THE REDISCOVERY OF AMIOUN, ANCIENT AMMIYA. THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF A REGIONAL CAPITAL IN THE INNER PLAIN OF KOURA (LEBANON)

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Abstract: In 2017 the joint Italian-Lebanese mission of the Northern Lebanon Project (NoLeP) started a systematic investigation in the district of Koura. The aim of the project is the reconstruction via intensive and extensive survey investigations of the ancient landscape of the region with particular reference to the ancient settlements located in the inner plain. In particular, one of the main initial targets has been the investigation of the ancient city of Ammiya that previous studies identified provisionally as the modern city of Amioun on the basis of textual data. This article provides a detailed account of the results achieved by the joint mission during the survey activity: in particular, it furnishes for the first time a solid archaeological basis in support of a definitive correlation between the modern city of Amioun and ancient Ammiya. Moreover, it provides a first look at the origin, rise and development of the ancient settlement in this site of fundamental importance in the inner area of Koura. This in turn permits us to illuminate the socio-economic dynamics characterising this important region of Northern Lebanon.

Keywords: Koura; Levant; Survey; Regional Settlement; Bronze and Iron Age.

1. Introduction: The Regional and Local Context. The Area of Koura, an Unexplored Landscape with Millennia of Human Presence[1]

Among the districts that compose the administrative region of Northern Lebanon, that of Koura, together with Zgharta, is one of the most interesting (Fig. 1). From a geographical point of view, it largely coincides with the hinterland of the modern city of Tripoli (in whose vicinity ancient Ullasa of the Amarna texts was possibly located).[2] It thus lies in an area where the narrow coastal strip that hosts several ancient cities/settlements well-known in historical records (running from modern Jbeil/ancient Byblos/Gubla and then continuing northwards with Chekka/Shigata, Batroun/Batruna, Enfeh/Ambi) slightly opens up in correspondence with the routes of the watercourses Wadi Hab and, in particular, Abu Ali, and has access to the inner plain of Koura. This latter creates an internal area, which, although characterised by a smoothly sloping profile,

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1 The successful results achieved during the survey carried out by the NoLeP Italian – Lebanese team depend on several reasons. The first factor concerns the support received by the mission: the Directorate General of Antiquities and in particular the Directorate of Antiquities of Northern Lebanon, represented respectively by Mr S. Al Khoury and Mrs S. Karam, granted the survey permission and were of great assistance to the mission during each season. Ifpo of Beirut with the General Director M. Mouton and the Director of the archaeological section, D. Pieri, has given constant support to our work. Secondly, but by no means of less importance, were the team members: the mission's specialists A. Elias (geomorphology), J.S. Baldi (prehistory and EBA), V. Vezzoli (medieval archaeology), R. Valente (GIS analysis), M. Scattini and L. Zanazzo (pottery analysis), who helped us to obtain a clearer idea of Amioun and who will help to further explore the archaeology of Amioun and the Koura area in future publications, together with the students who took part in the survey of Amioun, L. Burj, S. Zampa, E. Nader, R. Nader, R. Menis, S. Ghaye and J. Ibrahim. Last but not least we wish to express our thanks for the financial support received from the Municipality of Amioun (to which we would like to dedicate this article), the University of Udine and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, and our gratitude to the Italian Embassy in Beirut that has always followed our research with great interest.

2 Liverani 1998, pp. 201-202, note 115.

Fig. 1. Satellite view of inner Koura: note the variegated landscape that is a direct consequence of the geomorphology of the area.

offers one of the few rather flat surfaces of the region, that gently joins the edges of the inner Lebanon Mountains with the coast. As far as the water sources are concerned these are rather abundant: several seasonal watercourses cross the area, whereas karstic sources are located along the edge of the Lebanon Mountain and the Jebel Qalhat. Precipitation (Fig. 2) provides a further reliable source of water. Current average annual precipitation is more than 700 mm: it varies greatly according to season, i.e. with significant concentrations during the winter months and rather low or even absent rainfall during the late springtime and summer.[3] Leaving aside possible temporary oscillations that may have coincided to create periods of crisis e.g. the so-called 4.2 ka event,[4] analyses of paleo-environmental proxies suggest that the picture has not changed significantly between the mid/late Holocene and recent times.[5]

The variegated landscape is a further, and by no means less relevant, asset of the region. The internal plain is surrounded by hills that, especially on the southern side, rapidly rise to heights of 1000 m and more. On the northern side is Jebel Qalhat, a large plateau which rises to a height of about 300 m and separates the inner area of Koura while dominating the coast, thus providing a strategically crucial location for the control

3 Neheme *et al.* 2015.

4 Kaniewski *et al.* 2018.

5 Bar-Matthews – Ayalon 2019.

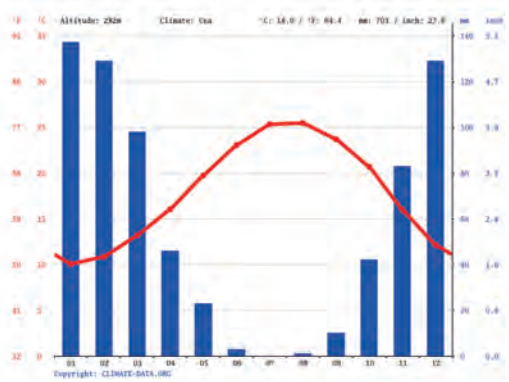

Fig. 2. Average of precipitation and of temperature (data taken from https://en.climate-data.org/asia/lebanon/qada-al-batroun/amioun-419672/#climate-graph).

Fig. 3. Aerial view of present-day Amioun: note its position dominating the inner Plain of Koura on the northern side of the site (right side of the photo).

of the access routes crossing this sector of Northern Lebanon, especially when these put the hinterland in contact with the coast.

As a consequence of these climatic and topographical factors, the area of Koura and in particular its inner plain has offered an ideal environment for human presence (for both permanent/sedentary and/or seasonal settlements) since at least the beginning of the Neolithic, c. 10.000 BCE.[6]

Amioun dominates this region from its position on the top of a rocky hill (Fig. 3) located on the south-eastern margin of the inner plain. The location of Amioun is particularly strategic for the following three reasons:

- The higher position permits it to have a complete overview of the inner plain as far as the Jebel Qalhat and that portion of the coast that extends as far as Tripoli. It also offers natural protection for a permanent settlement of significant dimension (the entire upper surface of the modern hill covers an area of almost 48 hectares)
- The location of Amioun is in proximity to internal valleys that penetrate into the mountains of the Lebanon chain and its forests of cedar, one of the raw materials for which Lebanon was famous in antiquity. Furthermore, it is also not far (ca. 5 km) from the Abu Ali, the main river of the region which connects the inner mountainous area with the coast.
- The area is characterised by natural springs located, in particular, along the southern side of the hills that result from the emergence of groundwater. They were already well known in ancient times and, although water is rather abundant in the area due to the substantial precipitation that characterises the region, they further facilitated the formation of human settlements, contributing to the emergence of larger permanent sites.

Despite this notable concurrence of attractive characteristics for the settlements of ancient communities, the area, in particular that around Amioun, has not seen systematic archaeological investigations aimed at assessing the presence and nature of human activity in ancient times and understanding the traits and dynamics of the regional archaeological landscape.

6 Finlayson 2014.

Pioneering work was conducted using textual data.[7] Archaeological investigations, on the other hand, have been only sporadically carried out; a noteworthy exception is the Qadisha Valley Project (QVP), whose main focus was, however, limited to the earliest prehistory of the region.[8] QVP's results have been, however, fundamental in many respects. Firstly, they confirmed the frequentation of the area since the earliest times of human presence in the Levant, in agreement with the Palaeolithic evidence collected by a Japanese mission in its excavation of the Keoue cave.[9] QVP also spotted traces of Early Bronze Age occupation during the survey of a few prehistoric caves in the area of the Abu Ali River,[10] demonstrating that the inner sector of the area of Koura might have seen human settlement in the 3rd millennium BCE.

