

MITTANI

AN ENIGMATIC EMPIRE

Bern, 21-23 October 2022

<https://unibe-ch.zoom.us/j/68439903067?pwd=djNLTytMZUFvZlRmYTE3dz09>

Of all the great empires of the Ancient Near East, the Mittani Empire is the most enigmatic one: for almost two centuries it was one of the leading great powers, rivalling the New Kingdom of Egypt, Babylonia, and the Hittite Empire for supremacy. Culturally, it exerted an influence on the Hittite Empire that should not be underestimated, serving as a transmitter of Mesopotamian culture to Anatolia. In its heyday, the empire stretched from the Mediterranean to the Zagros, thus encompassing parts of the modern states of Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Iraq, and Iran. Considering that, it is even more astonishing that very little is still known about the Mittani Empire. Neither is its list of kings complete and reconstructible without uncertainties, nor are the residences and great temples of their capitals known. Larger archives from the core area are missing, as are monumental products of a courtly art. In part, this may be due to the fact that so far, the major capitals of the empire have been insufficiently archaeologically investigated. However, it cannot be ruled out that other reasons are responsible for the apparent lack of monumental art.

Our knowledge of Mittani history and culture has long been based almost exclusively on the rich results of excavations in two peripheral cities of the empire: Alalah in the west and Nuzi in the east. It was only in the years before the outbreak of the Syrian civil war that research began in the centres of the empire located in the Ḫābūr region. Unfortunately, these were abruptly interrupted, and a resumption seems unlikely in the long term. Nevertheless, the results, some of which have not yet been published, give us cause to re-evaluate the history, structure, and culture of the Mittani Empire, taking into consideration not only the material from the Mittanian heartland but also from its periphery to the north and east, which is now available due to recent excavations.

To reach the goal, a 2-day symposium in Bern on the subject of **Mittani: an Enigmatic Empire (21st-23rd October 2022)** is planned with a view to publishing the papers as a monograph in *Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis* (OBO).

The symposium is intended to provide a small group of invited speakers with the opportunity to meet face to face and discuss a variety of relevant themes, some of which could be updated, others of which still lack consensus, and a few of which have yet to be considered in relation to the political entity that is Mittani. We have scheduled fourteen presentations each consisting of a 30-minute synthesis of research followed by a 15-minute discussion. The aim of the symposium and resulting publication is to provide a Handbook that surveys the scattered material (textual, archaeological, art historical, palaeobotanical etc.) on the Mittanian and early Middle Assyrian period, re-examines the evidence considering new discoveries, and presents the pros and cons on issues that remain open to debate. The volume is aimed at students and academics interested in the formation of one of the first tentative empires and international alliances that reshaped the Mediterranean and Near Eastern world during the Late Bronze Age.

Programme

Fr. 21.10.2022

13:00–13:30	<i>Coffee</i>	
13:30–14:00	<i>Welcome Address and Introduction</i>	Diana Stein, Mirko Novák
14:00–15:00	<i>Landscape Archaeology: Settlement and Migration Patterns</i>	Jason Ur
15:00–16:00	<i>A Look at the Formational Period of Mittani from Tikunanu in Upper Mesopotamia</i>	Regine Pruzsinszky
16:00–16:30	<i>Coffee Break</i>	
16:30–17:30	<i>Mittani as Great Power</i>	Stefano De Martino
17:30–18:30	<i>The rise of Assyria and the Mittanian Heritage</i>	Stefan Jakob
17:30–18:30	<i>Economy, and Subsistence Strategies</i>	Brigitte Lion
18:30–19:30	<i>SGOA General Assembly (for SGOA members only)</i>	
20:00	<i>Dinner</i>	

Sa. 22.10.2022

9:00–10:00	<i>Coffee</i>	
10:00–11:00	<i>State and Society</i>	Eva von Dassow
11:00–12:00	<i>Ritual and Religion</i>	Daniel Schwemer
12:00–13:00	<i>Art I: Monumental Art</i>	Dominik Bonatz
13:00–14:00	<i>Lunch</i>	
14:00–15:00	<i>Art II: Minor Arts (Luxury Industry)</i>	Marian Feldman
15:00–16:00	<i>Art III: Glyptics</i>	Diana Stein
16:00–16:30	<i>Coffee Break</i>	
16:30–17:30	<i>Architecture I: Palaces and Temples</i>	Hannah Mönninghoff, Mirko Novák
17:30–18:30	<i>Architecture II: Houses</i>	Adelheid Otto
20:00	<i>Dinner</i>	

