still participating in the broader caliciform culture that dominated the larger region (Figures 59, 60 and 61). Unfortunately, the Ebla texts concerning the Amuq Plain do not provide further details regarding the organization of rural territory during the period when Ze-malik was operating at Alalaḫu. As a result, the documentary evidence is relatively silent with regards to Ebla’s effect on land tenure during this period, which, as noted above, Casana and Wilkinson (2005b: 39) state may be important for understanding settlement nucleation and the development of multi-tiered settlement systems.

The Territorial-Hegemonic Model suggests several archaeological correlates for the different strategies adopted by expansionist states. Territorially-oriented states managed peripheral security more directly, resulting in greater investment in local defensive infrastructure, including garrisons, watchtowers and forts. Though unexcavated, Temel Kızılkaya (AS 208) presents an interesting example of a hilltop fort founded in the Early Bronze Age, as early as Phase H or I. The fortified site commands a strategic position overlooking the Afrin valley and the east-west route connecting the Amuq Plain to Inner Syria. It is tempting to attribute the building of this fort with Ebla’s expansion into the plain, either on the part of Alalaḫu which sought to buttress its defensibility in the face of an increasingly expansionistic Ebla, or to Ebla itself as it sought to consolidate its newly gained territory. While no similar military structures can be connected to Ebla, at least archaeologically (Cooper 2010: 90), the preamble to the Treaty with Abarsal indicates that a series of forts were under the purview of Ebla along its northeastern
frontier with Abarsal (Archi 1989: 16). Importantly, these forts are not described as having been built by Ebla, but rather as pre-existing structures associated with larger cities also under Ebla’s control. For example, in the treaty, Ebla is listed as controlling “Kablul and its fortresses; Za’ar, Uziladu and their fortresses” and so on (after Archi 1989: 16). No further description of these forts (or fortresses) is given, but it is implied that Ebla did not construct them. Temel Kızılkaya—if it was a fortified site—could also be such a border fort, perhaps being previously built by Alalaḫu, but in possession of Ebla by the time it asserts its dominance over the Amuq Plain during the period covered by the archives.

Although no garrisons, watchtowers or outposts have been discovered that directly connect to Ebla’s political expansion, there is strong evidence for intense fortification construction at many Middle Euphratean sites during the height of Ebla’s power. Cooper (2010: 90) lists Jerablus Tahtani, Tell ‘Abd, Tell Banat, Tell es-Sweyaht, Munbaqa, Tell Halawa A, Tell Habuba Kabira and Selenkahiye as sites containing significant fortifications built around this time, including ramparts, glacis, walls and towers. It is unlikely that Ebla had any direct role in the construction of these fortifications, but they at least attest to the considerable focus on defensibility in the region at the time. This is unsurprising given the frequent military clashes, especially along the Euphrates, as major regional powers vied for control.

While evidence for the construction of border forts is lacking, the extractive nature of Eblaite hegemony should perhaps have left a greater archaeological impact on local settlement patterns in controlled regions. Typically, tributary payments sent to Ebla by subordinate polities consisted of staples (Cooper 2010: 91), at least in areas where conditions for growing grain was favorable. Evidence from around Tell es-Sweyhat (Danti 1997; 2000; Wilkinson 2004) shows that the better-watered uplands slopes around the site were exploited in the EB IV. However,
Tell es-Sweyhat, which may or may not have been under Ebla’s control, only reached its height in the period following Ebla’s destruction in the 24th century, suggesting perhaps that its own fortunes were connected to the power vacuum left in the wake of the removal of the dominant regional hegemony. Nevertheless, the agricultural expansion attested at late EBA Tell es-Sweyhat is precisely the type of archaeological correlate predicted by the Territorial-Hegemonic Model. That is, in hegemonic states, tributary pressures by the core force the periphery to shift productive foci to meet these demands. In the case of Tell es-Sweyhat, this entailed exploiting nearby areas that were productive for growing grain. In general, a similar trend of settlement expansion into the margins is observed along much of Ebla’s western periphery in the Orontes River (al-Maqdissi et al. 2007; 2010; Castel and Peltenburg 2007; Fortin 2007; Mantellini et al. 2013; Mazzoni 2005). Unfortunately, these broader settlement trends cannot be easily associated with any top-down processes stemming from Ebla’s political authority, and are probably best understood as local phenomena in line with developments across much of the northern Levant in the late Early Bronze Age.

Following Ebla’s destruction in the twenty-fourth century, settlement along the Afrin River collapsed. Still, Tell Tayinat remained apparently unaffected, and may have even thrived in these new geo-political conditions. In fact, similar to the situation at Tell es-Sweyhat, Tell Tayinat may have reached its peak in the late third millennium only after Ebla’s decline (see below). This suggests that while Ebla’s decline was disruptive to interregional trade, certain key polities like Tell Tayinat/Alalahu continued to prosper until stability was restored.

4 Tell Tayinat (Alalahu) in the Third Millennium BCE

Tell Tayinat is a large, relatively low-lying mound situated in the southern part of the Amuq Plain, within the floodplain of the Orontes at the point where the river bends southwest
toward modern Antakya (Antioch). Analysis of CORONA satellite imagery, coupled with intensive fieldwalking on and around the mound during a 2001 survey demonstrated that Tell Tayinat comprised both an upper and lower mound, the latter being buried by modern alluvium (Batiuk et al. 2005).

Analysis of sherd densities resulting from the site survey, along with further analysis of the satellite imagery revealed that the lower mound extended some 200 m to the north of the upper mound, and about 100 m to the east of the upper mound. The lower town did not, apparently, extend west of the upper mound. Linear features along the northern corner of the lower town may indicate the presence of a fortification wall. In total, by including the area circumscribed by the lower town, Tell Tayinat occupies an area between 35 and 40 ha, making it by far the largest settlement in the plain, and comparable in size to other first-tier settlements in Western Syro-Anatolia and the Northern Levant (Welton et al. 2011: 152-153). However, the lower town identified by the surface survey and satellite imagery probably corresponds not to the Early Bronze Age, but rather the later Iron Age city. Tell Tayinat was reoccupied beginning in the Early Iron Age, leading to substantial deposits of cultural material. This later city has obscured much of the Early Bronze Age mound. As it stands, the size of Tell Tayinat in the EBA remains unclear, though it certainly occupied all of the upper mound, measuring about 18 to 20 ha, which is still a significantly large center for Cis euphratean sites. Finally, it should be noted that cores taken on the upper mound recorded EBA remains as much as 6 m in depth, meaning that the levels dating to this period are considerable. Moreover, much of these levels appeared to be lower than the current level of the lower town surface, suggesting perhaps that the true extent of Tell Tayinat during the EBA was not confined to the area of the upper mound, but extended well beyond the area that is now obscured by the overlying Iron Age remains in the lower town.
Further evidence suggesting the greater extent of the EBA levels was recorded during the 2001 survey, as significant quantities of EBA sherds were recovered within 5-10 m from the base of the upper mound along its eastern slope. This material was probably deposited during bulldozing operations that cut away portions of the upper mound’s eastern slope sometime subsequent to the Chicago excavations but before the AVRP was initiated in 1995. Cores taken from the southern slope of the upper mound also yielded EBA material, leading Welton et al. (2011: 153) to suggest that EBA Tell Tayinat probably covered an area of at least 25 ha. In recent years, the Tayinat Lower Town Project has sought to further elucidate the occupational history of the lower mound, and this project promised to increase our understanding not only of the Iron Age city, but also delineate the extent of the Early Bronze Age settlement (Osborne 2017; Osborne and Karacic 2017).