Notwithstanding these investigations, most recent archaeological large-scale projects, such as the Enfeh archaeological project and the Chekka archaeological project[11] continued to concentrate their attention on the coastal area. They have provided indeed interesting data concerning the development of coastal settlements but shed little light on the possible nature of inland settlement. In particular, one of the biggest question marks has concerned the city of Amioun, frequently associated with the famous ancient city of Ammiya on the basis of philological and textual conjectures that, however, were never tested and proved or disproved by solid archaeological work on the ground. One of the main goals of the Northern Lebanon Project, a regional archaeological project carried out by a joint Italian-Lebanese mission directed by M. Iamoni (University of Udine) and M. Haider (Lebanese University) has been to verify the existence – and eventual dimensions and development – of an ancient settlement at Amioun that may justify its correlation with the ancient city of Ammiya. As we will explain below, the results have exceeded even the most optimistic expectations.

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2. The Archaeological Survey of Amioun: Methods to Pursue Archaeological Investigations in a Modern Urban Settlement

The survey of the modern city of Amioun posed questions and difficulties that forced the Italian-Lebanese team to adapt the investigation methods currently in use in the survey projects active in the Near East and the Levant to the specific context of Amioun. Usually these focus their efforts on regional projects investigating the large rural areas of Syria and Mesopotamia,[12] i.e. in territories that are devoid of the obstacles presented by urban agglomerations. The latter are characterised by concentrations of modern buildings that hamper, or even make impossible, the reconnaissance of early deposits. Even in the case of projects focussing on single sites e.g. Hamoukar, Tell Beydar and Carchemish,[13] the areas investigated had a low density of modern buildings, which permitted preliminary analysis conducted with topographic and digital sources and, in a second step, direct field-walking aimed at ground-truthing the archaeological evidence.

The case of Amioun differs substantially from these and required the definition of a different approach and related investigation method which had to be appropriate to the conformation of the hill, as well as the presence of private properties. The latter represented in some cases the only source of information for

7 Salamé-Sarkis 1975-1976; see also Turri in this volume for a more detailed re-analysis of the historical evidence.

8 Garrard – Yazbeck 2004 and 2005; Garrard 2008.

9 Nishiaki 2018; Watanabe 1970.

10 Garrard – Yazbeck 2004.

11 Panayot-Harun 2016; Kopetzky *et al.* 2019.

12 Adams – Nissen 1972; Wilkinson – Tucker 1995; Lyonnet 2000.

13 Ur 2010; Lebeau – Suleiman 2008; Wilkinson – Peltenburg – Barbanes Wilkinson 2016.

specific sectors of Amioun and therefore could not be ignored. The survey area was therefore explored by means of 55 collection units (Fig. 4), most of which were located in private gardens, which the joint mission was granted permission to enter and collect surface materials. A significant number of these units (25) where situated at the base of the northern side of Amioun's cliff, where the surface gently slopes towards the inner plain of Koura. The presence of gardens planted with olive trees facilitated survey investigation and also permitted us to obtain a better view of the origins of the ancient settlement at Amioun, thanks to the occurrence of substantial quantities of archaeological material, in particular pottery.

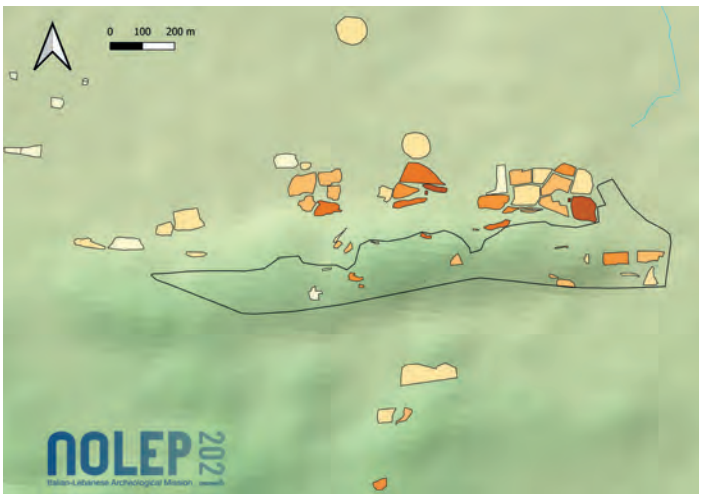

Fig. 4. The area of Amioun with the survey units; darker colours indicate greater amount of collected pottery (the black line the limit of present-day Amioun).

The remaining survey units were on the top of hill, i.e. in the modern settlement of Amioun: they were located according to the same considerations (i.e. the presence of gardens and the possibility of access to them), with the aim of obtaining as complete a view as possible of the presence of archaeological deposits – and therefore ancient settlement levels – at Amioun. A second goal was to understand the form of the ancient settlement, i.e. its genesis and its traits, even if obscured by modern Amioun.

Although limited in extent, the survey units allowed us to achieve these goals, providing a sizeable collection of ceramics which illustrate the chronological development of Amioun and permit us to have an idea of the modification of the settlement, in terms of dimension and growth or reduction of the inhabited area. As far as this latter point is concerned, it must be stressed that the continuous building activities that have occurred on the top of the hill have undoubtedly altered the distribution of the ancient materials. As a consequence, the reconstruction of the development of Amioun through the different epochs, as mirrored by the collected pottery assemblages, must be considered as very tentative. In particular, the size estimation of the ancient settlement might be significantly affected by the constant re-deposition/movement of the ancient materials due to the use in modern times of mechanical construction machinery. However, the concentration of ceramics should remain a valid and reliable indicator for the identification of settlement levels in specific areas of the site.

2.1. *The Ancient Settlement of Amioun: The Archaeological Evidence*

The data obtained from the different units surveyed on the top of the hill of Amioun revealed the presence of a long and complex sequence of settlement phases that attest to the antiquity of the origins of Amioun. With the exception of the Chalcolithic period (for which the quantities are exiguous), the ceramic data are no presented in terms of sherd numbers, but the proportion of material from each chronological range (EBA, MBA-LBA and Iron Age) with respect to the total amount of pottery collected in each survey unit (taken as 1.00). This has permitted a more homogeneous approach to exploring the development of human settlement at Amioun in each epoch.

These data suggest that Amioun has been of pivotal relevance since the beginning of the first human settlement in the area of Koura. The following account focuses on the pre-Classical eras and re-

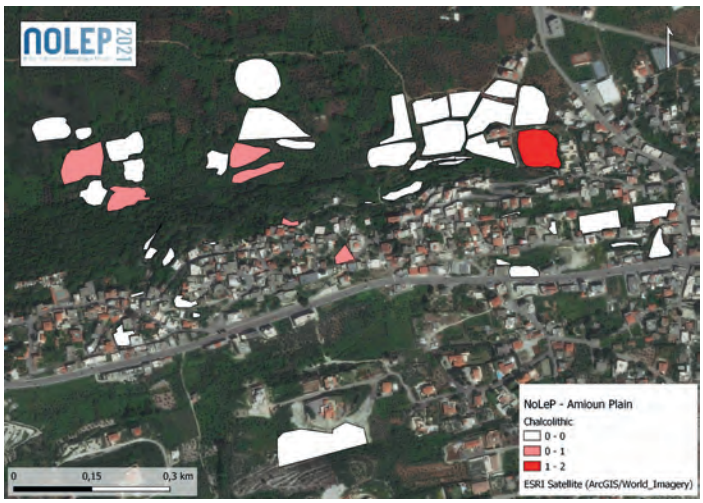

Fig. 5. Survey units with evidence of Neolithic and Chalcolithic pottery: darker colours indicate major densities of ceramics.

constructs the origins of Amioun and its development during the Neolithic/Chalcolithic, Bronze and Iron Ages. A second report will be dedicated to the Classical and post-Classical/Medieval epochs during which Amioun continued to play a significant role in the region of Koura.

