A Small Town in Late Bronze Age Syria

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Salvage archaeological excavations carried out on Late Bronze Age sites in the Middle Euphrates region of Syria during the 1970s and 1980s brought to light three significant deposits of cuneiform documents, albeit of vastly different sizes: From Emar (modern Meseke) have come over 700 practical documents and a significant collection of scholarly and literary material; Ekalte (modern Tall Munbaqa) yielded around 100 economic texts and a single lexical fragment; finally, 15 records of daily life were found at Azu (modern Tell Hadidi).

The Emar material from the French excavations was published with exemplary dispatch by the expedition’s epigrapher Daniel Arnaud, while tablets which had made their way onto the art market have been treated by various scholars over the past two decades. The Azu texts remain unpublished, although a catalogue, a few copies, and transliterations are accessible on the website of Robert Whiting. The edition of the tablets from Ekalte has recently appeared, prepared by Walter Mayer. It presents the edition princeps of 89 tablets, plus transliterations and translations of a further seven published elsewhere by other scho-

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2 The texts in Mayer’s volume were found during German excavations from 1974 to 1990. Another German team renewed work at the site in 1999, but no further epigraphic material has turned up; see F. Blocher/D. Machule/P. Werner, MDOG 132 (2000) 123–31; 137 (2005) 99–107.

3 When the waters of Lake Assad failed to submerge the tell as quickly as expected, a new German excavation began work at Emar in 1996. For its most recent report, see U. Finkbeiner/F. Sakal et al., BaM 34 (2004) 9–100. No additional significant finds of tablets have been announced.


6 http://www.helsinki.fi/~whiting/hadid01.html, etc. (accessed July 29, 2007).
The not entirely adequate hand copies are thankfully accompanied by excellent photographs, including 15 in color. The sealings from the texts have been published by Peter Werner in a separate volume.  

It is impossible to date the Ekalte texts with any precision. Only a handful of the tablets bear a chronological notation, and these follow a local eponym system that we cannot order even internally, let alone connect to an absolute chronology. Mayer here (p. 15 with n. 55) defends his earlier claim that one tablet (TM 80) bears a year date referring to a campaign of the Hittite king Tudhaliya I in the region, but this is extremely unlikely. Prosopography allows the reconstruction of several family lines at Ekalte (pp. 70–72), each of three or four active generations, indicating that the archives cover a span of 60 to 80 years.

There is no sign of Hittite influence in the Ekalte archives (p. 17): no Anatolian personal names, no Hittite stamp or cylinder seal impressions, and no tablets in the so-called “Syro-Hittite” – that is horizontal or “land-

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6 Probably to be added to the Munbâq tablets is the stray document published by A. Tsukimoto, Acta Sumerologica 16 (1994) 231–38 ("Hirayama 51"). The first witness to this testament is one Mugs, son of Ba'al-belu (line 40). This same combination of personal name and patronymic appears in two Ekalte texts (TM 1: 21'; 65: 30, 33), and since Muga is a very unusual name, it is likely that we are dealing with a single individual in both instances. Tsukimoto’s text bears the impression of the seal of Zimri-Dagan (label, left edge), son of Kapi-Dagan, who is almost certainly identical to Zimri-Dagan, son of Kapi, discussed in n. 24 below. It is unfortunate that the study of the seal by K. Ishida promised by Tsukimoto (p. 236) seems never to have appeared.