4.1 Phase H Remains

Phase H is mostly notable for the introduction of Red-Black Burnished Ware into the ceramic repertory of the Amuq Plain, but it is also joined by the appearance of Brittle Orange Ware. These new additions join the continuation of the Plain Simple Wares from the preceding Phase G. Thus, there is a mix of cultural continuity and change in the Amuq Plain from the early to mid-third millennium, as not only did settlement patterns shift dramatically to become oriented toward the main east-west routes along the southern part of the plain, but also new cultural elements originating beyond the plain become hallmarks of this new phase.

Phase H material was recovered by the Chicago excavations at Judaidah, Çatal Höyük, Tell Dhahab, and Tell Tayinat (Braidwood and Braidwood 1960: 20). The exposures at Tell Tayinat were restricted to a 35.8 m² area measuring 3 m in depth in T4: 9-6 (Braidwood and Braidwood 1960: 345). Architecturally, the Phase H remains from Tell Tayinat are scant, limited
to just one or two walls belonging to an apparent domestic structure. Yet the masonry of these walls is described as high quality, with the brickwork being straight and uniform, and the corners forming rights angles. At Judaidah the remains are more prominent. New to the architectural repertory are bins, hearths and benches (Braidwood and Braidwood 1960: 518), which though appearing in Phase G, are executed to a much higher quality in Phase H levels.

The Phase H remains from Tell Tayinat consist of parts of two rooms connected by a doorway (Figure 62). The western room yielded parts of a shallow silo. Overlying floors, also dating to Phase H, did not contain architecture (Braidwood and Braidwood 1960: 350). Thus, not much can be said of Tell Tayinat in Phase H, other than it adhered to the high quality of masonry attested at the other sites yielded material from this phase.

The initial Early Bronze Age foundations of Tell Tayinat are poorly understood, in part due to limited exposures, but also because of the sometimes unclear distinctions between Phase G and Phase H assemblages. Certainly, by Phase H Tell Tayinat was a prominent mound, and it is likely that its foundations in the Early Bronze Age begin sometime in the late fourth or early third millennium, as Braidwood had initially suggested (Braidwood and Braidwood 1960: 351, note 3), and has been supported by more recent work on the Amuq ceramic sequence (Welton 2018: 2). Nevertheless, the best represented Early Bronze Age phases at Tell Tayinat date to the later Amuq Phases I and J, which correspond to the EBIV period and the time of Ebla’s hegemonic expansion in the plain.

4.2 Phase I Remains

Phase I material was recovered at Judaidah, Çatal Höyük, and Tell Tayinat (Braidwood and Braidwood 1960: 20). The assemblage exhibits continuity with Phase H, such as the persistence of Red-Black Burnished Ware and Brittle Orange Ware, but also the introduction of the highly
standardized Simple Wares (also called Caliciform Wares) and the first appearance of the distinctive Smeared Washed Wares. While Red-Black Burnished Ware continues in Phase I, it takes on different characteristics, including a preference for an all-red surface treatment.

Phase I material at Tell Tayinat was recovered from T1: 6-4, T4: 5-2, and T8: 8-5. Remains from this phase were less prominent at Judaidah and Çatal Höyük. Simple Ware is a derivation of the Plain Simple Ware of Phase G, though it follows stricter standardization. Unfortunately, the architectural remains for Phase I are extremely limited, meaning that we cannot evaluate the effects of Eblaite hegemony on local architectural traditions with any confidence, nor can we identify any buildings that may be related to Eblaite governance in the Amuq Plain. For example, while excavations of Phase I material at Judaidah and Çatal Höyük were carried out along the edges of those mounds, the operations at Tell Tayinat occurred in the core of the mound. Yet these operations yielded only limited remains, perhaps because the larger operations (T4 and T8) ended up situated in courtyards or some other exterior spaces, while the smaller operation (T1) was simply too limited in area to uncover walls.

Parts of two walls were uncovered in T4, but these do not adhere to any discernible building plan. Adjacent to the walls were two pits (Figure 63) that were probably cut into the architecture-bearing phases at a later point. Most of the floors identified by the Chicago team are simple gray layers with no connected architectural remains (Braidwood and Braidwood 1960: 397). Part of a single, east-west oriented wall was uncovered in T8, but again it does not adhere to a discernible building plan (Figure 64). A multiple hearth installation was recovered, but little else of interest, at least architecturally, was found. Work in T1 did not yield architectural remains (Braidwood and Braidwood 1960: 397).
As for the ceramics of Phase I, of particular importance are the Simple or Caliciform Wares. These have a wide distribution extending from the Levantine coast to the Euphrates. Though Red-Black Burnished Wares are limited at Ebla, Caliciform Ware makes up an important part of the EB IVA assemblage at that site (Mazzoni 1985). This means that while there are some clear boundaries between both areas in terms of ceramic distribution, both the Amuq Plain and Ebla share in the Caliciform culture that is more or less ubiquitous in the northern Levant during the latter Early Bronze Age. However, Mazzoni (1985, 2002, 2003) has noted some discrepancies in the Caliciform Wares that reflect regional varieties, and these should not be overlooked. Despite the presence of Caliciform Wares in both the Ebla region and the Amuq Plain, these areas are divided based on the predominance of Red-Black Burnished Ware, Painted Simple Ware and Smeared Washed Ware, which are hallmarks of the Amuq Plain and the more coastal regions of the northern Levant.

The renewed excavations at Tell Tayinat by the University of Toronto have started to expose levels reached by the Chicago excavations in their various deep soundings. Early Bronze Age remains were uncovered in Field 1, roughly in the center of the upper mound and immediately to the south of the Syro-Hittite Expedition excavations in the West Central Area (Welton et al. 2011: 154). These new excavations have shown that the Early Bronze Age remains at Tell Tayinat are more complicated than anticipated, in part due to several superimposed architectural levels and substantial pitting activities in the Early Iron Age, which in some cases obscured or damaged the terminal Early Bronze Age layers. Beginning in 2008, excavations started to expose in situ features that dated to the latter third millennium, during Amuq Phase J. The latest remains comprise a layer of mostly ephemeral pits post-date the destruction of Ebla (Mardikh IIB2) (Welton et al. 2011: 154). By 2010, excavations had started to expose mainly
Phase J remains, but this may include possible late Phase I material as well (Welton et al. 2011: 155).

4.3 Phase J Remains

Phase J corresponds to the period following the collapse of Ebla. In the Amuq Plain, settlements along the Afrin were considerably reduced in this period, but Tell Tayinat remained a major urban center. The best Phase J remains stemming from the Syrian-Hittite Expedition come from T4:1, T8: 4-3 and T13 at Tell Tayinat, where they measured 1.7 m in depth in some areas (Braidwood and Braidwood 1960: 429). In total, 134 m² of Phase J remains were exposed in these operations, yielding architectural remains of domestic structures, and parts of a building described as a “pretentious structure” (Braidwood and Braidwood 1960: 429). In T3 and T8, the walls were well-built, more than a brick thick, and accompanied by clay benches and basins, while no architectural remains were recovered from T4. Excavations in T8: 4 revealed parts of at least two rooms. The eastern room may have been a narrow hallway given the appearance of a small corner belonging to a partially exposed wall in the southeast corner of the unit. A doorway along the western side of the main east-west wall provided access to an area containing five pits (Figure 65, Level 4). East of the pits were two clay benches lining the walls. Above this building, further Phase J remains were recovered (T8: 3) including at least one room with a doorway on the west wall towards its southern end, providing access to an apparently open area containing two pits (Figure 65, Level 3).

