

The Place of infants in the ancient society of Tell Mozan (Northeastern Syria) during the Middle Bronze Age (2000-1600 BC): An Archeoethanatomical Approach.

KHARABI Arwa¹, BUCCELLATI Giorgio², KELLY-BUCCELLATI Marilyn², COURTAUD Patrice¹, DUDAY Henri¹.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Tell Mozan, the ancient city of Urkesh. Northeastern Syria near the Turkish border.

Excavations since 1984 under co-directors Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati and Giorgio Buccellati.

An important urban and religious center during the mid 3rd millennium BCE. Linguistically connected to Hurrian (Buccellati and Kelly-Buccellati 2000).

Topography: high mound and outer city with a monumental temple terrace at the center of the mound (since ca. 3500 BCE) and a royal palace dated to the Akkadian period (ca. 2350-2200 BCE.).

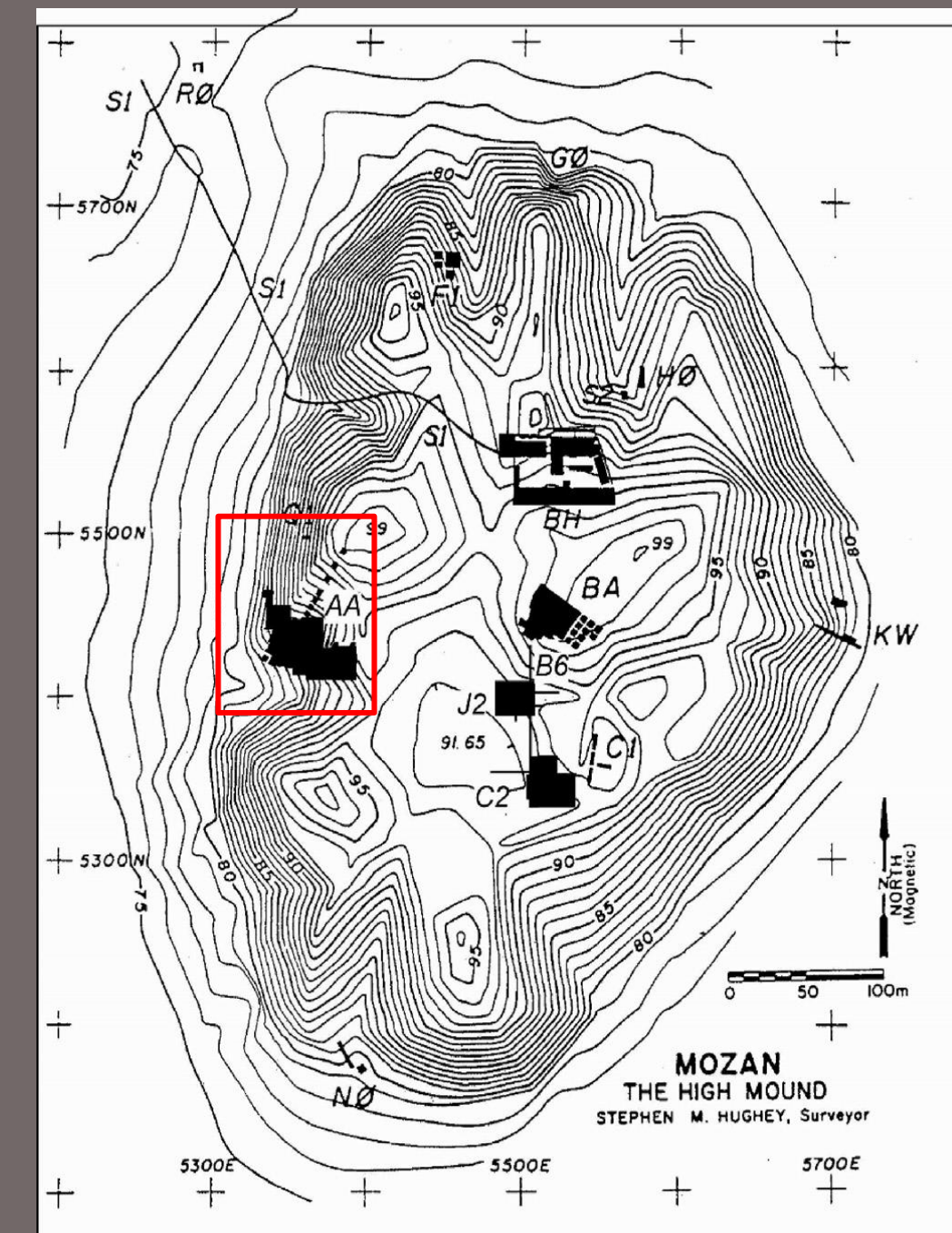


KHABUR CEMETERY (2000-1600 BCE.)

A burial ground consisting of several miniature houses. Extramural burials.

Two different levels separated by intrusion of a large pit that covered and cut into the whole cemetery:

1. Early Khabur which cut into Phases IV material for burial deposition (2000-1900 BCE.).
2. Late Khabur level retaining the same cemetery (1900-1600 BCE.).



MAIN GOAL

Our focus is to bring to light the infant's burials of the Khabur cemetery in Mozan.
57 tombs³ - 63 individuals (aged between 0 – 10 years)

2350 BCE.

Palace construction

2100 BCE.

Palace abandoned

2000 BCE.

Khabur Cemetery

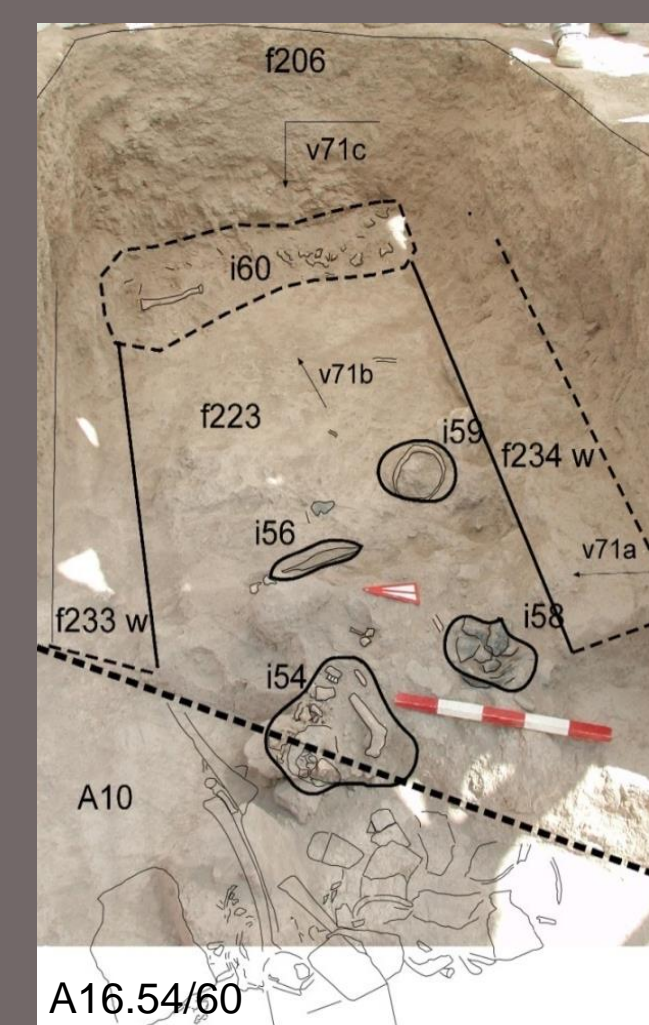
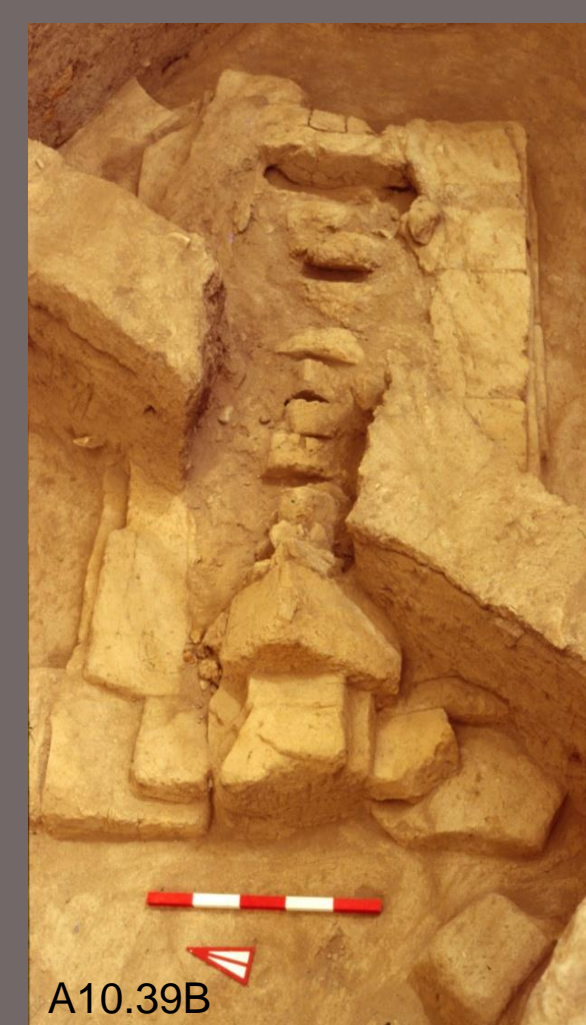
Three basic burial types with several funerary practices