8 Aunu-bar Dumu Shunia, TM 28: 16; Belu-malik ud hazannah, TM 48: 37; Ba-da; TM 80: 32; cf. n. 10 below.


10 See C. Wicke, Aula Orientalis 10 (1992) 124–25, for the interpretation of TM 80: 32 as MU Ba/MA-da/da 1-kam.ama rather than MU BA.DU = TICY now also W. Sallaberger, ZA 93 (2002) 277. Mayer’s objection that this personal name is not found at Ekalte may be answered by the presence of Ba-da at Emar (RE 88: 22; AuOs 16: 10, 18). And although the abbreviation Tu for Tudhaliya is occasionally found in both cuneiform and Hieroglyphic Luwian sources at Bogazköy, it is doubtful that a scribe in a foreign land would refer to a conqueror in this unclear manner, or indeed attribute a campaign to the king himself rather than to “the Hittites” (I.UM.MES 200 Hatti). Note also that there are no other native year dates to be found among the Late Bronze Age Middle Euphrates documents. The mentions of “year of siege and famine” collected by C. Zaccagnini, Or. 64 (1995) 96–98, are not part of a system of chronological notation, but rather simply remarks explaining the straitened circumstances under which the relevant transactions took place. On this, see D. Fleming, Time at Emar (Winona Lake 2000) 204.
scape" – format so common at Emar.\textsuperscript{11} These texts were certainly inscribed before the establishment of Hittite hegemony over the region. But how long before?

Two or three kings, almost certainly with their seat in Emar (pp. 13–14), are mentioned in the Ekalte documents. At first glance, we might be tempted to identify one of these, Ba’al-kabar (TM 1: 9; 24: 18), with the second monarch in the Second Dynasty\textsuperscript{12} of Late Bronze Age Emar (Yašši-Dagān, son of Ba’al-kabar). But Yašši-Dagān (TM 9: 27; 70: 1) and his son Zū-Ba’la (TM 9: 35; 49: 1)\textsuperscript{13} find no correspondence among the known rulers of the larger town. Since the sequence of kings in the First Late Bronze Age Dynasty of Emar is attested over three or four generations prior to the Hittite incursion that seemingly brought about its demise,\textsuperscript{14} Yašši-Dagān, Zū-Ba’la, and Ba’al-kabar\textsuperscript{15} must have ruled in a period that ended at least half a century before the Syrian conquests of Šuppiluliuma I.

If we follow currently prevailing opinion and date the accession of Muršili II to the Hittite throne to 1321,\textsuperscript{16} and consequently place the beginning of the reign of Šuppiluliuma I at around 1344, the annexation of northern Syria by Ḫatti will have taken place in the 1330s. Therefore the period covered by the Ekalte tablets cannot date any later than around 1460 or 1440 through 1380. Obviously, the endpoint of this span must be raised by the length of whatever chronological gap separated Yašši-Dagān, Zū-Ba’la, and Ba’al-kabar from Yarib-Ba’al, the earliest known ruler of the First Dynasty. If it approached 60–70 years, then Mayer’s attribution of the destruction of the tablet-yielding Schicht 4 at Munbāqa to the eighth campaign of Tuthmosis III in 1446 (p. 18) could still be correct.\textsuperscript{17}

In terms of sign-forms and syllabary, as well as of phonology and Akkadian grammar (e.g., a productive dual, p. 37), the Ekalte tablets indeed

\textsuperscript{11} For this distinction and orthographic and grammatical features that further characterize each group, see C. Wilcke, Aula Orientalis 10 (1992) 115–50.
\textsuperscript{12} For this ruling family, see A. Skaist, ZA 88 (1998) 58, Fig. 2.
\textsuperscript{13} It is uncertain whether this individual was a ruler; see p. 14.
\textsuperscript{14} See A. Skaist, ZA 88 (1998) 60, Fig. 3. On p. 64 Skaist suggests that the transition between dynasties at Emar was a consequence of Hittite intervention.
\textsuperscript{15} There is no question but that all of the Ekalte texts date to the same general period; therefore identification with Ba’al-kabar of the Second Dynasty must be ruled out. We have no basis on which to determine the relative chronological sequence of Yašši-Dagān – Zū-Ba’la and Ba’al-kabar.
\textsuperscript{17} [Man beachte aber, daß eine Tafel, T 25, mit dem emanotischen Dynastensiegel gesiegelt ist. – U. Seidl]
seem archaic in comparison to those from Emar. Mayer (p. 17) feels that the Ekalte texts stand closer to those from Alalah OB level VII than to those of MB level IV at the same site, and refers to their linguistic characteristics as “spätaltbabylonisch.” Further study will be required to sort out the relative pace of development of the orthography, phonology, and grammar of the various Akkadian “scribal dialects” of inland and coastal Syria, but there can be little doubt that the Ekalte material is significantly earlier than that from Emar. Therefore, a comparison of the contents of the Ekalte texts with those of the later archives of Emar will allow us to investigate the changes in government, economy, and population that took place as a result of the Hittite conquest of inland northern Syria in the mid-fourteenth century B.C.E.