Another Phase J building was partly exposed in T13: 2, comprising a complex plan of several rooms and a conical depression on the surface. The walls of this phase were relatively thin, but a doorway to the south of the unit was exposed, alongside two basalt ground stone tools. Above this was T13: 1, which also yielded Phase J remains of a building, this time much more
substantial. Braidwood and Braidwood (1960: 430) note the thickness of the walls and their excellent construction and preservation as exemplary of Phase J remains at the site. Two rooms were exposed. The northern room was fully cleared, and though not large, contained a doorway on the east leading into another room with a partially stone-paved floor and a pier or buttress just to the north of the doorway (Figure 66). The southern room was larger than the northern room, and also contained a doorway providing access to the east. Evidence of fire in this room suggests that the terminal Phase J structure was destroyed violently (Braidwood and Braidwood 1960: 430).

The University of Toronto’s excavations in Field 1 (Figure 67) have continued to expose extensive Phase J remains. Three Field Phases (FP 9-7) correspond to Phase J remains. FP 9 represents the earliest Phase J (EB IVB) remains so far uncovered in the renewed excavations. These comprise a unique plan unassociated with overlying structures, but they remain only partially exposed. Much more is known about the architectural remains from FP 8, including two rooms of a building with walls preserved to a height of 1.5 m (Welton et al. 2011: 154). Numerous ceramics found on the floors within these rooms, coupled with the evidence of wall collapse indicates that the building was destroyed rapidly, preserving much of the buried cultural remains. Based on ceramic parallels, Welton and colleagues (2011: 154-155) date the destruction of the FP 8 building to the end of the third millennium, around the same time as the destruction of the Archaic Palace at Tell Mardikh/Ebla (Matthiae 2006: 90) and the general destruction and abandonment that characterizes much of the northern Levant and Upper Mesopotamia around 2000 BCE (Weiss et al. 1993).

The architectural style of the FP 8 building is similar to contemporaneous examples found at sites like Habuba Kabira, Tell al-‘Abd, and Halawa Tell A (Welton et al. 2011: 155).
Particularly notable are the use of symmetrically placed internal buttresses, thin inner walls, and thicker outer walls (Figure 68). Though the building segments exposed by the Syrian-Hittite Expedition in T13: 1 are limited in terms of exposure, buttresses are also evident in its construction. Moreover, the thick walls of this structure, coupled with its apparently rapid destruction suggests that it belongs to the same architectural phase as the FP 8 building. Both structures seem to date to the terminal Early Bronze Age levels at Tell Tayinat.

A final Early Bronze Age phase, FP 7, has been identified by the University of Toronto team. This phase consists of post-occupational pitting, dating perhaps to the Early Bronze/Middle Bronze transition, when the main settlement in the plain shifted to Tell Atçana.

4.4 Discussion

The archaeological phases at Tell Tayinat dating to the period of Ebla’s hegemony, Phase I/EB IVA, are extremely limited, though the continued excavations at the site promise to reveal more material over time. Nevertheless, we are forced to conclude that the evidence collected thus far presents little indication of an Eblaite influence. The buildings identified so far are only partially exposed, and appear to be domestic in nature. Associated installations, such as pits, and small finds are mute with regards to an Eblaite presence. Only Phase J, dating to the post-Palace G period, presents some evidence of larger, possibly public architecture. However, the Phase J buildings found in Field 1 and T13 exhibit features that were apparently common among contemporaneous Euphratean sites.

To date, there is no direct evidence of an Eblaite presence at Tell Tayinat, and further, the evidence cannot shed light on any potential changes to the settlement’s layout or function resulting from an Eblaite influence. The archaeology of third millennium Tell Tayinat indicates that the site was similar to other primary regional centers in the northern Levant, both in terms of
site morphology and architectural remains. The ceramic evidence, particularly the large quantities of Red-Black Burnished Ware found at the site, suggest the influx of foreign elements, yet the prevalence of Caliciform Wares implies an adherence to larger cultural koine that characterizes much of northern Levant and Middle Euphrates in the mid to late-third millennium. Tell Tayinat exhibits features that are both native to the Amuq Plain and suggestive of external influence, but none of this influence is attributable to Ebla’s expansion. In short, the evidence as it stands suggests that if Ebla controlled the Amuq Plain and its primary settlement at Tell Tayinat—which the text seem to imply rather overtly—the archaeology of that site remained largely unaffected by the major geo-political events in effect at the time. Tell Tayinat’s historical trajectory was left unchanged by Ebla’s rise and fall. Such an outcome is anticipated in the context of the Territorial-Hegemonic Model. As a hegemonic state, Ebla continued to intervene only sparingly in local affairs along its periphery, and even those states that housed Eblaite officials retained significant autonomy. The result is that archaeologically, Ebla’s hegemony has left little trace on the ground at sites like Tell Tayinat. Whatever influence was felt, it apparently did not alter the function, layout, or architecture of the site.

5 Seal-Impressed Jars and the Redistributive Economy

One of the more interesting categories of archaeological materials relating to Ebla’s administration consists of seal impressions and especially seal-impressed vessels. Several seal impressions have been found at Ebla’s Palace G exhibiting different styles and characteristics that may relate in different ways to the state apparatus. Similarly, a large corpus of seal-impressed vessels has frequently been invoked as evidence of the Eblaite state administration, and their distribution has been interpreted as an archaeological correlate for Ebla’s political and economic hegemony. The following discussion summarizes some of the key points relating to
this evidence, and it becomes clear that the use of seal impressions and the distribution of seal-impressed vessels as a reliable marker of Ebla’s hegemony is not tenable.

5.1 Seal Impressions

Excavations at Palace G have recovered many seal impressions on bullae, cooking jars and other containers (Pinnock 2013). Seals on cooking jars were made before firing, and adhere to a style that Pinnock (2013: 66) describes as “linear-cursory,” while those made on bullae follow a “court” style. The 50 or so impressions found on jars exhibit geometric and floral designs (Figures 69 and 70), but human and animal depictions are also present (Figure 71). These designs are not exclusive to Ebla, but are well-known from other EB III-IV sites in the region (Mazzoni 1992; 1993: 410-414). Mazzoni notes that geometric and floral designs (Figure 72) are mostly present on corrugated jars, while seals showing humans and animals tend to appear on ovoid jars (Figures 73 and 74), often three-footed, which are mostly found within official areas in Palace G. The jars themselves were mainly used for storage—as is the case for the pattern-combed wares mostly associated with oil storage, and often contained seal impressions—or other kitchen uses such as cooking or food transformation (Pinnock 2013: 66). Most jars impressed with linear-cursory designs were found in the two long storerooms located to the north, behind the Court of Audience.

Bullae containing official palace seals were found in greater quantities than seal-impressed jars. Moreover, bullae were used on a greater variety of containers, including ceramic vessels, but also wooden boxes and wicker baskets. The iconographic repertoire of the palace-style glyptic exhibits a strong similarity to that of Early Dynastic Mesopotamian designs. Eblaite seals contained one register, sometimes flanked above and below by friezes of human and animal heads. The most common figurative design was the “contest” scene, though it was executed in a
distinctly local style. For example, while in Mesopotamian contest scenes, the struggle took place solely between animals of hybrid figures, in the Eblaite designs human and divine figures feature prominently. The goddess Ishkhara, closely connected to the Eblaite royal family, is commonly featured in this palace glyptic. At least two seals were inscribed with their owners’ names, Ibdula and Rei-Naim. Both individuals were overseers, and in the case of Ibdula, used more than one seal—though all of them in the palatial style—for different containers holding specific goods and documents for the palace.