I. JAR BURIALS (16)



- The most ubiquitous type
- Inside the jars or between two sherds
- For infants under 7 years old
- Primary and individual burials
- Flexed or contracted position
- (Lateral or dorsal)
- Funerary objects (jewels in bronze and ceramic objects)
- Only during the Early KHABUR period

II. CONSTRUCTED TOMBS (3)



- A10.39B: a mock pitched roof tomb, a double burial which contains a young adult (18-22 years old) and a new born (34-40 weeks old).
- A16.54/60 and A7.525/530 are similar based on the plan (rectangular), the grave dimensions (2X3 meters) and the number of the individuals (MNI = 6). But the skeletons in the first grave were found disarticulated and in poor condition, however the 6 bodies of A7.525/530 were laying north to south with legs in flexed position. The infant (2.5 – 3.5 years old) was interred following the same position as the adults, no special funerary treatment has been applied for it.

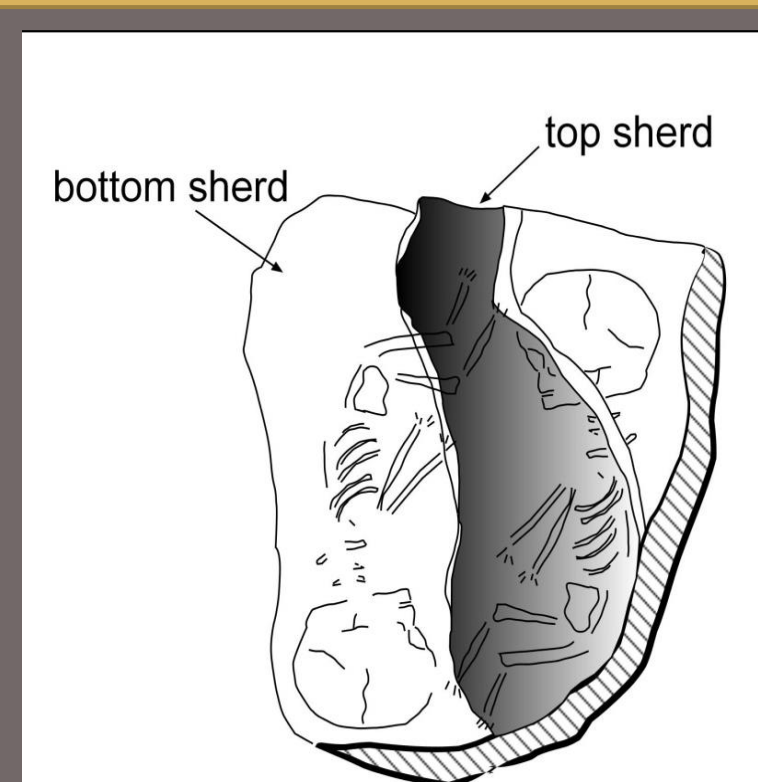
III. SIMPLE PITS (14)