In many respects, the transactions documented by the Ekalte tablets are quite similar to those with which we have become familiar from Emar. In fact, several tablets from illicit digs published as coming from Emar are now known to have been written at Ekalte. Let us compare one of the most common types of document at the two sites, the sale of real estate. At both Ekalte and Emar, the sanction for reneging on a transaction is the same prohibitive payment of (usually) 1000 units of silver to the local urban authorities and/or the city god, Ba’al-ka(bar) at Ekalte and Ninurta at Emar. It is also only in these two groups of documents that we encounter the ceremonial anointing of a table and breaking of bread to consummate the transfer of a property (pp. 19–20). Furthermore, fields or houses are often sold by the deity and town elders of both Ekalte and Emar, but are never purchased by them. This probably indicates a common practice of confiscation and resale of the real estate holdings of delinquent citizens.

Both archives date documents – if sporadically – only by the name of a prominent local official, now known to have been the hazannu, or “mayor,” at least at Ekalte (pp. 23–25). (While the Emar dates occasion-

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18 The appearance of several scribes (Pazû-Dagûn, Kunurû, and Iptûrû) at both Ekalte and Azû leaves little doubt that the tablets from these two sites were roughly contemporary (p. 12). This mingling of the affairs of the towns is not surprising since it seems that their territories abutted one another (see TM 74: 4) and that the inhabitants of one house at Ekalte had a particular connection to Azû (pp. 6–7).
19 Here re-edited – without copies – as nos. 90ff.
21 At Azû the deity Dagûn plays this role, e.g. TH 4: 25.
ally include a month, this is never the case at Ekalte, so we cannot compare the local calendars.) The layout of text and seal impressions on an Ekalte tablet is almost identical to that found on the traditional, so-called "Syrian"-format tablets at Emar. Clearly the two sites partake of the same scribal and cultural traditions.

I now take a closer look at some of the similarities and differences between the two groups of documents. First, the onomastic: At Ekalte, the personal names are overwhelmingly Canaanite (p. 3) – note especially the frequent alternation of verbal prefixes I- and Ya- in sentence names. We encounter only a few Hurrian personal designations (e.g., Nuruwe DUMU Šigge, TM 28: 6) and one or two of Indic origin (e.g., Parata DUMU Puriba, TM 70: 26–27). As mentioned earlier, there is a total absence here of Hittite and Luwian names, and few if any Babylonian or Assyrian, unless some of the ideographic writings are to be interpreted as such. In contrast, among the mass of West Semitic names at Emar there are to be found a fair number of personal names – mostly those of individuals in high positions – indicating ethnic affiliation with one of the great powers of the day – Babylon, Assyria, or Hatti – as well as titles denoting membership in the Hittite imperial bureaucracy.

Theophoric personal names from Ekalte as well as Emar feature most prominently the Storm-god (written ḪISKUR, EN, or Ba'-la) and the regional deity Dagân. Interestingly, at Ekalte there are only a handful of attestations of the ideogram ḪUR so frequently employed to indicate this god in the Emar material, but this writing is well attested in the contemporary texts from Ezû.

The geographic horizon of the Ekalte archives is considerably less expansive than that of the Emar texts. As already indicated, Ekalte seems to have been politically dependent on Emar, and the texts occasionally speak of the larger city or her kings. The most distant locations appearing in the older archives are Ebla to the northwest and Tutul to the south.