As far as the pottery is concerned, for the scope of the present article (genesis and development of the ancient settlement of Amioun) ceramic types are only summarised, with a selection of the most distinctive types characterising each epoch. A future article in preparation will focus on a detailed account of the pottery evidence collected during the survey investigation with a more precise definition of the vessel forms and fabrics in use during the different epochs.

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2.2. *Prehistory: The Neolithic and Chalcolithic Periods*

The data retrieved by the joint Italian-Lebanese Mission revealed a small quantity of ceramics dating to the Neolithic and Chalcolithic eras (Fig. 5). These suggest the presence of one or more areas of occupation, located at the base of the hill but with the likely occurrence of a further inhabited area situated in the central-western sector of the hill. One must ask whether the pottery at the base of the mound may be the result of dumping activity and/or the simple collapse of layers from the top of the mound. However, the density of ceramics per survey unit as well as the distribution in precise and well-defined areas of the sloping surfaces at the base of the Amioun hill makes the simple re-deposition of archaeological materials an extremely unlikely hypothesis.

The limited evidence makes it impossible to propose a more detailed interpretation of the archaeological evidence. From a general standpoint, it is, however, interesting to observe that the location of the ceramics and the consequent presence of a few very small settlements confirm the attractiveness of the area of Amioun for the first permanent human settlements in the area of Northern Lebanon. Furthermore, it sets the origin of these latter to a period comparable only with one of the most important archaeological sequences in the area of Northern Lebanon, e.g. Byblos/Jbeil,[14] thus stressing the crucial role played by Amioun in the investigation of ancient human settlements and, in particular, of the origin of complex, structured societies in the Levant.

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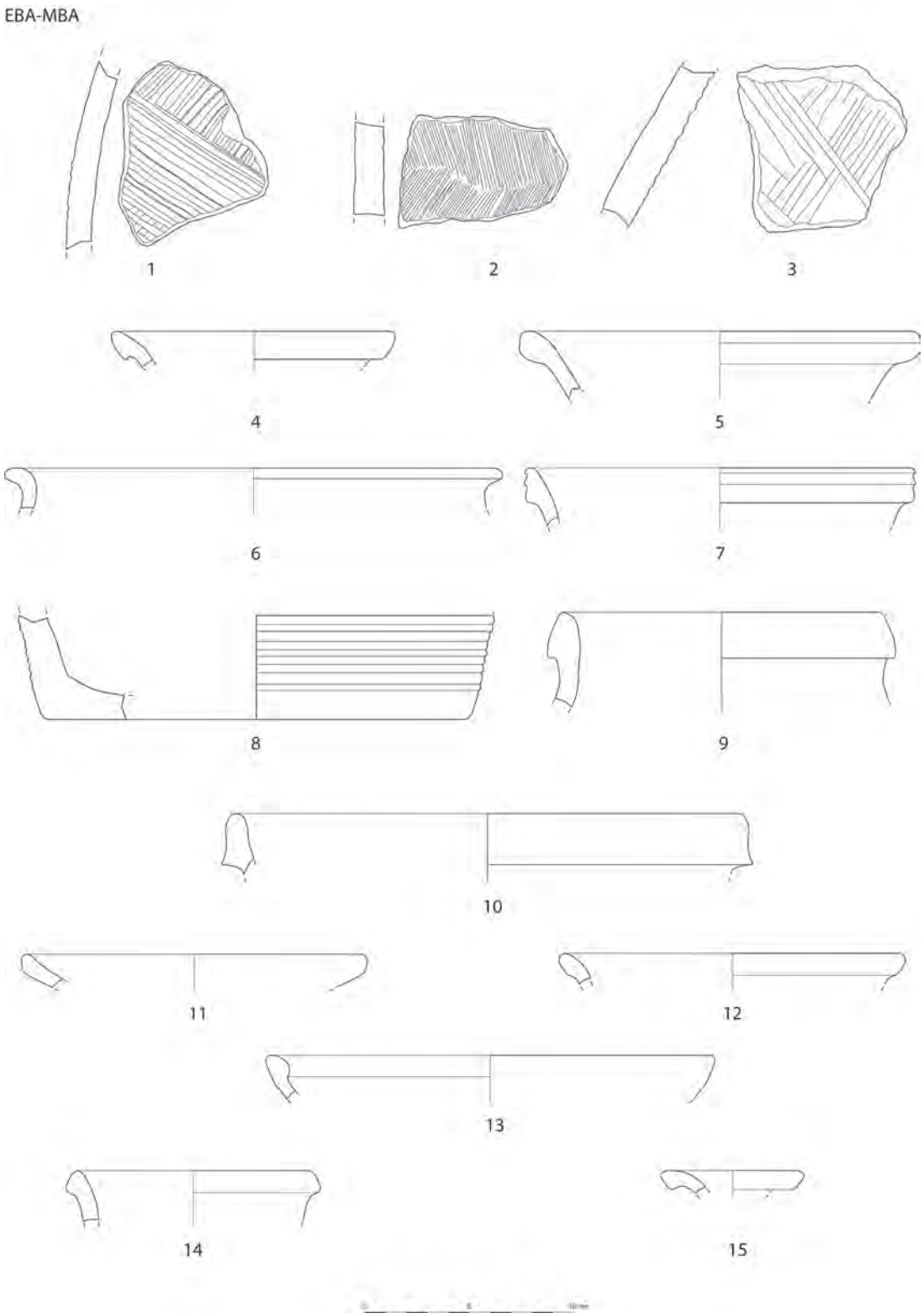
2.3. *The Early Bronze Age*

The Early Bronze Age saw a literal "boom" in the frequentation of the area of Amioun (Fig. 6), at least on the basis of the amount of pottery collected, which numbers almost 300 pieces dated to the EBA.[15] The

14 Akkermans 2014, pp. 143-144.

15 The study of the prehistoric, including the EBA, pottery is currently being carried out by J.S. Baldi, who has kindly helped in providing this very synthetic picture. A more detailed work focused on the presentation of the pottery collected at Amioun and more generally during the survey carried out by NoLeP's team is in preparation.



Pl. 1. EBA and MBA pottery types collected at Amioun.

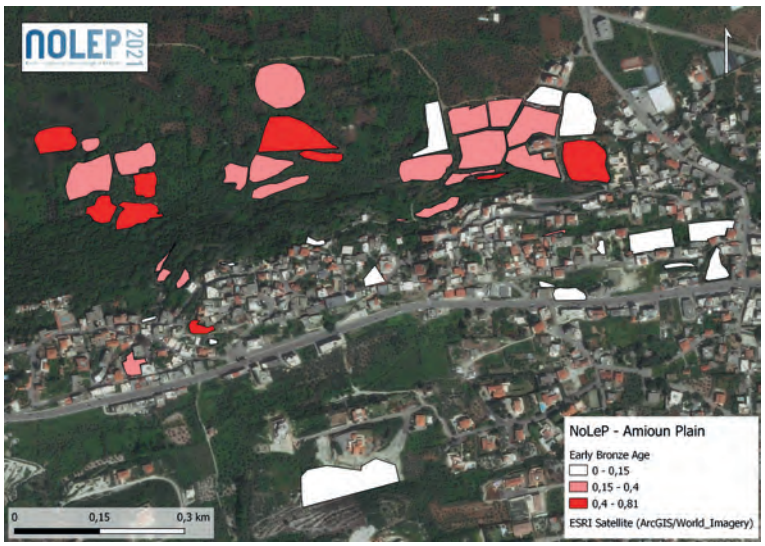


Fig. 6. The collection units with EBA sherds; colours are graduated in order to highlight the major or minor density of EBA types.

several diagnostic types found fall firmly within the most distinctive ceramic forms generally characterizing the EBA (Pl. I: 1-8). Among these, pattern combed decorations (Pl. I: 1-3) and short necked jars with flaring necks and swollen/double rim (Pl. I: 5) are particularly frequent. These are all widely attested in EB II-III contexts of Northern Lebanon, in the Akkar plain[16] as well as along the coast[17] and, especially during the EB III, also in the southern Levant.[18]

In the EB IV assemblages a smaller number of pottery types were found; these, however, continue to display forms that are common in reference contexts from Northern Lebanon (Tell Arqa, Phase P) and Western Syria (Tell Mardikh, Phase II B; Hama, Phase J3-J4; Qatna, Op. J Phases 38-19 = Mishrifeh Phase IIIA and B). Closed forms dominate the collections with large jars characterised by short-necked profiles with square/rounded everted, simple out-turned or triangular rims (Pl. I: 4, 6, 9).[19] Bases are usually flat whereas the surfaces are frequently grooved (Pl. I: 8), following a tradition that might have its genesis in the earlier combed pattern pottery of the preceding EB II-III.[20] Noteworthy is the occurrence of a jar with grooved rim (Pl. I: 7), a hallmark of Central Western Syria,[21] whose occurrence in Koura suggests the existence of wider interregional contacts already during the later 3rd millennium BCE.