So. 23.10.2022

8:00–8:30	<i>Coffee</i>	
8:30–10:00	<i>Ceramics and Comparative Stratigraphy: West and South</i>	Marco Iamoni, Michel al-Maqdissi, Ekin Kozal
10:00–11:30	<i>Ceramics and Comparative Stratigraphy: Center and East</i>	Peter Pfälzner, Glenn Schwartz
11:30–13:00	<i>General Discussion: Results</i>	Plenum
13:00–14:00	<i>Lunch</i>	

Abstracts

Petra Creamer (Dartmouth College) and Jason Ur (Harvard University): Settlement Landscapes of the Mitanni Polity and Late Bronze Age Northern Mesopotamia

The question of landscape and settlement during the reign of the Mittani state in Upper Mesopotamia is a fraught one. Decades of excavation and historical study have provided little clarity to the changes that settlement systems underwent during this time, in no small part due to a difficulty in distinguishing Mittani ceramic horizons from those bookending Mittani rule. Recent work in northern Iraq builds on previous archaeological efforts in Syria and Turkey to solidify the identification of Mittani material, yet is still limited by our understanding of ceramic chronologies specific to the era of Mittani hegemony. In this presentation, we address these difficulties in separating Mittani settlement patterns from those of the Late Bronze Age more generally. We discuss the overall landscape of the Late Bronze Age, identifying trends in urbanization and how we may be able to connect them to practices of the Mittani state.

Regine Pruzsinszky (Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg): A Look at the Formational Period of Mittani from Tikunanu in Upper Mesopotamia

The publication of a prism and the first tablets from Tikunanu by M. Salvini in 1996 has evoked special interest with regard to the Dark Age around the middle of the 2nd millennium BCE and the texts' possible link to the early formational stages of Mittani. These texts along with ca. 450 cuneiform tablets belonging to the palace archive of Tikunanu's ruler Tunip-Teššup were found during illegal excavations in the area around Diyarbakir in the 1980s. Before they were sold to several private collections, W. G. Lambert examined them, whose transliterations and comments are archived in the so-called "WGL folios". Based on the evaluation of the mostly unpublished Tikunanu texts by the research project „El reino de Tikunani en la Alta Mesopotamia: historia, administración y sociedad según los archivos inéditos del rey Tunip-Teššup (ca. 1620 a. C.)” led by J.J. Justel (2016-2019) and following an attempt to anchor them chronologically, this paper seeks to shed new light on the geographical horizon, population and political situation in search for Mittani's rise and identity.

Stefano de Martino (Università degli studi di Torino): History II. Mittani as a Great Power

The earliest attestation of the toponym Mittani comes from an Egyptian source and dates to the time of Pharaoh Tuthmosis I, but a Hurrian kingdom may already have existed in Syria before the beginning of the 15th century BC.

The reconstruction of the Mittanian political history from this time until the Hittite conquest during the reign of Šuppiluliuma I is not an easy task because of the scarcity of the sources coming from the core of Mittani. Hence, the documentation available, such as texts from Hatti, Egypt, Alalah, Nuzi, and Ṭerqa, only allow to draw an incomplete picture. The zenith of the Mittanian power coincided with the reigns of, respectively, Parratarna I whose name occurs in the Idrimi inscription, and Šauštatar I who is mentioned in texts discovered at Alalah, Tall Bazi, Ṭerqa, and Hattuša. At this time, Mittani controlled a large area that extended from the Mediterranean to northern Mesopotamia, and its heartland was the Upper Hābūr region where the capital Waššukkanni was located. The Mittanian kingdom stretched eastwards to include Assur and Arrapḫe, northwest to Išuwa, westwards to Kizzuwatna and western Syria (Aleppo, Karkemiš, Tunip, Ekalte, Nuḫašše, Qaṭna and Qadeš), and southward to Ṭerqa. Hence the Mittanian kings were the overlords of several Syrian, Mesopotamian, and Anatolian polities, but their political control did not extend over contiguous territories; in fact, we argue that for example the arid region between Ṭerqa and Arrapḫe might have been of no interest to Mittani.