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22 See only comment to TM 29: 5, below, but this is not a date.
23 There are several peculiarities displayed by those who wrote the Ekalte texts: 1) the rather frequent use of undeclined Akkadograms (e.g., kルェ-se-um ibaqara), TM 10: 23; cf. pp. 37–38); 2) abbreviation of both ideograms (e.g., Killa for KiLlaH = KISLAIH, TM 51: 5) and common formulae (e.g., a-ha 'a ta for aba 'a taragum, TM 13: 27); and 3) unusual distribution of the words of stereotyped sentences (e.g., ... sa urram | šeram A.Isa | ibaqara), TM 48: 21–23) or even the signs of a single word (e.g. uRUKAI|E-kal-te-et', TM 11: 1–2; kルェ-1 | se-tam, TM 11: 31–32) across lines.
24 For example, likín-Dagân = Yakún-Dagân; for attestations see pp. 51–52.
25 For the data, see R. Prezinszky, Die Persoennennamen der Texte aus Emar (Bethesda 2003).
east. Significantly, both Babylonia and Mittanni are absent. The later Emar scribes write of Assur, Babylonia, Ḫatti, Arzawa, Alashiya, Kinza, Qatna, and Tadmor/Palmyra – the entire known world save for Egypt and Elam.

As revealed by the archives, the economy on the Late Bronze Age Middle Euphrates was based upon cereal and grape cultivation and stock breeding. Sales of productive real estate at both Ekalte and Emar concern fields, vineyards, and vegetable gardens. In addition, trade played a significant role at the later site, as documented by Middle Assyrian27 and Ugaritic28 records, as well as by those from Emar itself. Commodities purveyed by Emarite merchants included copper, timber, oil, and bovines. Obviously, the local businessmen were engaged in transit trade in the case of the first two items.

On the other hand, the Ekalte texts treat but little of commerce, although we do find a single mention of a merchant (ıš-makkurî) in a letter (TM 72: 8). A non-mercantile ethos is perhaps reflected in the local practice of lending money at no interest (e.g., TM 68). Pastoralism, however, seems to have been proportionally more important to the inhabitants of the earlier town. An impost to their overlord was assessed in sheep and goats, although converted to a payment in copper (TM 1). A woman was sold for the price of 1000 head of small cattle (TM 23). Among the other Ekalte records are a list of 16 shepherds (TM 59) and a letter concerning the acquisition of 140 asses from the neighboring Sutean tribesmen (TM 72).

Institutions of local government at Ekalte and Emar were comparable. Both communities were led and represented by a hazzamu (pp. 23–25), and significant economic power was exercised in each case by a body of citizens29 referred to alternately as “the elders” (ṣībuṭu),

27 For references see the collection at the conclusion of this article.
28 For business dealings with the coast, see G. Beckman, Ugarit and Inner Syria during the Late Bronze Age, in: J.-M. Michaud (ed.), Le Royaume d’Ugarit de la Crête à l’Euphrate (Sherbrooke 2007) 163–74.
29 It seems that Zimri-Dagan pulu Kapi-Dagan was a particularly important member of this group. Not only does he appear, primarily as a witness, in 13 documents (TM 1, 16, 20, 29, 30, 35, 39, 41, 50, 51, 65, 83 [participant], Hirayama 51), but impressions of his seals (P. Werner, Tall Munbâq-Ekalte III, no. 4612: TM 8, 30, 39, 65; no. 4581: TM 3, 4, 5, 9, 10, 14, 16, 20, 29, 47, 50, 51, T13a) are found on nine more. (TM 22, 41, 44, 57, 58, 59, 64, 71, 72, 86, and 89 are either unsealed or have lost their sealings; the seal impressions on TM 90ff. are not available for study.) Thus he is involved in 27.7%
“the brothers” (U.ŠEŠ abhū), “the fathers” (U.ŠEŠ abbu), or simply “the city” (URU*1) (pp. 25–26).30

The relative size of the settlements determined their place within wider political contexts. The larger regional center of Emar supported its own monarchy, although in the period documented by the archives, the powers of the Emariote ruler were tightly circumscribed by those of the Hittite imperial authorities operating from the viceregal seat of Carchemish.31 The small town of Ekalte owed allegiance to a king resident elsewhere in the vicinity and was probably ultimately part of the great kingdom of Mittanni. No direct evidence proves this latter point, however.

In summary, the epigraphic discoveries at Ekalte and Emar are witnesses to a single local variety of Syro-Mesopotamian Late Bronze Age culture, but they also reveal significant contrasts between the two settlements. Ekalte was a small community largely populated by a homogeneous group of West Semitic background, whose inhabitants engaged primarily in agriculture and animal husbandry. Politically, she was subordinate to a larger neighbor. Late Bronze Age Emar was a significant component of a larger territorial state, and played host to persons of various ethnicity for varying periods of time. Although most Emariotes were farmers or vintners, interregional trade was also an important element in the local economy.