Pinnock (2013: 67) argues that the seals of the palace administrators attest to the systematic oversight and management of palace-based production. This included the validation of other administrator’s work, as in the case of Ibdula and Rei-Naim. Other functions are also evinced in the glyptic of the palace. Specifically, the lone cylinder seal recovered during excavations bears an inscription identifying its owner as Ushra-Samu, who is known from the texts as ugula in charge of the women’s sector of the palace. The seal was found close to the maliktum’s standard, suggesting that, indeed, Ushra-Samu was responsible for this part of the palace. Overall, Pinnock suggests that the palace-style glyptic had a limited circulation within the Administrative Quarter itself, and perhaps other as yet unexcavated parts of the palace. This practice was apparently repeated at other major centers in Syria, with each having their own Mesopotamian-influenced but recognizably local glyptic repertories used exclusively by high officials associated with the central administration.

The linear-cursory seals differ strongly from the court style in terms of function and distribution. According to Pinnock, the former were impressed before baking, and have a much wider distribution, as they are found throughout Syro-Anatolia, Upper Mesopotamia and the Levant. She distinguishes these seals from the court style examples, arguing that they represent a
more local type of sealing practice associated with storage and staples. Nevertheless, both styles are present in Palace G, and this indicates that the administration had a role in managing a variety of products ranging from agricultural to sumptuary goods. On the other hand, jars sealed in the linear-cursory style prior to firing, according to Pinnock, represent administrative practices originating beyond the palace. These seals, with their simple geometric and floral designs belonged to peripheral officials who were more directly involved with production in villages and towns outside the main center of power. The sealings on jars probably signified the special nature or place of origin of their contents, which Pinnock argues was probably wine or oil. Interestingly, she notes that these types of seals tend to be highly localized in terms of style and distribution, but at Ebla they exhibit a greater variety, suggesting that they represent agricultural and other goods stemming from a larger territory. As a result, the presence of a diverse linear-cursory glyptic repertory may be seen as a proxy for Ebla’s long-distance trade connections, and perhaps even its extensive hegemonic control over a considerable periphery. Compared to other centers, Ebla’s source for agricultural and other local products was more substantial. Finally, Pinnock (2013: 69) emphasizes the complex system of sealing practices at Ebla, arguing that it demonstrates not only the large territorial coverage of Ebla’s trade networks, but also the relative autonomy of peripheral officials, who maintained their own glyptic traditions distinct from the official palace administration in the core.

Mazzoni argues that the linear-cursory style seal impressions are not decorative, but rather functional. They marked the special nature of the products contained in the impressed jars. Mazzoni further suggests that the seals represent rural environments or villages, and not the central administration, which had its own seal designs that were characterized by more elaborate scenes but were limited in distribution to the palace itself. Most important, Mazzoni suggests that
the jars with these local style seals may have come from the zone under Ebla’s economic control, thus serving as indicators of Ebla’s hegemonic and extractive activities (Mazzoni 1988: 89). Some of these jars—for example, two specimens of a metallic type ware—may even originate in the Amuq Plain, suggesting that goods were reaching Ebla from this region either through trade or in the form of tribute (Mazzoni 1988: 90).\(^4\)

The jars containing linear-cursory seal impressions exhibit a double-sealing method, wherein two different impressions are apparent. Mazzoni argues that these different markings signify the provenance and subsequent acceptance of the jars. The jar would have been sealed initially by its producers to indicate the provenance of the contents, and then upon receipt, for example by the town or palace, a second seal validating the contents would have been added (Mazzoni 1988: 90). However, as the impressions on these jars were made prior to the firing of the vessels, this explanation for the double seals cannot be accepted.

The seal-impressed vessels themselves all conform to the same typological style, and indeed Mazzoni (1988: 90-91) states that they emanate from the same workshop. However, the seal impressions stem from different places. Similar practices, and in some cases identical seal impression designs, are noted at places like Tell es-Sweyhat, Tawi, Tell Munbaqa, and Tell Bi’a. This suggests the widespread use of simplified geometric and floral designs, but also the common practice of impressing specific jars types (Mazzoni 1988: 91).

According to Mazzoni (1988: 91), the distribution of the seal-impressed vessels does not extend further than the Amuq Plain in the west and the Balikh region in the east. That is, the imports at Ebla originate from within the boundaries of its political and economic zone of influence, and not further. However, it is important to address the quantities of seal-impressed

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46 Both examples come from L. 2812 (TM.85.G.387/1-2)
jars found in Palace G. In total, some 280 large and 300 medium sized storage jars, many of them without seal marking, were recovered in the Administrative Quarter of the palace. Mazzoni (1988: 92) considers these quantities to be far too limited compared to the figures attested in the texts with regards to the storage and shipment of agricultural goods associated with the palace’s central storerooms. As a result, Mazzoni (1988: 92) claims that the jars recovered during excavation reflect the central administration’s own annual reserves, and not those of the state. Regarding luxury goods, evidence of their storage in the palace was even more limited. This is reasonable considering their use was mainly as part of a system of gift exchange between rulers and other officials (Mazzoni 1988: 92). In short, Mazzoni concludes, the palace’s storerooms reflect only the limited amounts of goods used by the palace itself, and the actual state storerooms, which the palace managed, were probably located elsewhere, perhaps even outside the city.

Four impressions are found on corrugated straight-rim jars from L.2890. These vessels are not associated with transport, but rather were found in connection to several hearths (Mazzoni 1993: 403). Jars found at both Ebla and Hama have been shown to exhibit impressions made by the same seal (Mazzoni 1993: 405). The jars themselves are of the same fabric and have a corrugated ovoid shape with straight-rimmed profiles. Mazzoni takes this as evidence of the close economic relationship between both cities. Interestingly, these vessels have calcite temper, which is most commonly applied to vessels intended for heating, specifically cooking. The porosity of the fabric also indicates that these vessels were designed to withstand strong thermal stress, while the corrugated design is believed to enhance the vessel’s ability to absorb heat from the fire while cooking. In short, these vessels are cooking pots, which is further confirmed by their association with hearths at Ebla. However, it is possible that these vessels also served as
storage vessels, given that at Ebla and Hama, examples have been found within clear storage contexts. Furthermore, despite the strong evidence for their use as cooking pots, the vessels do exhibit wide necks which may have negated some of their heat retention qualities.

Mazzoni argues that regardless of whether the corrugated ovoid pots had seal impressions, the vessels themselves signify specialist production by a possibly itinerant workshop. Despite their distribution, which stretches from Hama to the Euphrates, they exhibit petrological and morphological consistency. Moreover, they are thin-based and thick-walled vessels, meaning that they would have been cumbersome to transport, and therefore were likely restricted to local use (Mazzoni 1993: 407).

Mazzoni stresses the multi-functionality of the corrugated ovoid vessels, which served as both cooking and storage jars. She also compares them to the Pattern-Combed Wares prevalent along the Levantine coast, suggesting that the corrugated wares filled a similar role in Inner Syria, though she admits that their use as wine or olive oil storage vessels cannot be supported.

5.2 Seal-Impressed Vessels

Seal-impressed vessels are classified as medium to large jars with either horizontally or vertically impressed cylinder seal designs. They date mainly to the EB IV, and are found throughout the Eastern Mediterranean, but especially in Syria and Palestine. Three types of seal-impressed jars are of significance. First, globular tripod jars with out-turned rims are found only at Ebla. Second, seal-impressed holemouth jars are found only at Hama. Finally, globular, corrugated straight-rim jars are found at both Ebla and Hama, and at various sites along the Orontes and Inner Syria (Graff 2012: 22).