The pottery distribution is particularly intriguing since it is concentrated in specific areas located at the base of the hill of Amioun. Three areas see concentrations of ceramics with significant densities of EBA sherds. As said above, our initial hypothesis was to interpret them as the consequence of dumping from the top of the hill. However, the position of the material, the occurrence of clear limits regarding the presence of pottery, i.e. areas with high concentrations of ceramics were separated by areas with very low ceramic densities, and the apparent existence on the ground of geomorphological traits that coincide with the concentrations of ceramics suggest that these areas might have been the result of stable human presence, i.e. of real settlements located in the proximity to the mound of Amioun.

16 Thalmann 2006, p. 115, and 2009; at Tell Arqa pattern combed decoration has been found since Level 18 corresponding to Phase S3-S1 (Thalmann 2016, fig. 36).

17 Baldi 2017.

18 A recent study, based mostly on evidence from Tell Yarmuth suggests the extension of the combed tradition also to the area of Canaan especially during the EB III (Miroschedji 2021, pp. 34-35). It is likely that further internal regional differentiations may have characterised this ceramic tradition, with more specific sub-traditions in use, especially in the coastal and inner regions (Badreshany – Philip – Kennedy 2020, pp. 192-193).

19 Braemer 2002, pl. V: 32, 34; Thalmann 2006, pl. 66: 8; Roux – Thalmann 2016, fig. 3: 19; Mazzoni 2002a, pl. XXXVII: 75; Thalmann 2008, fig. 2: 5; Besana – Da Ros – Iamoni 2008, fig. 1: 14.

20 See for example the presence in both Phases R and P of Tell Arqa (Thalmann 2006, pl. 68: 1-8; 71: 2-4).

21 Mazzoni 2002a, p. 77, and pl. XL: 101-102.

Of the utmost importance for site interpretation is the correspondence between the collection units characterised by significant density of pottery and the above-mentioned presence of natural boundaries. Sites 25 and, to a lesser extent, 16 and 26 are the best examples in this respect. The largest number of sherds collected come from an area where the distribution of the vegetation marks out a circular area (which has a difference in height visible only during field-walking) that is also recognisable in aerial and satellite images (Fig. 7).

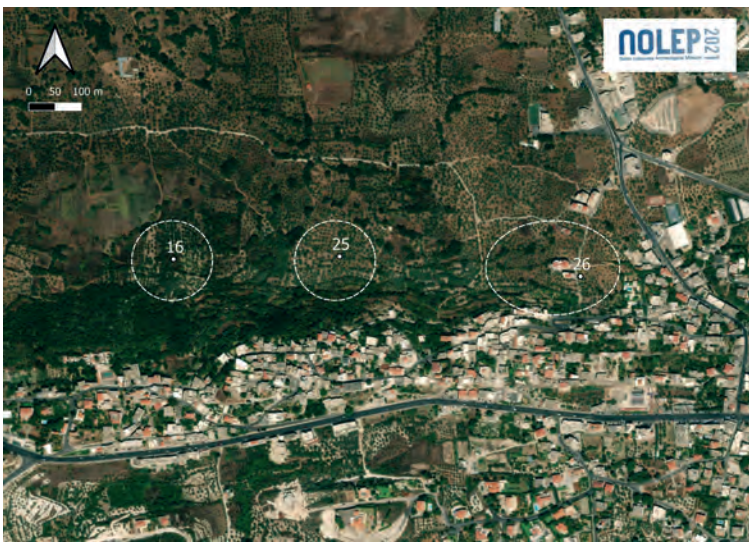


Fig. 7. EBA sites 16, 25 and 26 with their possible boundaries – as evidenced by vegetation, altitude change and sherd density – highlighted.

If this interpretation is confirmed by test excavations, we might have proof of the first significant occupation of the area of Amioun, with three settlements that were inhabited at the base of the mound. It is possible (and perhaps likely) that these areas were not settled contemporaneously. It has been suggested that the contemporaneity of sites should not be assumed in the absence of solid archaeological proof; this holds especially true in survey studies which use chronological ceramic markers valid for longer phases than those employed in studies based on data from site stratigraphies. This may easily generate an exaggerated impression of contemporaneously inhabited sites and a consequent overestimation of the number of settlements actually present in a specific area.[22]

Sites 16, 25 and 26 well illustrate this phenomenon, i.e. be settlements that were inhabited at different times during the 3rd millennium BCE. Ceramic evidence may help to further refine this picture: preliminary data indicate a significant predominance of EBA II-III sherds in sites 16 and 25, whereas site 26 is characterised by a clear preponderance of EBA IV ceramics. This suggests that either 16 and 25 were the earliest stable sites, later abandoned with resettlement in site 26 or that, in line with an alternative and perhaps more realistic interpretation, 16, 25 and 26 might be evidence of a single human community that across the centuries progressively shifted its location.

The reasons for this possible progressive shift are unclear, but it is very likely that it had to do with the emergence of a single large site located on the top of the hill of Amioun, which the survey evidence suggests may have happened during the 2nd millennium. In this respect it is worth considering a few traits that distinguish site 26, the latest EBA settlement on the basis of the collected pottery, from the others.

The first is its larger size: the ceramic scatter suggests an inhabited area of 4 hectares for site 26, whereas 16 and 25 each cover about 2 hectares each. The second, and perhaps more significant, is site 26's proximity to the centre of old Amioun, where the most substantial ceramic assemblages from the 2nd millennium (and especially the MBA) have been recovered. This evidence suggests that the site moved progressively towards what was becoming a major "centre" in the plain of Koura.

The fragmented data obtained from the top of the hill of Amioun can help, to a limited extent, to understand this phenomenon better. EBA materials has been found in a few units, located on the eastern and western sides of the mound in particular (Fig. 6). With the above-discussed caveat in mind, specifically

22 Dewar 1991; 1994.

the likely scattering of materials due to modern construction in recent times, the presence of 3rd millennium materials in different areas of Amioun suggests that part of the top of the mound may also have been inhabited during the EBA. More precisely, the presence of EBA IV ceramics in the eastern sector of Amioun may suggest that a process of settlement growth was underway since the very end of the 3rd millennium BCE.[23] The extent of this settlement and its nature/development remain, unfortunately, still rather difficult to understand.

We can say that Amioun was clearly characterised in the earliest times (since the Neolithic/Chalcolithic and in particular since the EBA II/III) by multiple small settlements that demonstrate how the area had become of paramount importance for the permanent organization of human societies in the area. The abundance of finds and the possibility of linking them to specific areas that we provisionally interpret as discrete settlements make Amioun a crucial case study for the investigation of the emergence of structured societies in the Levant. In particular, as will be discussed more widely in the conclusion of this work, Amioun may provide a different and thus far undetected model regarding the formation of complex settlements, and ultimately, urban societies, in Northern Lebanon and the central Levant.