To what extent are these differences due to economic developments or to the course of political events that brought the replacement of Mittanian domination by that of the Hittites? How much can be attributed to the simple difference in size between the communities in question? These problems require further reflection. Furthermore, I am aware that all of my conclusions may also have been skewed by the nature of the textual samples. We are, after all, comparing primarily family documents from Ekalte32 to Emar’s record depot. Could there have been a mer-

30 See D. Fleming, Democracy’s Ancient Ancestors: Mari and Early Collective Governance (Cambridge 2004) chapter 4, for the tradition of communal government in this region.
32 TM 1–34 were found in Haus F, which according to Mayer (p. 4) may have been the headquarters of the local administration. If so, this archive would be comparable in part to that of the “House of the Diviner” at Emar, for which see D. Fleming, Time at Emar, 13–47.
chant's archive of any size at Ekalte? Probably not, but the nature of the evidence is more problematic for some questions than for others. For example, my assessment of the ethnic makeup of the respective populations is hardly in doubt, since it is based on more than 900 personal names from Ekalte and several thousand from Emar.

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I conclude with comments on individual texts:

TM 1: Legal case (?) concerning payment of copper in lieu of a livestock impost due to king of Emar. Line 15: A-uri(lso photo)-ra.


TM 6, line 32: igt-Baba DUMU A-li-[Da-gan] (so photo).

TM 7, line 37: igt-li-[Da-gar] DUMU Ab-di-[Ir-ba-ra], an individual also found in Hi-rayama 32: 4 and RE 69: 38.

TM 8, line 26: igt-Zi-[l]-I[a-DN ... ]; line 32: igt De-di DUMU Baya/la-ur.

TM 11, line 36: The appearance of the buyer at the head of the witness list is surprising.

TM 12, line 1: igt-[l]-[l]-I[Da-gar] as in TM 17: 12 and 61: 28; cf. also igt-DINGIR-ru-[ma] in TM 48: 2 and igt-LUGAL-qa-[la] in TM 73: 4. These seem to be clan eponyms and also perhaps small settlements (so p. 11). Line 22: The naming of the seller as one of the beneficiaries of the Verrassingsichtungskausel is unusual, but cf. TM 15: 14–15. In TM 16: 26–27 it is the purchaser who is given this symbolic function; cf. comment to TM 62 below.

TM 13, line 39: igt Huazu DUMU Nu-ri-[ ... ] (so photo).

TM 19, line 26: ana tU-li sararr[ri].


TM 23, lines 5–6: Abi-Rat[ap igt]-DUMU Murla-ah[;] TUR does not appear elsewhere in this corpus with the meaning “servant.”

TM 28, lines 14–15: kum a-kul-ri haql[iti], “anstelle der verzehnten Verkostigung.”

TM 29, line 8: ina "[Hi]-ya-[ri]; for this month name see D. Fleming, Time at Emar, fig. 19.

TM 30, line 16: igt A-iti-ma-lI DUMU Ill-aht; cf. TM 19: 45. Line 17: No abbreviation similar to Da-ka-bar for Daqan-kabar is attested at Emar; there the divine portion of a theonym may be shortened only in second position, e.g., rUR-Da, RE 94: 1, 12, 25, 28.

TM 36, line 38: Read a-kur as Ehl-Teššup or Šušu-Adad.

TM 60, line 2: a-dumI a-DUMU An-na-qa; cf. line 11.

TM 61: The photos of the obverse and the reverse have been reversed on Tj. 73: line 23: igt-Ba-ri-[li].

TM 62, line 15: Egal in the penalty clause cannot be an abbreviation for Ekalte, for we would expect igt ... ; This is either a reference to the royal establishment in Emar or is a result of habit from a scribe Mayer recognizes as originating from outside Ekalte (p. 129). In the latter case, no substantial harm will have been done to the legal procedure, since sanctions such as these are purely symbolic. That is, we cannot imagine that any party to a contract involving one-half shekel of silver would renge on a contract if the result were a fine of 2000 shekels!
TM 68, line 4: Translate *ul id-da-ra-* as "(the borrower) cannot be released (by royal decree)"; see CAD D, 109.