Globular, corrugated, straight-rim jars (GCSRJ) tend to be large, measuring about 60 cm in height and roughly 55 cm in diameter (Figure 75). They are primarily characterized by their
short necks, rounded bodies and bases, and fine corrugated surfaces (Figure 76). Seal impressions are usually found on either their neck or shoulder, and are executed by the rolling out of a cylinder seal. Sometimes the impressions can circumscribe the whole of the neck or shoulder, but more often it is rolled out once or twice. The designs on these seals range from simple geometric patterns to more complex figurative displays including animals and humans. Mazzoni (1984, 1992) considers these seals to be representative of a localized sealing tradition that spanned much of western Syria during the EB IV.

Understanding the meaning of these seals is difficult. Scenes appear to be related to cult activities, dancing, fertility or animal husbandry. The geometric designs are even more ambiguous, but probably held some inherent meaning for their users.

5.3 Distribution of Seal-Impressed Vessels

At least four seal-pressed GCSRJ were recovered from the food-processing rooms located behind the “Audience Unit” of Ebla’s Palace G complex. These were found in association with eight hearths found in situ along a plastered bench lining the eastern wall of the room (Figure 77; Mazzoni 2003). Sherds belonging to the four specimens were found in and around the four southern hearths, leading Mazzoni to conclude that these vessels were associated with cooking activities. Storage jars were also found along the western side of the same room, though these were not seal-pressed, and were not of the same type as the GCSRJ (Graff 2012: 28).

Prior to the discovery of the seal-pressed GCSRJ alongside the hearth installations, seal-impressed jars at Ebla were mostly recovered from contexts associated with food storage, and possibly transportation. However, the inclusion of the new evidence suggests that while such vessels may have been used for storage, their primary function may have been food preparation and cooking.
In contrast with the excavations at Ebla, those at Hama were mainly of residential buildings (Fugmann 1958; Matthews 1996). Seal-impressed vessels found here derive almost exclusively from kitchen or cooking-related contexts, though some were also found in association with textile production and storage areas. Thus, the limited evidence from Hama seems to support the dual function of seal-impressed jars as both cooking pots and storage vessels.

At least two seal-impressed GCSRJ have been recovered from the recent excavations at Qatna (Tell Mishrifeh). Both appear to come from residential contexts, possibly associated with cooking or storage. Interestingly, the impressions are very similar to those found on vessels at Ebla, including one example of a contest scene.

5.4 Economic Role of Seal-Impressed Vessels

The widespread distribution of seal-impressed vessels in the EBIV is often seen as evidence for a highly integrated and centralized redistributive economy. Mazzoni has argued that GCSRJ with seal impressions found at Ebla were produced in villages where they were filled with local agricultural products, and then subsequently transported to Ebla as part of its redistributive system. Similar seal-impressed jars were found at both Hama and Qatna (Tell Mishrifeh), to the southwest of Ebla along the Orontes, and these have also been interpreted as signatures of the redistributive economic system headed by Ebla during the EB IV (Matthews 1996; Morandi Bonacossi 2007). Cooper (2006) has similarly linked these seal-impressed vessels to a centralized economy from evidence recovered at Tell Acharneh, possibly ancient Tunip.

However, not everyone agrees with this interpretation of the seal-impressed vessels. Graff (2006; 2012) argues that petrographic, contextual and other data indicate that the seal-impressed GCSRJ were used primarily as cooking pots, and not as transport vessels. Specifically,
she suggests that seal-impressed GCSRJ represent a unique type of highly-prized and specialist-produced cooking pot. Counter to most assumptions about the production of cooking wares, these vessels were produced by specialists in workshops, and distributed along the same lines as other ceramic commodities, such as decorated tablewares. The latter are known to change more frequently over time, and also to move more readily across the landscape, as they are treated as goods themselves. On the other hand, it is assumed that cooking pots are more utilitarian, and therefore not particularly valued. But Graff notes that the pyrotechnical aspects of the fabric of GCSRJ, combined with their surface decoration in the form of seal impressions, indicates their purpose as highly-specialized cooking wares. Apparently, these were desirable wares during the EB IVA and EB IVB, hence their wide distribution in both normal domestic and even palatial contexts. In short, Graff is arguing that while the seal-impressed GCSRJ found at Ebla and elsewhere may have served a secondary function as storage jars, they were primarily an important type of cooking pot that was produced by specialists and sought after by many people. Most important, they were not state-produced vessels, and they are not indicative of a redistributive economic system.

5.5 Political Role of Seal-Impressed Vessels

Mazzoni (1984; 2003) contends that while the seals on vessels were not directly linked to the Eblaite administration, they did nevertheless function as emblems of the state. Her main argument is that the vessels were produced in villages, but used to transport and store goods headed to Ebla as part of the larger redistributive system. This interpretation has been supported by both Matthews (1996) and Flender (2000). As emblems of the state, and not as official administrative seals issued by the palace, the seal impressions on the vessels are seen as indicators of the quality of the goods being sent to the palace.
Graff argues that interpretations of these seal-impressed vessels is impeded by a persistent need to connect their production and distribution to Ebla’s political and economic hegemony. However, the distribution of the vessels indicates that they were used both at Ebla—where they were found in the kitchens of the palace—and Hama, a site under the control of the former. Moreover, seal-impressed vessels were found in domestic contexts at Hama, which appears to contrast with their role as storage vessels of state goods. These vessels were also found at Qatna, which may be the kingdom of Ibal in the Ebla texts. Ibal was both autonomous and at times extremely hostile with Ebla, which most poignantly demonstrated by Ebla’s numerous campaigns against that city. Yet, seal-impressed vessels similar to those found in Palace G were recovered at Qatna, also in domestic contexts. Graff (2012: 37) suggests that the distribution of these vessels is better explained by rejecting their potential role as emblems of the state, and rather accepting that they were simply highly-desirable cooking vessels that were produced and traded similar to any other commodity at the time.

Graff rejects the notion that GCSRJ were used as transport vessels, particularly because they would have been cumbersome to move over long distances. On the other hand, she accepts that ceramic vessels often served multiple functions, and this appears to be the case of the GCSRJ. At Ebla, they were associated both with cooking and storage. Graff suggests that the rounded shape of these large vessels accommodated both functions, as they could be placed in a hearth during cooking activities, while their rounded bases also allowed them to be neatly stacked when used for storage.

6 Archaeological Evidence and the Territorial-Hegemonic Model

In discussing the construction of Palace G, Mazzoni (1993: 403) observes that the complex was built on the periphery of the acropolis. She argues that the audience and ceremonial units were
aggregated to the older parts of the palace, suggesting that they were essentially built into the service areas. She takes this as evidence that Ebla’s rise was rather rapid, and the city needed to accommodate various new functions quickly, resulting in a haphazard layout. Considering that even the capital city experienced unique challenges due to the rapidity of its own expansion—resulting, apparently in refitting rather than rebuilding—it calls into question the probability that such a rapid rise could result in a significant impact to the archaeology along the state’s periphery. The textual evidence reviewed in Chapter 4 suggests that Ebla’s hegemony was unevenly spread throughout its sphere of influence, and even in those areas that were purportedly under the direct control of Ebla significant levels of local autonomy were retained. What, then, can we expect to find archaeologically that would provide ground-truthing for Ebla’s expansion? The answer, disappointingly, appears to be very little.

The settlement patterns of the Amuq Plain in the third millennium remained largely unaffected by Ebla’s rise and fall. Similarly, the relevant archaeological remains at Tell Tayinat/Alalahu, have yet to exhibit an Eblaite influence, despite an Eblaite overseer being installed at the site. Granted, much of the lack of direct evidence for Ebla’s presence in the Amuq Plain can be attributed to the limited Phase I exposures, but this is an argument from the absence of evidence.