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2.4. *The Middle and Late Bronze Age*

During the 2nd millennium BCE – a period that, with the exception of the last two centuries, broadly corresponds to the Middle and Late Bronze Ages – settlement growth seems to continue and reach its final and stable outcome. The small sites distributed in proximity to the rocky hill are apparently abandoned. Almost all the MBA and LBA pottery comes from units located on the top of the hill. This suggests that the rocky hill of Amioun emerged as a single main settlement: the fragmentation observed during the 3rd millennium was replaced by the appearance of one new single large site (Fig. 8). The study of the MB ceramic evidence has permitted us to single out a few ceramic forms that are diagnostic types across a very wide region, embracing the Levant as well as Central Western Syria (Pl. I: 10-15). Types such as necked jars and bottles with swollen or out-turned square rims together with plates and/or bowls with upright rims are among the most common forms collected during the survey (Pl. I: 11, 12, 14-15): they are well known at sites such as Tell Arqa, Qatna, Hama and in southern Syria.[24] Large jars with a ridged rim (Pl. I: 10) were also found: they are probably of a type which is common in northern early MB contexts.[25] Their discovery together with that of an inter-

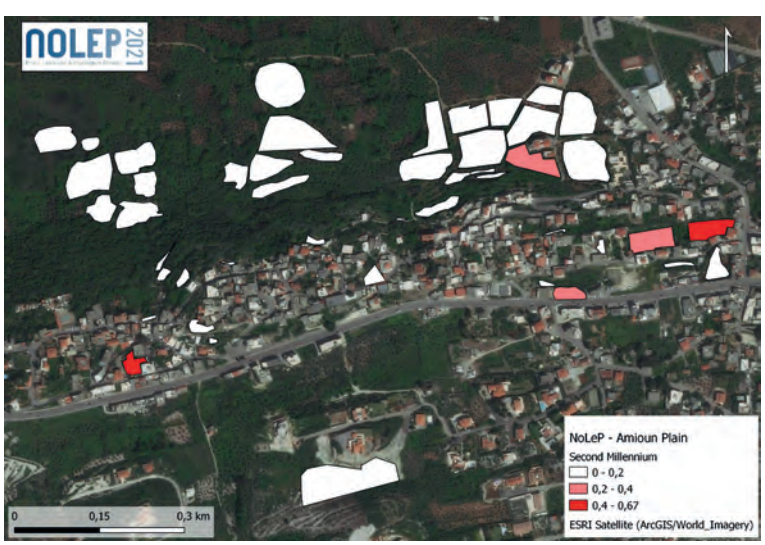
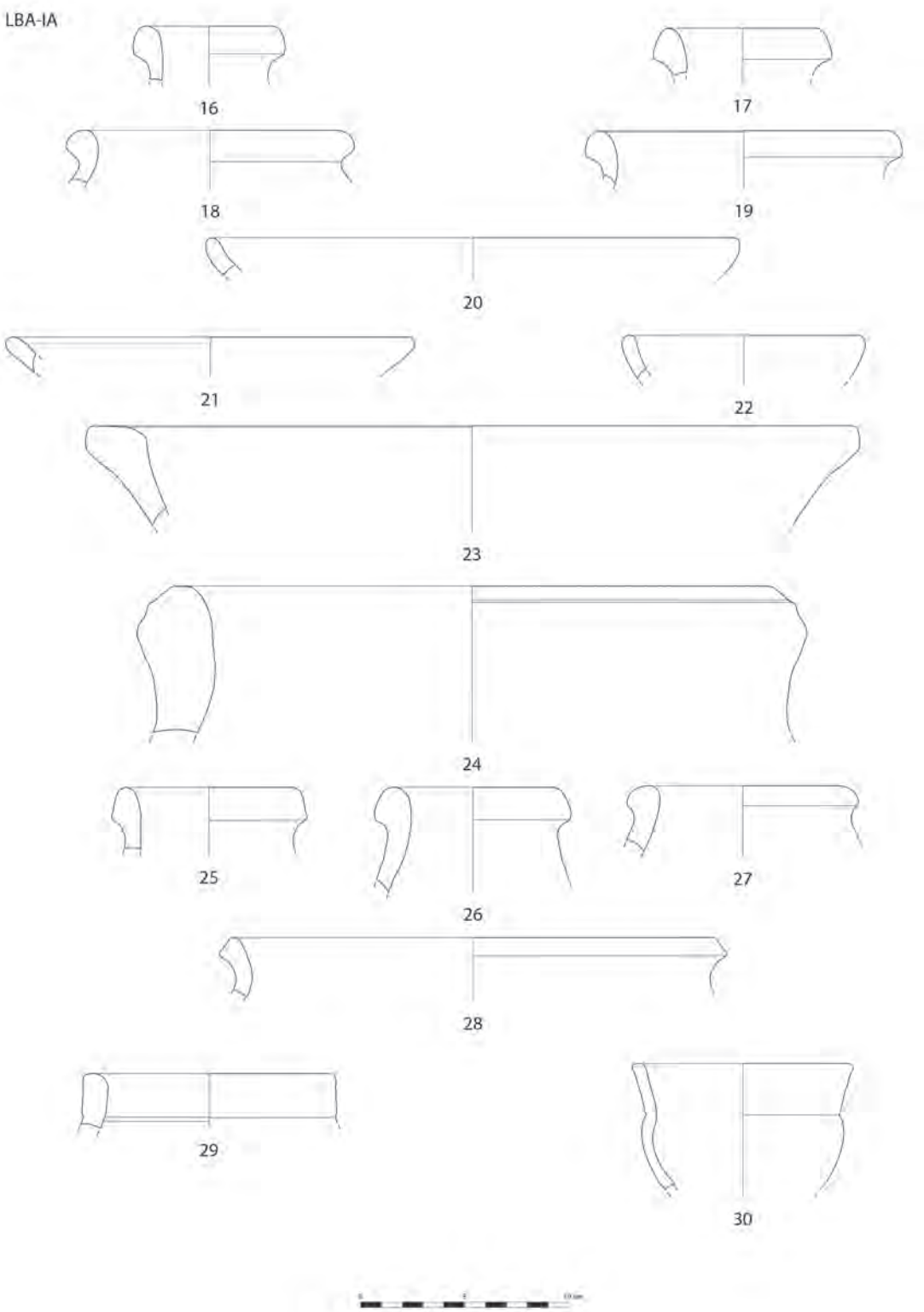


Fig. 8. Collection units with MBA and LBA sherds.

23 Data from a small test excavation in the eastern sector of the hilltop provided a significant amount of EBA material (still under study), confirming the presence of a human community.

24 Iamoni 2012, pp. 117-118 and 127; Thalmann 2006, p. 147; Badreshany – Kamlah 2019; Mazzoni 2002b, pl. LVIII: 22; Charaf 2021, figs. 25: 3 and 21: 11-12; Nicolle 2002, pl. XXVIII: 53, 57; Braemer – Al-Maqdissi 2002, pl. X: 22-28.

25 Iamoni 2012, p. 119; Nigro 2002, pl. XVII: 24.



Pl. 2. LBA and IA ceramic forms from Amioun.

Fig. 9. Estimates of settled areas of Amioun, Arqa and Ardeh during the MBA and LBA; for Ardeh only the main mound is estimated here.

nally swollen rim plate is noteworthy (Pl. I: 13): this latter type was widespread during the late MBA and the LBA especially in the Northern Levant,[26] including north-western Syria as far as Ebla.[27] This connection with northern contexts/sites points to likely contacts/relationships between the area of Koura and neighbouring regions, which might be interpreted as the resumption of routes already explored during the 3rd millennium BCE, as discussed above in the analysis of EB IV ceramic types shared with Central Western Syria.