TM 74, line 2: To šikri-ši, "Gärbböckhe" (p. 32), cf. šikrinmu, "Bierfaß," Emir 6, 301: 9; 393: 21–22; Goodnick Westerhoit el at., CM 13, No. 23: 10(?), which would similarly combine a Semitic stem with a Hurrian suffix: šikri-ni/u.

TM 75, line 33: The implication of anunma-ku-*kurpu* 613 lā *kā* is probably that "no one may marry," an act that often involved the anointing of the bride. The *kā*-vessel is otherwise attested only at Mari; see CAD K, 407.

TH 78, line 22: ḫ(e)†(u)photo-*me-ta*; sense unclear; line 26: 1GI 1EN-3K DUMU A-31-40[a ...]; cf. Emir 109: 44.


TM 82, line 7: =Ba-aršu ...

TM 87, line 9: 1GI 1Ha-a-ra-*DUMU Ba’al-belu*; cf. TM 7: 12; 12: 11, 13, [19]: line 11: 1GI Ya-mu-ul(t ...]; I know of no other possibilities for restoration in the oromacion of the Middle Euphrates.

TM 91, line 33: 1GI 4ššur.mar DUMU 4ššur.glal.

TH 96: See now C. Roche, Semitàica 51 (2001) 133–38, for a photo and new study of this text, based upon an examination of the original tablet. (Only a cast was available to E. Frahm, UF 31 [2002] 175–85, whose edition is utilized here by Mayer.)

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Since Mayer decided not to provide a list of place names,33 for the convenience of users of this volume I include one here:

**U** 1GI-la-:*ma-ab-da*, 73: 5

**U** 1GI-A-zu-**š**, 13: 37; [15: 5]; [26: 11]; 74: 37, [76: 3]; 76: 31

**U** 1GI-A-za-bi-**š**, 43: 10

**U** 1GI-A-zu-**š**-DUMU, 74: 4

**U** 1GI-Bi-ri-ti, 56: 26

Bit-abuna

**U** 1GI-DINGIR.AD-*ma*, 48: 2

Bit-Rašap-qullha

**U** 1GI-DU-qi-la, 73: 4

Bit-Sûri-tuppi

**U** 1GI-Sùri-DUB.BA, 12: 10(1); 17: 12; 61: 28

Ébla

**U** 1GI-MES E-eb-la-na, 34: 14

**U** 1GI-ba-la-te, 27: 6

Exakhe

**U** 1GI-Kal-te, 5: 11; 8: 11; 11: 7, [22]; 29(2); 30: 2; 61: 10; 68: 2; 73: 13; 79: 7]

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33 See p. 3. Many of these toponyms have been included in J. A. Belmonte Marín, Répertoire Géographique 12/2 (2001), but a perusal of that work revealed a number of errors. Citations given here in brackets have been largely or totally restored; therefore the precise spelling on the tablet might have differed slightly.
E-kal-te-e, 11: 1-2
E-kal-te-eši, 25: 6
E-kal-te-ši, 62: 6, 7; 80: 5
E-kal-ti-eši, 80: 7
I-kal-te-eši, 28: 2
I-kal-te-eši, 74: 33
I-kal-te-eši, 77: 6

Emar
E-ma-reši, 28: 18; 64: 26
I-na-ri-ú, 34: 18
I-ri-bak, 36: 29
Kašša, 32: 15
Ku-ú-ti-eši, 11: 12; 73: 2; 96: 2
Ma-du-du, 36: 26

Parattu
DINGIR-la, 34: 10
DUN.NA, 79: 4; 96: 21
Qe-ta-li, 32: 9

Suteans
Su-ti-eši, 72: 5
LÚ.MEŠ Su-ti-eši, 34: 7

Sāhu
DUMU-Sa-a-ta-eši, 41: 28
DUMU-Sa-a-ta, 60: 4
Ša-um-ašu, 31: 19

Tuttul
DUMU-Tu-ú-tu-la, 41: 26
[...-šiš]-ši, 43: 4
[...-šiš]-ši, 26: 4