The aggressive policy of Egypt at the time of Tuthmosis III led to a military contrast with Mittani that culminated in the battle of Megiddo. At this same time the Hittite kingdom took advantage of the Mittanian political weakness and annexed Kizzuwatna. The conflict between Mittani and Egypt eventually brought to the peace. The alliance between these two states lasted for more than half a century and gave stability to the Syrian and Levantine regions. Instead, the western boundary that bordered Hatti became the scene of several conflicts that are documented from the Hittite texts, not only those from the collection of tablets discovered at Hattuša, but also some recently published tablets from Ortaköy and Kayalıpınar.

The Mittanian kingdom entered a phase of severe crisis during the reign of Tušratta. The attack against Arrapḫe, the independence of Assyria and the successful military campaign led by Šuppiluliuma I caused the collapse of Mittani, although it survived as a polity that was subordinated before to Hatti and then to Assur.

Stefan Jakob (Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg): The rise of Assyria and the Mittanian Heritage

During the reign of Tušratta, Mittani was facing a serious political crisis. The throne quarrel that followed the violent death of that king encouraged vassal states to seize the opportunity to free themselves from Mittani's supremacy. One of them is the middle power Assyria, which had lost its autonomy at the time of Šauštatar.

In the course of the following decades, Assyrian rulers, beginning with Aššur-uballiṭ I, continuously succeeded in expanding their power base to the west of the Assyrian heartland through alliances and successful military operations, until Assyria finally became the leading power in Mesopotamia at the end of the 13th century. A significant part of those regions incorporated during this western expansion previously belonged to the Mittanian sphere of influence. A key issue is how the Assyrian administration dealt with this heritage.

It shall be discussed in which way Mittanian conventions, administrative practices and institutions are reflected in textual sources from Assyria. Is there an interest in adopting inherited patterns and titles, or are attempts being made to replace them by Assyrian administrative structures?

Eva von Dassow (University of Minnesota): Mittani – State and Society

In the absence of substantial textual finds within Ḫanigalbat, its core territory, the kingdom of Mittani is largely a black box. Scattered sources serve as peepholes into the box. The remains of administrative archives found at Tall Brak (Nawar), Tall al-Ḫamidīya (probably Taide) and Kemune (probably Zaḫiku) confirm that Mittani did possess an administration like other ancient Near Eastern states, as we would expect. Letters and legal documents issued or authorized by kings and officials of Mittani that have been found in various parts of its empire, from Alalaḫ to Zalpaḫ (possibly at Hammām at-Turkmān), disclose glimpses of its organization and government. Where textual sources are richest, in the town of Nuzi, local archives yield information about the society of Ḫanigalbat, for many Ḫanigalbateans were temporarily deployed or permanently settled in the kingdom of Arrapḫe. Meanwhile, to the extent that Middle Assyrian practices of government reproduce those of Mittani, the parent state may be modeled on the basis of its better-documented descendant. Almost nothing about that state is attested directly, except that it had a king. As to its monarchy, the letters of Tušratta in the Amarna archive, along with the treaties Šuppiluliuma I made upon conquering Mittani, reveal a fracture in the royal house that effectively split the kingdom in two, but no source illuminates the story of that split until the moment both sides were defeated and the empire dismembered. Meanwhile, Tušratta's portrayal of himself and his kingdom is not to be believed on key points, but the extant sources are inadequate to posit a credible alternative.

In sum, Mittani's actions during the two centuries of its existence are known, if at all, mainly by their echoes in other kingdoms' affairs. It is from these echoes that the shape of the state and its society may be inferred, in silhouette.

Brigitte Lion (Université de Tours): Economy and subsistence strategies

The economic resources of the Mittani state are linked to its geographical location. The heart of the state is located in Upper Mesopotamia, in the region of Upper Ḫābūr. But Mittani can also count on the economic cooperation of its vassals, its area of domination extending from the Transtigrine to the Mediterranean. Most of this area is north of the 250 mm isohyet, in a dry farming zone, which allows for cereal cultivation. The production of sesame, fruits, vegetables and the exploitation of wooded areas are also documented. Vineyards and olive trees are present in the western part of the empire. Animal husbandry, especially that of small livestock, provides additional resources.