If an association between Ebla and Temel Kızılkaya could be established, a compelling case could be made that the fort evinces a more direct territorial approach to governance of the Amuq Plain on the part of Ebla. However, no such connection can be established based on the available evidence. As it stands, life in the Amuq Plain apparently carried on as usual despite Ebla’s supremacy. While fortification walls are commonplace at many contemporaneous sites,
dedicated, non-urban military forts or fortresses do not appear to be have made up a major component of Ebla’s defensive strategy.

The Territorial-Hegemonic Model suggests that hegemonic states exercised low-cost, low-extraction methods of integration along their peripheries. The archaeological correlates to such strategies are frustratingly ambiguous. While the textual sources indicate that Ebla controlled a vast territory, the archaeological evidence cannot support this. More appropriately, the texts imply that Ebla maintained strong ties with an increasingly large cohort of client states, but its direct governance of these polities is less obvious. The archaeology seems to corroborate this more nuanced form of political hegemony exercised by Ebla. Autonomy was retained whenever possible, and even in those cases where sovereigns were removed in favor of Eblaite officials, much local autonomy was preserved. Security along the periphery was probably left to the client states themselves, as there is no evidence that Ebla invested in military infrastructure in these areas, despite frequent military activity.

Though horizontal exposures of archaeological levels contemporaneous with the Palace G archives remains relatively limited, it seems as though no direct evidence of Eblaite administrative facilities can be positively identified. Ebla apparently installed numerous officials at many sites within its sphere of influence, but such procedures did not coincide with major building projects. Thus, unlike the Neo-Assyrian expansion in the early first millennium, Ebla’s political growth was not accompanied by a major investment in building of palaces or administrative complexes. Ebla’s policy was apparently based on hegemonic strategies that included collaboration, diplomacy, and the threat of reprisal.

Hegemonic strategies, by nature, left less behind archaeologically compared to more territorial strategies. This should not be unexpected. However, the Territorial-Hegemonic Model
helps us to understand these phenomena by presenting the range of possible orientations along various spectra corresponding to various domains, be they political, economic, military and so on. While the evidence of territorial strategies is largely lacking along political and military domains, the distribution of seal-impressed vessels indicates that economically Ebla may have had a more heavy-handed role than would be expected of a purely hegemonic state. However, debates over the nature of these vessels and their relationship to the tributary systems in place at the time suggest that associating their distribution with Eblaite territorial control is premature.

Concerning Ebla’s impact on the distribution of ceramics, a few additional comments must be made. In recent years, refinements to the Early Bronze Age ceramic sequences of northwest Syria have begun to clarify both the chronology and distribution of certain ware types like the so-called Caliciform Ware (e.g., Welton 2018; 2014; Cooper and Welton 2014; Sconzo 2015; Vacca 2015; D’Andrea and Vacca 2015). These studies promise to provide greater resolution to the available settlement data, making it possible to track regional trends more closely in relation to Ebla’s political fortunes. While it is unlikely that the distribution of Caliciform Wares can be taken as direct evidence of Eblaite hegemony, there appears to be a growing body of evidence suggesting that changes in the assemblage from the EB IVA to EB IVB can be linked, at least partly, to political events surrounding Ebla’s destruction at the end of the EB IVB (Cooper 2018). That the EB IVA Caliciform Wares exhibit less local idiosyncrasies suggests, perhaps, that this period experienced a greater sense of cultural unity, and that this unity is related to the political stability brought on by the presence of a large and centralized political authority in the region, in this case Ebla. Once removed as the leading polity, something of a disintegration or degeneration may have ensued, and this is manifest culturally through greater regional variation in forms and decoration to the ubiquitous drinking assemblage.
7 Summary Observations

In this chapter, I presented the archaeological evidence for Ebla’s expansion in the Amuq Plain, focusing on regional settlement patterns and third millennium remains at Tell Tayinat. An overview of these data shows that settlement trends in the Amuq Plain remained largely unaffected by the growth and expansion Ebla into a regional power. Despite exercising a clear political and economic hegemony over a wide area, Ebla’s policies did not result in discernible changes to local subsistence strategies. Evidence for the intensification of agricultural production in the Amuq Plain is in line with similar trends observed throughout much of the northern Levant and Upper Mesopotamia during the so-called “second urban revolution.”

Following Ebla’s collapse, there is a noticeable decline in settlements along the Afrin River, suggesting that communication with Inner Syria was disrupted. However, Tell Tayinat appears to have been unaffected by this newfound isolation, as the settlement thrived until the end of the Early Bronze Age. Prior to this reduction in settlements along the Afrin, the hilltop for of Temel Kızılkaya was constructed. However, this structure cannot directly connected to Ebla’s expansion. As a result, the major settlement trends in the Amuq Plain during the third millennium appear to have followed a largely organic course that shows little direct evidence of Eblaite interference.

Similarly, an overview of the Early Bronze Age levels at Tell Tayinat reveals about a possible Eblaite presence at that site. To date, there is no direct evidence of an Eblaite administrative complex or other structure associated with the installed Eblaite overseer Ze-malik. While such officials were clearly active on the part of the Royal Palace, they apparently did not occupy newly built accommodations at conquered cities. Further excavations may shed more
light on the nature of Ebla’s presence at places like Tell Tayinat, but as it stands, the archaeological evidence for Eblaite investment in local administrative and military infrastructure is severely lacking.

While on the surface it appears as though a state as expansive as Ebla should have left a greater archaeological legacy among its peripheral territories, when one considers the Territorial-Hegemonic Model, it becomes clear that our expectations of what can be observed archaeologically for such a scenario must be tempered. Hegemonic strategies leave little behind because they entail limited investment on the part of the core polity. Local rulers are often left in place, but even when state officials are installed, local autonomy is often retained to a considerable degree. This is especially so for security and defense, which are costly for the core polity to oversee and manage. Apparently, ancient Ebla also sought to limit investment in administrative infrastructure, preferring to superimpose its governance on local systems. While this leaves a fairly ephemeral archaeological impact, it also apparently left Ebla vulnerable to widespread rebellion and insecurity. The low-cost strategies adopted by Ebla may have served it in the short-term, but the constant rebellions of its subject polities ultimately adversely impacted the long-term stability of the kingdom.
Chapter 8
Conclusions: Ebla’s Hegemony and the Amuq Plain

In the preceding chapters, I presented a characterization of Ebla as an early expansionist state that relied heavily on hegemonic as opposed to territorial strategies to consolidate its growing periphery. A review of the archaeological literature concerning expansionist states demonstrates the vital role that peripheries, borderland and frontiers played in core-periphery systems. Ebla’s periphery consisted of a range of polities of differing size, complexity, and degrees of loyalty. The texts found in Palace G reveal that Ebla maintained intense diplomatic ties with a considerable number of cities and towns scattered throughout the northern Levant and Upper Mesopotamia. Mutual gift-exchange and interdynastic marriages were the norm. Warfare was common too. As Ebla expanded, military activity and diplomacy increased accordingly. Ultimately, however, Ebla never established a permanent hold over much of its periphery, perhaps contributing to its eventual defeat. A review of the archaeological evidence during the EB IVB shows that even though Ebla controlled a vast number of client states, it invested little in local military or administrative infrastructure, and had minimal impact on local settlement patterns. While it did install overseers at some conquered cities, Ebla’s policy for governance along its periphery seems to have been rooted in a “hands off” approach. That is, in place of direct territorial control over a significant periphery extending from the Orontes to the Euphrates, Ebla opted for a hegemonic strategy that focused on extracting resources at minimal cost to the core polity.