The LBA ceramics collected during the survey (Pl. II: 16-23) confirm the increase of interregional contacts of Amioun in the second half of the second millennium BCE. Open forms such as plates/bowls with simple or outturned rims (Pl. II: 20-22) are common throughout a large sector of the Levant, with significant parallels from Tyre lev. XVIII, Kazel lev. K3 as well as Hama lev. G. and Ugarit *Recent 2*.[28] Closed forms show necked and short-necked jars with swollen/triangular rims (Pl. II: 16-19); they have a slightly less ubiquitous distribution but find parallels in closer LB sites such as Ghassil lev. VII, Tyre lev. XVII and Kazel lev. K1 and demonstrate the local interaction of Amioun with other sites in the of the central Levant.[29]

The dimensions of the new settlement were considerable: the data from the survey units suggest a covered/inhabited area of 10 hectares, which is a remarkable size for a single settlement. Comparable sites are located further north in the plain of Akkar and in the adjacent district of Zgharta. In the former area lies Tell Arqa/ancient Irqata, a site that has provided, thanks to the excavation directed by

26 Iamoni 2012, pp. 124-125. A similar type has also been identified also in Sidon (Charaf 2021, fig. 16: 2).

27 Nigro 2009, fig. XLIV: 2,5; Nigro 2002, pp. 111-112.

28 Bikai 1978, pl. LIII: 14-15; Fugmann 1958, fig. 153: 5A537; Schaeffer – Chenet 1949, fig. 117: 19, 26; Badre – Capet – Vitale 2018, pl. IV: 42. For a wider discussion of this type see also Iamoni 2012, p. 127.

29 Doumet-Serhal 1996, pl. 47: 1; pl. 48: 1; Bikai 1978, pl. XLIX: 4, 8, 21. Badre – Capet – Vitale 2018, pl. XXX: 318, 321.

Fig. 10. The section surveyed in unit 9.

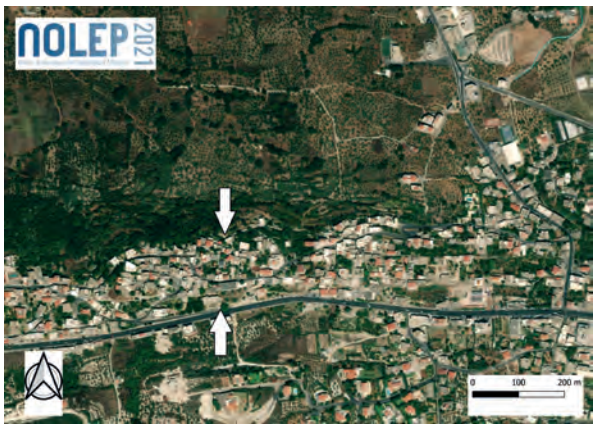


Fig. 11. Position of units 9 (lower arrow) and 20 (upper arrow), marking the likely western limit of the MBA and LBA settlement of ancient Amioun.

J.-P. Thalmann, the reference stratigraphic sequence for Northern Lebanon and also for the Central Levant.[30] Analysis of the site reveals an inhabited area of 7.8 hectares which puts Tell Arqa among the largest sites in the plain of Akkar,[31] together with Tell Kazel/ancient Simyra.[32] Slightly smaller is Tell Ardeh/ancient Ardata located in the district of Zgharta. The ancient mound covers 5 hectares: on the basis of the preliminary results of an intensive survey carried out on the site,[33] it is more than likely that during the Middle and Late Bronze Age – on the basis of textual data the latter was probably the most flourishing period of the site[34] – the entire mound was settled (Fig. 9). It is also possible that the so-called "Lower Town" might have been inhabited;[35] if so, the entire MB-LB settlement of Ardeh might have covered an area of about 10-12 hectares.

It is noteworthy that the new site was entirely located on the top of the rocky hill of modern Amioun. It is most likely that at the very end of the 3rd millennium or the beginning of the 2nd millennium the site would have had the appearance of an archaeological "tell", i.e. the top and the surrounding limits of the hill might have been characterised by a series of archaeological deposits that raised the usable surface level and/or created areas suitable for human settlement.

Units 9 and 20 (Fig. 10) are in this respect illuminating; in particular, the first shows a clear stratigraphic section of archaeological deposits – some of which probably collapsed from the top of the hill, eventually forming surfaces suitable for the construction of buildings. Unit 20 is located in a marginal sector of the hill: the pottery collection reveals an abundance of MBA and LBA types, which suggests in turn the possibility of settlement of areas of modern Amioun that previously were sparsely inhabited. Notably, both units 9 and 20 are located in the same sector of the hill (Fig. 11): the survey has furnished a body of data that makes them an excellent marker of the extension of the development of the settlement on the top of the hill during the 2nd millennium. The abundance of MBA and LBA forms is a further confirmation of the extension of a large set-

30 Thalmann 2006, pp. 217-218; 2016.

31 Thalmann 2006, pp. 211-213.

32 Badre 2006, pp. 65-66; Badre – Capet – Vitale 2018.

33 Parayre 2018, pp. 19-29.

34 Parayre 2017.

35 Parayre 2018, pp. 22-25, figs. 15-16. The density of MB-LB ceramics is however very low, casting doubts on the existence of a Lower Town of Ardeh during the MB and LBA.

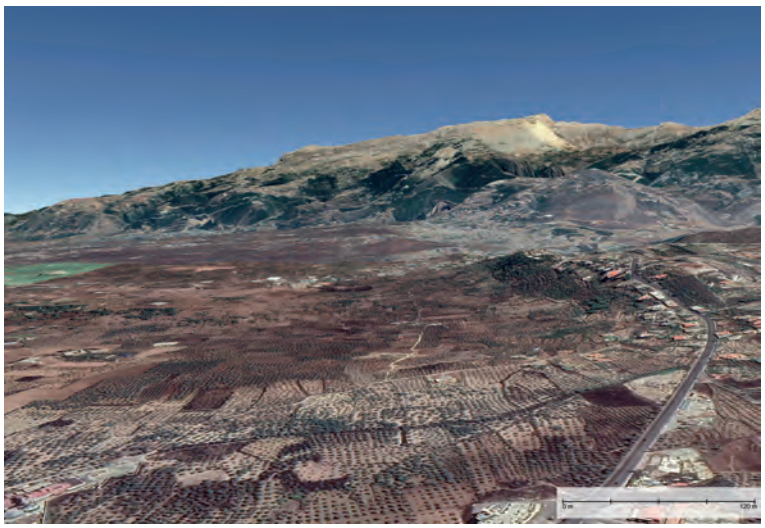


Fig. 12. Panoramic view of the mound of Amioun (indicated by the white arrow on the right side of the photo) dominating the inner plain of Koura.

tlement on the hilltop and further lends credence to the idea that the origin of the settlement was in the eastern zone of the hill, followed by a progressive enlargement towards the west. The rate of growth of the new settlement is difficult to assess: we do not have enough information to say whether the site rapidly covered the entire area of modern Amioun (during the MBA) or whether, as seems more plausible, this was a constant and rather slow process that started in the MBA (with the original settlement located in the eastern sector of Amioun) and ended in the LBA. The fragmented and disturbed evidence, together with the still preliminary nature of the study conducted on the pottery assemblages to date, hampers a more detailed reconstruction.

What seems sure, however, on the basis again of information obtained from units 9 and 10, is that Amioun started to be "visible", i.e. dominating the current landscape of Koura as it does now, in the MBA and that what was probably a rocky, possibly irregular, outcrop became a fully settled zone that was likely not very different from what one can see today. All these processes of settlement growth and extension align with the historical data to hand (see Turri in this volume) and provide a basis for exploring the mechanism of the formation of urban centres in the area of Koura that will be discussed in more detail below.

The strategic advantages offered by the new settlement on the top of the hill would likely have overcome any inconveniences deriving from its elevated position. The new site dominates the region with a unique 180° view of the entire plain as far as the coast (Fig. 12). Further, the higher position must have offered a degree of natural protection for a large settlement that would have increased the advantages of the new location. From a strategic point of view, the position of the settlement has few parallels in the area of Koura and must have outweighed any inconveniences/disadvantages deriving from the difficulty of accessing the settlement, as well as from the increased distance from local resources. Proximity to the latter was probably of the utmost importance for the small villages that characterised the area during the EBA: this explains the position of sites 16, 25 and 26, directly in contact with the inner plain of Koura. Its increased dimensions and different position suggest, however, that in the 2nd millennium the site of Amioun had acquired different functions, roles and political status.