Production and processing activities are better known in the palace context than in the domestic one, notably through the mention of specialized workers, but part of the production is done in the houses. The production of the large households, where they exist, is organized on the same model as palaces. The origin of processed products is local for most food preparations and probably also for woodworking and textiles. But the origin of metals is not always known, although relations with Cyprus and Egypt seem to indicate imports, respectively of copper and gold, from these countries.

Exchanges can take place at the local, regional (e.g. between the Mittani and its vassals) or international level, according to various modalities: trade at these different scales, tribute from the vassals to the Mittani, or diplomatic presents.

Daniel Schwemer (Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg): Religion in the Mittani Empire

The extant documentary evidence for the religious traditions in the kingdom of Mittani of 15th and 14th century Upper Mesopotamia is still sparse, both with regard to texts and material culture. Generally speaking, the religious practices and beliefs in the heartland of the Mittani state reflect Hurrian traditions, which, at the time, had been present in Upper Mesopotamia for more than half a millennium. With the rise of the kingdom of Mittani, Hurrian religious traditions, which had long since integrated

to a significant extent Mesopotamian and Syrian strands, are connected for the first time with the ruling elites and urban centres of one of the supra-regional political powers of the ancient Near East. In addition to the prevalent Hurrian stratum, the dynasty of the Mittani kingdom preserves some religious elements of Indo-Aryan heritage, but they appear to be isolated vestiges that did not gain significance beyond the royal court. Even though the kings of Mittani did not impose the religious customs of the heartland on the cities and territories under their control or influence, Hurrian religious traditions in various configurations were widespread throughout Late Bronze Age northern Mesopotamia, Syria, and southern Anatolia. This broad diffusion and, not least, the adoption of Hurrian traditions at the Hittite royal court since the late 15th century, is amply documented in cuneiform texts, which, though often written far away from the residences of the kings of Mittani, can still shed some light on the religious practices and beliefs that must have been current in their kingdom.

Hannah Mönninghoff and Mirko Novák (Universität Bern): Architecture I. Palaces and Temples

For a long time, information about the palaces of the Mittani period was only available through a few examples from the periphery, which served as residences of vassal rulers: Ugarit, Alalakh and Nuzi. In addition, the palace of the king of Qatna, who was also a vassal of the Mittani for a time, was added in the more recent past. A comparative examination of these buildings reveals more differences than similarities, which could indicate that there was no normative palace architecture in the empire, i.e. that the seat of the Mittani king did not have the exemplary function that one finds in other great empires of the Ancient Near East. Only in the recent past have at least parts of residences from the heartland of the empire become known, namely from Ta'udu (Tall Hamidiya). This and a recently undertaken thorough re-evaluation of the Palace of Nuzi offer an opportunity to revisit the palace architecture of the Mittani Empire.

The situation of the known temples of the empire is very similar: here, too, local or regional types dominate over a standard form, which indicates little or no centralism in Mittani cult architecture. Nevertheless, an overview of the widespread building forms and their respective typological classification will be attempted.

Adelheid Otto (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München): Architecture II. Houses

Houses in the Mittani Empire were as varied as were the people that had been integrated in this vast area under Mittani hegemony. Local communities from Alalakh and Ugarit in the West over the Euphrates valley and Northern Mesopotamia until Arrapha mostly continued their way of house construction and building technique which resulted in marked differences displayed by the houses. The topic of this contribution is therefore much more houses in the Mittani empire than 'Mittani houses'. This paper will investigate the building technique, the layout, the equipment found inside the houses, and the function of rooms, open spaces, and roofs. A glimpse will be thrown also on the streets and places between the houses. The multifunctional use of the houses, where dwelling, social gathering, trade, handicraft and many more activities took place, will be investigated with the help of the numerous houses which have been excavated so far and which consist in many cases not only of isolated dwellings, but large areas of built environment. Since many settlements displayed not only architectural and archaeological features, but delivered also cuneiform tablets, it will be even possible in cases to reconstruct the daily life and the social structures with a fair degree of certainty.