This dissertation contributes three key insights regarding the nature of the Eblaite state and its impact on the archaeology of the Amuq Plain. First, characterizations describing Ebla as an empire are based more on fiction than fact. A review of the textual data clearly demonstrates
that despite the broad geographic coverage of the Palace G archives, the territory over which Ebla exercised power was modest compared to the later empires that are frequently invoked as comparative examples in discussions of the Eblaite state. Previous descriptions of Ebla have focused too heavily on the size of the state, rather than on how it functioned. The Territorial-Hegemonic Model provides a useful means by which to categorize Ebla by considering its policies towards peripheral incorporation as significant to the overall operation or function of the state itself. Importantly, Ebla did not embrace strongly territorial approaches to peripheral incorporation, relying instead on forms of “soft power” to maintain authority over its periphery.

The second insight relates to the geopolitical and historical context within which Ebla was embedded. The Palace G archives attest to the considerably rapid rise of Ebla as a regional power. Over the course of only three or four decades, Ebla managed to usurp Mari as the most powerful state in northwestern Syria, at least temporarily. More important, Ebla was one of a number of powerful regional states all vying for control over the major trade routes criss-crossing Upper Mesopotamia. Close analysis of the Annual Accounts of Metals and the Monthly Accounts of Textiles reveals that as Ebla expanded, it increased the range of its hegemony, while also increasing its belligerence. In the years leading up to its destruction, Ebla was in a constant state of warfare with major rivals like Mari, but also with supposed subject polities like Alalaḫu as well. Ultimately, it may have been Ebla’s obligation to honor its diplomatic arrangements with smaller allied polities like Ḫarran that led to its downfall. The picture of third millennium geopolitics that emerges from the texts is one characterized by aggressive expansionism and instability. Most important, the texts attest to Ebla’s rapid expansion, meaning that even though it may have maintained a hegemonic approach to peripheral governance, it may have been on a trajectory towards more direct, territorial management of its frontiers. The state may not have
had the chance to fully incorporate subject polities, which were apparently left to their own devices so long as they recognized Ebla’s supremacy and paid regular tribute.

Finally, a review of the archaeology of the Amuq Plain before, during and after Ebla’s rise and fall leads to an important insight regarding the nature of regional hegemonies on the archaeology of conquered peripheries. For the most part, no direct archaeological evidence of Ebla’s hegemony can be observed in the Amuq Plain. While settlements gradually emerged along the major east-west communication corridors leading out of the Amuq Plain and into Inner Syria, these appeared prior to Ebla’s emergence as a regional state. Tributary demands may have forced conquered regions to reorganize subsistence production, which should be discernible archaeologically, but settlement patterns in the Amuq Plain remained largely unaffected following Alalaḫu’s incorporation into the Eblaite state system. Following Ebla’s destruction, there is a decline in settlement along the Afrin River, but his is best seen as a consequence of broader disruptions to trade and communication throughout the region in the tumultuous final few centuries of the Early Bronze Age, which included multiple invasions from southern Mesopotamian expansionist states.

1 Characterizing Ebla as a Hegemonic State

Cooper (2010) characterizes Ebla as a hegemonic state, pointing out the nuanced nature of its relationships to subordinate, semi-autonomous and autonomous polities. She further outlines some of the potential archaeological correlates for Ebla’s hegemony, noting the difficulties in their identification. In this dissertation, I have attempted to further articulate the nature of hegemonic states by not only contrasting them with their territorial counterparts, but also showing how a given state can operate hegemonically and territorially across different domains. Specifically, I have adopted the Territorial-Hegemonic Model as a means of describing and
explaining the various strategies employed by expansionist states to incorporate their growing peripheries, arguing that hegemonic states adhered to low-investment policies that included minimal investment in costly infrastructure along the periphery. The result, however, is that hegemonic states are more difficult to detect archaeologically, and often only indirect evidence of the core polity can be identified in the periphery.

That Ebla acted primarily as a hegemonic state is explicit in the Palace G archives. Though Ebla installed overseers in some of its client states, many subordinate polities retained their local sovereigns and continued to operate relatively autonomously. Such autonomy came with a price, especially in the form of “gifts” sent to the palace by the client state. Coincidently, Ebla itself invested heavily in sending gifts to its subjects, suggesting that in place of establishing a permanent military presence along its borders, it preferred to leave security measures in the hands of local rulers who were compensated for the cooperation. This form of “soft power” is precisely the kind prescribed by the Territorial-Hegemonic Model. Through strategic diplomacy, Ebla headed a complex network of alliances with specific polities, mostly located along the highly lucrative trade routes around the Euphrates and further east. It competed with other regional powers like Mari and Nagar for control over the flow of resources. This competition apparently focused on buying off local rulers, though annual campaigns became the norm, especially during the vizierships of Ibrium and Ibbi-zikir.

The increase in military activity probably indicates that Ebla was undergoing a transformation around the time that it was destroyed in the twenty-fourth century. I understand this transformation as a move from hegemonic to more territorial strategies that would have eventually entailed more deliberate investment along the periphery. Fortified sites were already the norm in the Euphrates by the period of the Ebla texts in the EB IVB, but Ebla lacked the
logistical infrastructure to secure its vast periphery. Annual campaigning, interdynastic marriages, and intense gift exchange probably were insufficient to consolidate the large periphery that Ebla had acquired, apparently rather rapidly. This suggests that while Ebla was successful in expanding through hegemonic means, it met a threshold beyond which more territorial strategies would have been necessary to ensure safety along its borders, particularly in light of the numerous powerful states that flanked the kingdom to the east and southeast.

2 The Amuq Plain as Part of Ebla’s Periphery

In this dissertation, I presented evidence of the impact of Ebla’s hegemony on the archaeology of the Amuq Plain. Given that an overseer was installed at Alalaḫu, it is clear that the Amuq Plain was firmly under Eblaite control. This did not, however, prevent Alalaḫu from engaging in hostilities with Ebla, albeit in what appears to have been a minor clash. Nevertheless, Alalaḫu’s belligerence is indicative of the nature of Ebla’s hold over the region, which appears to have been rather tenuous. This also suggests that Ebla’s ability to fully incorporate even those parts of its periphery that were geographically close to the core polity was somewhat limited.

Alalaḫu is mentioned in the texts alongside other independent kingdoms, signifying that the former city may have only recently lost its status as an autonomous polity. The texts further indicate that the amount of tribute paid by Alalaḫu to Ebla declined considerably over several years. As a result, it is difficult to reconcile the notion that Ebla governed a large periphery with any serious authority given that even a relatively small city like Alalaḫu appeared to be unmanageable at times.

The archaeological data from the Amuq Plain corroborates this interpretation. To date, there is no direct evidence of an Eblaite presence in the region, and there is no indication that the rise of Ebla as a regional power had any serious impact on either settlement patterns or
subsistence patterns in the plain, or on the layout and function of the main settlement at Tell Tayinat. The Eblaite overseer Ze-malik may have been housed at Alalahu, but his presence was not accompanied, so far as can be told by current understandings of the settlement, by any substantial buildings or quarters associated with foreign officials. Further work at Tell Tayinat and in the plain may yet shed light on Ebla’s impact, but as it stands it must be concluded that as a hegemonic state Ebla did not exert a significant impact on the archaeology of the Amuq Plain. While such a conclusion may be disappointing, it must be reiterated that this is exactly what should be expected of a hegemonic state. Had Ebla adopted more territorial strategies, its archaeological legacy may have been more dramatic.