It remains to be understood whether the rise of a significant inhabited centre had anything to do with the exploitation of timber that came to characterise the inner mountains of Lebanon. The Qadisha Valley is one of the main routes penetrating into the mountains and thus providing access to the extensive forests of the Lebanon mountains. Amioun's peripheral position (with respect to the main axis represented by the Qadisha Valley) does not make it the best candidate to control the exploitation of this massively important raw material. It is therefore likely that the growth of Amioun might have been only marginally influenced by the commerce in the famous cedars that have always attracted the interest of great empires. The reason for Amioun's development must therefore be sought in other factors, most likely in the wide inner plain of Koura that represents one of the few areas suitable for cultivation thus far located in Northern Lebanon. The

control of a rural economy is at present the most likely principal factor that led to the flourishing of a large centre at Amioun, as a result of the emergence of a settlement hierarchy accompanied by a reduction in the number of settlements in the area of Amioun itself. A similar pattern has been recognised in other studies of the formative processes of large urban centres, e.g. Qatna, although there the scale of the new urban centre was significantly different;[36] the best comparable evidence is again Tell Arqa, which between the EBA IV and the MBA emerged as a major centre for a significant part of the Akkar plain.[37]

MI

2.5. *Amioun, Ancient Ammiya. The Rediscovery of a Major Bronze Age Centre in the Inner Plain of Koura*

The data collected from the survey conducted in the area of modern Amioun have revealed the presence of a considerable – and previously unknown – long archaeological sequence. The investigation carried out by the joint Italian and Lebanese project has built a substantial body of data that has permitted us to identify the ancient origins of Amioun, revealing in particular the presence of human settlements among the earliest in Northern Lebanon. Three types of evidence/pattern attract the attention and characterise the exploitation of the area of Amioun.

The first regards the EBA in general: Amioun appears immediately, i.e. since EBA II/III, as a major focus for the first human settlements. The area of Amioun hosted at least 4 different settlements during the 3rd millennium BCE:[38] although it is likely that they were not in use simultaneously, their number and concentration in an area of only 50 ha underlines the importance of the hill of Amioun for the first stable human communities. At the same time, it confirms the advantages offered by the inner area of Koura, and in particular the area of Amioun, for the foundation of permanent sites that most likely relied on intensive farming for their sustenance. With regard to northern Lebanon, data from EBA sites such as Tell Fadous-Kfarabida and Tell Arqa suggest two possible trajectories leading to the emergence of complex EBA sites.

Recent studies from the first site (Tell Fadous-Kfarabida) demonstrate that it might have been a small but important centre with a significant degree of socio-economic complexity indicated by the occurrence of Egyptian imports, cylinder seals typical of bureaucracy and public buildings.[39] This led the archaeologists to believe that Tell Fadous-Kfarabida might have been a settlement of some importance, perhaps under the influence/control of larger sites located further south, such as Byblos.[40] Connection with Egypt might therefore have been a significant stimulus for the flourishing of the site, similar in a way, although on a definitely different scale, to what has been proposed for Byblos/Jebeil.

On the other hand, Tell Arqa and, more generally, the Plain of Akkar testify to a different type of development that Thalmann has defined as *La colonisation agricole*: as a consequence of demographic growth, several sites started to thrive in EBA III[41] and spread across the plain. These villages exploited areas in discrete sectors, avoiding territories that did not offer resources and/or characteristics ideal/suitable for the successful development of human communities. As a consequence, the successful foundation of new communities was based on a rural economy closely linked to the properties of the surrounding environment. The exploitation

36 Morandi Bonacossi – Al-Maqdissi 2007, p. 75; Morandi Bonacossi 2014, pp. 416-420.

37 Thalmann 2006, pp. 213-215; 2007; Charaf 2014, pp. 437-438.

38 It remains difficult to understand the nature of the EBA I in the area: this period still lacks an adequate characterization with regard both material culture and a socio/economic model, which hampers significantly its identification in the regional settlement pattern (Genz 2014, pp. 293-297).

39 Genz *et al.* 2016.

40 Genz *et al.* 2016; Genz 2014, p. 300.

41 Thalmann 2006, pp. 213-214.

of the surrounding territory together with regular storage of the food surplus derived from agriculture might have been the basis of the economy of the first EBA centres in the area.

Amioun seems to fall solidly into this category. Survey data suggest that the area of the site[42] exerted a major attraction on the first human prehistoric communities, which found it particularly suitable for permanent settlement. The continuity identified across the EBA II/III and IV clearly highlights a preference for Amioun as an area ideal for the foundation of villages focused on intensive exploitation of the plain of Koura. The absence of excavation at present rules out making any hypothesis concerning the nature of this rural economy (concerning the type of cultivation: cereals might not have been the main agricultural product, since the soil seems to be more suitable for olive trees, which are grown today).

It is also unclear whether this EBA growth coincided with an increase in the socio-economic structure of this settlement, as suggested for the Jordan Valley[43] and as seems the case in settlements located along the coast, such as Byblos[44]. At Amioun the evidence at hand does not seem to point in this direction during the EBA. If anything of this kind occurred, it must have happened during the MBA-LBA, when a significant change took place in the landscape of Amioun.

The survey data indicate that a single centre emerged on the top of the hill. Two aspects of this process are particularly striking. The first is the exceptional change in size. The settlement on the Amioun hilltop covered almost 10 hectares, whereas previous EBA sites ranged between 1 and 2 hectares – a jump that quintupled the settled area. It is possible (and perhaps likely) that this would have been a gradual process of which we are not able to follow the steps in detail due to the above-mentioned consequences of modern construction.

The second aspect is the hilltop position that, as explained, was a strategically determinant location for the new settlement. The importance of overlooking the plain extending between Amioun and Jebel Qalhat and the coastline has already been discussed. However, a second reason determining the formation of the elevated settlement was the likely need to enhance its defences. The MBA is known to be a period during which a number of urban settlements started to build defensive systems such as ramparts and massive gates: sites such as Megiddo in the Upper Galilee and Beirut were characterised by massive walls surrounding the inhabited areas.[45] Byblos, which was already protected by significant stone walls, saw a further extension of this system with the construction of an imposing glacis, which had the effect of significantly strengthening the walls.[46]

The position of the new settlement at Amioun might be seen from this perspective as a way to provide a different, but by no means less effective, form of protection for the new large centre. The difficulty of access to the elevated site was therefore a way to improve the security of Amioun's inhabitants during a period characterised by competition, rivalry and very likely conflicts between urban settlements vying for control of the territories forming the central Levant.[47] In this way the new urban settlement of Amioun was probably emulating larger centres located along the coast or in the inner region, providing itself with a defensive system that, although less monumental, would still have been effective.

The impressiveness of the new settlement was, on the other hand, guaranteed by its elevated and isolated position, which offered unparalleled visibility, for example to anyone entering the inner area of Koura.

42 This also applies to the inner Plain of Koura, which will be treated in a forthcoming article.

43 Philip 2008, pp. 19-20 and 49-50.

44 Greenberg 2014.

45 Burke 2008; 2014, pp. 406-407.

46 Lauffray 2008, pp. 291-300.

47 This must have occurred especially during the latter part of the LBA, as the historical sources of the period – in particular the El Amarna correspondence regarding the "minor kings" – suggest (Liverani 1998; Moran 1992; see also Turri in this volume).

The settlement occupying in this way a prominent position from a strategic and socio-political point of view would fit with the very likely dominating role now played by Amioun in the inner area of Koura.

Amioun must have therefore emerged during the 2nd millennium as a new polity controlling a significant sector of the inner countryside of Lebanon. It is tempting to envisage the modalities through which the site thrived as such during the 2nd millennium. Although this attempt would also require a body of data based also on excavations to be more reliable and complete, the level of detail achieved by the survey conducted by the NoLeP team permits an initial interpretation of the site's development during the 2nd millennium BCE.