Dominik Bonatz (Freie Universität Berlin): Art I. Mittani Monumental Art

The Mittani period seems to be strikingly absent of monumental art works. So how to write about something, which is nearly missing in the archaeological record? It is a welcome opportunity to reflect on the function of monumental art in ancient Near Eastern societies. There are exceptions such as the

small-scale statue from Alalah and Tall Brak. Do they provide enough evidence for potential monumental art contexts, which have not been discovered yet? Or are they regional phenomena, which fall out of the contemporary needs in art production?

The geography, geology, and the socio-political structure of the Mittani state plays an important role in this consideration. To what extent influenced the combination of these three factors the art production? If there was no significant interest in monumental art, what other media could have been used for visual communication?

These are some of the many questions, which will be followed up in this essay. The answers should be useful because an investigation into the visual culture of the Mittani period has to start with the trigger question of monumental art, why absent or not?

Marian H. Feldman (The Johns Hopkins University): Art II. Luxury Arts of Mittani

Drawing on archaeological and textual evidence, this contribution presents a comprehensive overview of a somewhat ill-defined corpus of objects that I am referring to as *luxury arts*. The definition of what is a “luxury art” is notoriously elusive, but for the purposes of this paper, it includes certain materials, technologies, and object genres that can be considered additional to and/or beyond the necessary and everyday and that are typically of a small scale. Among the materials are ivory and related materials (bone and shell), glass and vitreous compositions, metals (both precious and base), and stones (semi-precious and ornamental). Objects include containers, furnishings, jewelry, and other adornments. Their sources, properties, forms, technologies, and object genres will be surveyed, along with their stylistic and formal relationships to other material culture. When possible, contextual evidence will be analyzed for local, regional, and inter-regional patterns. The contribution will also discuss, as much as possible, those materials that generally have not survived the archaeological record, such as textiles and wood.

Diana Stein (Birkbeck, University of London): Art III. Mittanian Glyptic in All Its Guises,

Mittanian glyptic is a term with multiple meanings that is often used but seldom understood. It can refer to seals and sealings of a specific era, geopolitical domain, socioeconomic class, design, engraving style or composite material, with ethnic overtones in some or all cases. However defined, tradition holds that Mittanian glyptic is distinctive. This paper explores that notion, beginning with the seals belonging to the kings of Mittani and their provincial counterparts. The emerging pattern of seal use and design paints a picture of a fledgling state determined to stand out amongst its peers. This is achieved, contrary to popular perception, through embracing rather than rejecting the iconographic heritage of the regions under Mittanian control. The 15th–14th cent. BCE archives of sealed tablets from Alalakh and Nuzi provide insight into the interplay between rural traditions and cosmopolitan trends in seal material and design across a broad spectrum of society at the beginning and end of the Mittanian hegemony. Recent discoveries from the Mittanian heartland and its northeastern periphery expand our understanding of regional variations in seal use and design. Seals and sealings of the 13th–12th cent. BCE discovered at sites like Assur, Emar and Dur Katlimmu allow us to gauge the impact of Mittanian glyptic on the mainstream glyptic developments that follow.

Marco Iamoni (Università di Udine): Ceramics I. Pottery in the West 1. Inland Levant

It is generally agreed that, since the beginning of the Late Bronze Age, the Mittanian empire has taken control over a significant portion of western Syria and, more in general, of Northern Levant. Textual sources, such as the Statue of Idrimi, suggest that Mittani might have exerted a significant influence on a large number of cities, affecting in this way the development of the settlements and related material culture. Pottery is in this respect a valuable indicator of the level of contacts between Mittani

and its “periphery”: the presence of Mittanian ceramic hallmarks in regions that are located far away from the heartland of the Mittani Empire, i.e. the north/north-east Mesopotamia, might indicate major or minor level of interactions between the core of the empire and its surrounding territories. Although a substantial number of diagnostic form types are known from Mittanian sites (e.g. Yorgan Tepe/Nuzi, Tall Brak), it is still unclear whether these were also in use in the western regions that were under control of the Mittanian Kings. This work presents an overview of the LB ceramic traditions excavated in key sites of Western Syria/Northern Levant such as Qatna and Hamā, with the aim of identifying the occurrence of Mittanian ceramic types within the local assemblages. This will in turn permit to highlight levels and types of contact between this region and the heartland of Mittani.