This study provides new insights regarding the nature of Ebla’s periphery by showing that the influence along the periphery of even powerful regional polities are difficult to detect archaeologically. The significance of these results can be best appreciated when considering other examples of core-periphery systems in the Near East like the “Uruk Expansion” of the late fourth millennium. In this case, influence stemming from the “core” polity in southern Mesopotamia has been noted across an exceedingly broad territory, including sites like Habuba Kabira. That such dramatic evidence of foreign elements can be detected attests to the intrusiveness of the material culture within its immediate contexts. No such intrusiveness or foreignness is detectable at Tell Tayinat or elsewhere in the Amuq Plain. The lack of evidence for an Eblaite presence, however, cannot be taken as an indicator that Ebla was not active in the region. Rather, it is merely that along its periphery, Ebla maintained a policy oriented towards hegemonic policies, and these left little in their wake in terms of archaeological impact.
3 New Directions for Future Research

In conducting the present research, several potential directions for future research became apparent. Foremost of these involves the need for a cross-cultural study of the Ebla state system with other examples of hegemonic polities, especially those beyond the Near East. Too often comparisons are drawn between Ebla and later Near Eastern expansionist states, such as the Akkadian, Old Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian empires. While there are obvious threads connecting all of these states, including their shared geographic, cultural and linguistic contexts, the explicit territoriality of these later examples makes direct comparisons with the hegemonic state of Ebla more challenging. While Ebla should be considered on its own terms, avenues for fruitful cross-cultural research can perhaps be found in examinations of other hegemonic states, such as the Incas (D’Altroy 1992) or Aztecs (Berdan et al. 1996), both polities that adopted a range of hegemonic and territorial strategies to varying degrees. That is not to say that expansionist states stemming from the Near East should be ignored—for example, even the Neo-Assyrian empire did not adhere to a strictly territorial approach—but only that by incorporating a more inclusive perspective to cross-cultural comparisons with Ebla can the hegemonic nature of such states receive the attention it deserves.

The network analysis presented in Chapter 5 constitutes a preliminary assessment of this computational approach to toponymic data. By looking at toponyms on a large scale and using statistical approaches to explore the various patterns that emerge from their co-occurrence, new insights can be gained about the structure of the Ebla texts. The thousands of references to cities, towns and villages in the texts represent an important but also unwieldy source of geographic data for the Early Bronze Age northern Levant. Though most of the places listed cannot be confidently located, some key sites are well-known, like Carchemish, Harran, and Emar. I have
attempted to show that geography and status played organizing roles in toponym co-occurrence, but more work needs to be done to tease out the many variables that influenced the organization of the toponymic repertory. Can we identify new sites based on co-occurrence data? Can a city’s status be inferred based on the other places with which it appears on a given tablet? Future work should focus on exploiting the potential of a computational approach to this vast dataset. Network analysis is appealing because of its robust visualizations, allowing patterns in data to be identified rapidly, even by those without expertise in the underlying mathematics of graph theory. Yet to make full use of these computational approaches, strict adherence to formal network methods must take precedence. As a case study, the work presented in this dissertation shows a sort of “proof of concept,” but there are numerous ways in which the current research can be improved. Ideally, a team of specialists in Eblaite language, coupled with experienced network analysis researchers, can collaborate to generate new research on the toponymic data that includes increasingly complex edge or link information, such as flow of goods between places and people. Co-occurrence is only one possible approach to studying the toponymy of the Ebla texts. Further work should aim to contextualize the data by placing it within the larger economic framework of the Ebla tributary and gift-exchange system. This would be particularly important for connecting the two variables of geography and status in a more holistic study of the toponymy of Ebla as it relates to geopolitics, particularly since so much of the flow of goods recorded in the texts relates to gift-exchange.

Studies of the relationship between Ebla and Alalaḫu would be vastly improved if more texts mentioning the latter were accessible. The published texts relate interesting data concerning the payments sent to Ebla by Alalaḫu, and they further detail the outcome of a minor clash between both polities. It is interesting that Alalaḫu was able to exert independence in light of the
presence of the Eblaite overseer Ze-malik at the site, even if its efforts were unsuccessful in the end. In the absence of more texts mentioning Alalaḫu, future work would benefit by comparing the available information with nearby sites like Tunip or Hama, both located on Ebla’s western flank.

Archaeologically, there is little that points to a direct Eblaite presence in the Amuq Plain. Nevertheless, a few areas of research could be pursued that may shed light on the relationship between both regions. The site of Temel Kızılıkaya presents an interesting case study of a rare hilltop fort in the Amuq Plain dating to the Early Bronze Age. Who built this fort, and for what purpose? Further investigations must also consider the nature of the settlement. For example, despite its location, there is little direct evidence that it was a watchtower or other military installation. Indeed, it may have functioned as a temple or hilltop shrine. Considering its location along the Afrin River, it clearly overlooked activity along this important conduit. However, it remains unclear if it is related to the nascent state headed by Alalaḫu, the expansionist state of Ebla, or some as yet undefined small, independent polity in the Afrin region. Future work could consider site inter-visibility at Temel Kızılıkaya to assess its strategic position from various points of view. For example, it may have provided Alalaḫu with a better vantage point from which to monitor east-west traffic flowing between the plain and Inner Syria. Likewise, if built by Ebla, Temel Kızılıkaya may have served to control Alalaḫu’s eastern boundary, and filter communication with polities located to the east and north of Ebla. Certain problems relating to Temel Kızılıkaya remain, however, including the date of its founding. Excavations at the site may shed light on the sites dating and function, but for now it is only possible to assess the site based on surface collections and a brief description provided by the AVRP survey.
Future research can also benefit from further consideration of “ceramic provinces” (Milano and Rova 2000; Welton 2018) in the third millennium, and how they relate to socio-political developments. While I do not explicitly connect the distributions of caliciform ware or Red-Black Burnished Ware to specific political entities, there is some evidence to suggest that these cultural boundaries overlap with political boundaries as extrapolated from the textual evidence. This phenomenon is particularly interesting given that both Ebla (Tell Mardikh) and Nagar (Tell Brak) appear to be located at the overlap between multiple ceramic provinces, suggesting a potential correlation between strategic positioning at the juncture between multiple overlapping socio-cultural networks and state formation. From the Early Bronze through Iron Ages, the political capital of northwestern Syria shifted from Ebla, to Aleppo, Alalakh, Carchemish and eventually Tell Tayinat. The reasons underlying these shifts are many, but one related component may be the relationship between these sites’ positions to various and changing social networks, as defined by ceramic distributions. It would appear that at different points, these sites served sequentially as both capitals (cores) and secondary cities (peripheries). Future work should emphasize these dynamics and their impact on the development of core-periphery systems within the context of early expansionist states.
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A-la-la-hu$^{ki}$ (= Alalakh)
’A-ma$^{ki}$ (= Hamath?)
I-ma-ar$^{ki}$ (= Emar)
Ib-al$^{ki}$ (= Ibal)
Du-ne-ib$^{ki}$ (= Tunip?)
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<th>Site / Toponym</th>
<th>Correlation (Distance, Weighted Degree)</th>
<th>Correlation (Distance, Eigencentrality)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Alalahu</td>
<td>0.205</td>
<td>0.207</td>
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<tr>
<td>'AMA</td>
<td>-0.214</td>
<td>-0.155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emar</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ibal</td>
<td>0.230</td>
<td>0.391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tunip</td>
<td>-0.271</td>
<td>-0.271</td>
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