- Simple pits with or without mud bricks around.
- Primary burials.
- Always beside the foundations of wall and below the earth floor.
- Flexed or contracted position (always lateral).
- Infants under 10 years old
- Bronze jewels & ceramic objects either next to the head or the feet of the cadaver.

The only double newborns burial in Mozan

- Burial Jar dates to Late KHABUR
- Two newborns (38-40, 39-40 weeks old, Fazeaks & Kosa 1978)
- Buried between two large sherds.
- Head to tail position (Right lateral,) Orientation (N-S, S-N)
- No funerary objects



Re-intervention in an infant's burial in Mozan

20 cm below the floor surface of a mud brick structure in area A15, north of an individual infant primary burial. Child aged between 6 months and 1 year old. Inside a rectangular pit lined from all sides with elongated mud brick.

Re-intervention:

- The skull is disarticulated from the rest of the body and seems to have been replaced in the opposite ends of the grave.
- The thorax and the os coxae have kept their anatomical logic.
- Significant absence of several bones.
- Spatial distribution of the bones inside the tomb.

Children burials associated with fire places in Mozan

Burials close to fire installations (near, above or below). intense ash, charcoal inside graves. Thermal modifications on the bones, macroscopically visible by brown and black discoloration, longitudinal fractures and warping.

Another mortuary patterns visible in Mozan during both Early and Late KHABUR periods. A practice which appears frequently in the ancient Near East with similar accounts documented in Neo-Babylonian and Anatolian sites.



Discussion and Conclusion

The analysis of burial practices of the Middle Bronze Age cemetery in Mozan (2000-1600 BCE) has shown specific characteristics linked to age. Infants received proper funerary treatments dissimilar to those practiced on adults.

Jar burials were reserved only for infants, chronologically only during the Early Khabur period (2000-1900 BCE). This funerary tradition was replaced in the Late Khabur period (1900-1600 BCE) by burying the infants in simple pits inhumation.

Generally individual burials, with the exception of two double burials. Infants were not excluded from the collective "familial" burials. In these cases, no special treatment was applied to them. Consequently infants were considered like adults in these cases but not in the individual ones.

Always primary inhumation, with one case of re-intervention.

Some infants were buried near, above or below a fire structure. Another funerary practice used only for infants and not for adults.

These observations jointly lead us to propose that infants had a special social status in the ancient society of Urkesh, the fact that mainly effected their funerary practices. Indeed, skeleton was part of a person that interacted within a social environment in a dynamic way.

¹ University of Bordeaux 1, UMR 5199, A3P, B8 – avenue des Facultés 33400 Talence.

² University of California, Los Angeles, CA 90095 – 1511.

³ No informations about the type of tomb for 28 additional infant's burials.

Geographical map : Maison de l'Orient et de la Méditerranée, Jean Pouilloux, Université Lumière Lyon2, France .

All photos : Mozan/Urkesh Archaeological Project .

Computer-aided design (CAD) by Laura Ramos.