Ekin Kozal (Onsekiz Mart Universitesi Çanakkale): Ceramic I. Pottery in the West 2. The Local Pottery Traditions in the Amuq and Islahiye Plains in the 16-13th centuries BCE. An Overview

The impact of the Mittanian state foundation on the material culture, here on pottery, represents one of the crucial aspects in understanding how this powerful political entity functioned. The aim of this paper is to address the continuing and discontinuing elements of pottery traditions to gain insights into the cultural and economic development of the societies in the Amuq and Islahiye Plains throughout this period. A regional overview of the pottery will be presented in respect to two chronological terms as Early Mittanian (ca. 16th-14th c. BCE) and Late Mittanian (ca. 14th-13th century BC) periods. Published material will be taken into consideration to provide an up-to-date analysis of pottery typology in terms of ware, shape and decoration on secure stratigraphical and chronological grounds supported by other datable materials.

The pottery of this period can be divided into different categories functionally: table wares (eating, drinking, serving), wares for food processing/production as well as storage and cooking. While the majority of these wares are undecorated plain wares, there is always a distinctive elaborately decorated group among the table wares, which is represented by the Black Impressed White Filled Ware in the Early Mittanian Period and Nuzi Ware in the Late Mittanian Period in the Amuq Plain. The common pottery types that are distributed to wider areas will be utilized to reconstruct regional and inter-regional affiliations. Regarding this matter, the concept of pottery standardization and networking among elites will also be discussed.

Michel al-Maqdissi (Musée du Louvre): Ceramic I. Pottery in the West 3. Coastal Northern Levant

The development of archaeological work along the Syrian coast has accelerated our knowledge of the nature of two important regions: First the plain of Latakia around the metropolis of *Ugarit* (current Ras Shamra), and then the plain of ‘Akkar with the town of *sumur* (current Tell Kazel). All the information published will allow us to expand our knowledge of the fields of town planning, material culture and above all the nature of the communication routes which linked this part of the Mediterranean coast with interior Syria. These new horizons will be the means to establish a new stratigraphic sequence for sites excavated by the Syrian teams at Tell Sianu, Tell Iris or joint teams at Tell Toueini or the American University Museum in Beirut mission at Tell Kazel.

The presentation will focus on two important points:

- The local development of sites with these stratigraphic sequences linked to ceramics and terracotta.
- The role of the central position of this region in the eastern Mediterranean between Cyprus and the Aegean world on one side and interior Syria and the middle Euphrates valley on the other.

This analysis will make it possible to identify the precise characteristics of this region during the Late Bronze Age and particularly its major role between Egypt, Cyprus, Anatolia and Mesopotamia.

Peter Pfälzner (Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen) and Glenn Schwartz (The Johns Hopkins University): Ceramic II. Pottery in the Centre and the East.

This joint paper will focus on the typology and chronology of ceramic assemblages associated with the period of the Mittani kingdom in the regions of the Khabur in Syria, the Turkish Upper Tigris and the Iraqi Middle Tigris, and the Eastern Tigridian region. The study will be based on published pottery material from major excavation sites in Syria, such as Tell Brak, Tell Barri, Tell Arbid and Tell Bderi, as well as on material from the old excavations in Iraq, at Nuzi, Nemrik and Tell al Rimah. Of special importance for this study is the inclusion, for the first time in a synthetic approach, of material from newly excavated sites in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (e.g. Kemune, Bassetki, Muqable, Kurd Qaburstan, Bashtapa and Helawa). This will strongly expand the overall picture of Mittani period ceramics from the various regions of Mittani influence. On this basis a new standard chronological framework for Mittani period ceramics will be established. In this respect, it is of interest that the distinction between Early and Late Mittani pottery in the heartland of the Mittani Empire, but also along the Middle Tigris in Northern Iraq, has become increasingly clear in recent years. Beyond chronology, another specific concern of our study is the question of regionalization. Throughout the Mittani sphere pottery reveals strong regional characteristics. This becomes all the more obvious through the new data from Iraqi-Kurdistan. Finally, an attempt at a functional differentiation of pottery in the Mittani period will be made.