Amioun seems to have jumped to the status of major urban settlement via a process of constant growth and progressive development towards the occupation of the leading position on the plain. It is unclear what drove the formation of this new settlement: from a social point of view, it is tempting to connect it with the so-called Amorite phenomenon.[48] From a more strictly political perspective, the rise of MB Amioun might have been the result of influences from contacts with Syrian -and to a greater extent Mesopotamian- societies (that had been organised into regional kingdoms since the beginning of the 2nd millennium).[49] The latter seems at present to be the preferable option, i.e. it seems reasonable to simply justify Amioun's growth on the basis of the new local socio-economic conditions that characterised the Levant, also thanks to the flourishing supra-regional contacts with Egypt and Mesopotamia in particular.[50] Amioun might have benefitted from its position as a strategic centre connecting the coast with the inner plain; it is also easy to imagine some role in the exploitation of the forests of cedars that attracted the interest of the great kingdoms dominating the socio-political scene of the Levant, although this is not supported by any 2nd millennium textual evidence (which always sees Byblos as main reference point for the central Levant).[51] It is also noteworthy that, for the first time, we have solid archaeological evidence supporting the identification of Amioun with the ancient Ammiya. This hypothetical correlation has always been based on textual data but no archaeological backing had emerged thus far. The work carried out by the joint Italian-Lebanese mission NoLeP has found robust evidence showing that Amioun was extensively settled in the 2nd millennium BCE. NoLeP's results further sustain the hypothesis of a very large settlement (actually the largest in the area of the inner Koura) that may well fit with the information in our possession concerning the status of Ammiya,[52] especially during the LBA. It is therefore now possible to place on a firmer basis the notion that ancient Ammiya was in the area of modern Amioun. This in turn helps to provide a more complete and clearer picture of the political landscape of Northern Lebanon/Central Levant during the 2nd millennium BCE.

Studies conducted by Thalmann on the emergence of a settlement hierarchy in the Akkar Plain indicate Tell Arqa/ancient Irqata, Tell Kazel/ancient Sumura and Tell Jamous as major centres dominating the area of Akkar, with sizeable territories under their influence or perhaps under direct control.[53] This might indeed have been the case for Amioun: its emergence seems also to reflect a regular territorial subdivision of the area with different polities dominating areas of more or less comparable extension (Fig. 13). Future investigations and the ongoing analysis of the body of data collected during the survey will permit us to provide a more in-depth definition of the settlement pattern in the inner area of Koura, with the possible identification of a site hierarchy. Such evidence has already been acquired for Akkar, where it is suggested that this may have started to happen by the end of the EBA. It is very likely that something similar might have also occurred in

48 Burke 2020; 2014.

49 Yasur-Landau 2018, pp. 224-225; Klengel 1992, pp. 39-41.

50 Ilan 1995, pp. 300-301.

51 Kilani 2020, pp. 106-111 and 125-134.

52 See Turri in this volume.

53 Thalmann 2007.

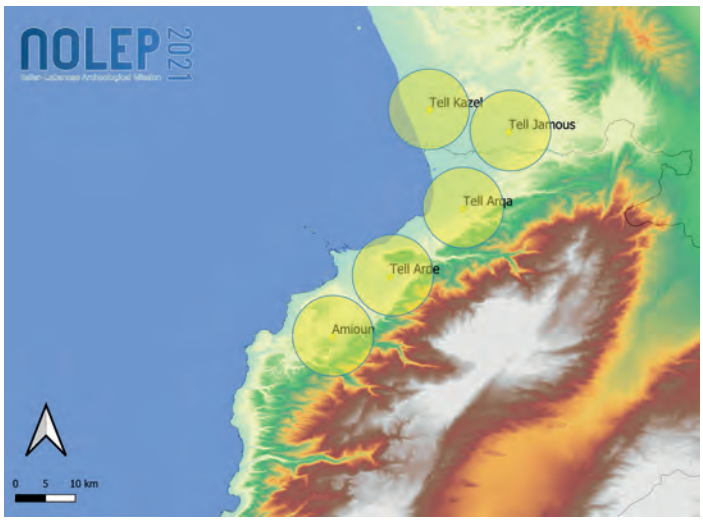


Fig. 13. Estimated areas of influence of the different polities dominating the area of Koura – Zgharta and Akkar (for the Akkar plain data based on Thalmann 2006, fig. 86).

the inner plain of Koura during the 2nd millennium BCE, although data from Amioun indicate the MBA as the era during which the site transformed itself, becoming a major centre.

During the LBA and in particular during the so-called International Age, i.e. circa the 14th century BCE, Amioun or ancient Ammiya continued to thrive as the major centre in the area and became involved in the clashes that characterised the belligerent local kings, in particular after the irresistible rise of the Amurru kingdom – whose kings, according to Rib-Adda of Byblos, were *habiru*, i.e. outsiders and stateless people.[54]

At this point Ammiya is mentioned in the Amarna texts and we therefore have textual proof of the settlement's importance among those in the area north of Byblos.[55] It is worth noting here that Amioun/Ammiya was probably well-integrated into the wide network of contacts that existed between the great empires dominating the political landscape of the Near East and the Levant: in this, Ammiya might have been, like other smaller local kingdoms, a cultural "interface", capable of communication with various socio-political entities via shared traditions and diverse material cultures. The survey data confirm this aspect: ceramics collected at Amioun suggest that the city used forms typical of a repertoire employed across a significant portion of the Levant.[56] The pottery thus far dated to the LBA is equally distributed over the entire hill, confirming in this way the continuous predominant role played by Amioun in the inner area of Koura. No imported ceramics have yet been found (or recognised) among the survey materials; and no Aegean material, such as Cypriot or Mycenaean painted wares that are typical of the period[57] and circulated in the Levant, especially during the 15th-13th centuries BCE.[58] However, the importance of this absence should not be exaggerated, since the pottery from archaeological surveys is in general characterised to a great extent by common wares, due to the difficulty of finding fine wares, such as is the case with the above-mentioned types.

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2.6. *Iron Age of Amioun: A Local Centre in the Provincial System of the Assyrian Empire?*

The Iron Age corpus, although still under study and difficult to assess due to the fragmentary nature of survey material, is still quite remarkable.[59] If we go back briefly to the geo-political and historical context of Lebanon in the Iron Age, it seems likely that Koura followed the same pattern uncovered at major sites

54 Bryce 2014, pp. 46-47.

55 Liverani 1998, p. 172, note 26. See also Turri in this volume.

56 Iamoni *et al.* 2019, p. 165.

57 Wijngaarden 2002; Leonard 1994; Stubbings 1951.

58 Charaf-Mullins 2006.

59 A more detailed volume on the pottery from Amioun is in preparation.

such as Tell Arqa,[60] Sarepta,[61] Sidon,[62] Tyre,[63] and Kamid el-Loz; all have yielded no evidence for destruction at the end of the Late Bronze Age in Lebanon. On the contrary, the architectural and material culture found at sites such as Tell Arqa and Kamid el-Loz points to a smooth transition from the Late Bronze Age to the Iron Age.[64] Survey data confirm that the hill of Amioun continued to be extensively settled, with a substantial inhabited area which is comparable in size to that identified for the Middle and Late Bronze Age.[65] Settlement continuity supports the above-mentioned hypothesis of a rather smooth passage between the Late Bronze and the Iron Ages characterising the inner area of Koura and in particular Amioun, which does not seem to have experienced a period of crisis. At the same time, its maintenance of significant dimensions suggests that Amioun continued to be a prominent site in Northern Lebanon during the first half of the first millennium BCE. The name of the site during the Iron Age remains a question mark: a possible correlation with an ancient Immiu mentioned in an Assyrian text of the second half of the 8th century BCE seems reasonable, but a more detailed analysis of the historical records is necessary to have a clearer idea about this ancient Immiu.[66] The pottery collected confirms the presence of a significant settlement at Amioun also during the Iron Age (Fig. 14) and allows for the following preliminary presentation of the main diagnostic traits.

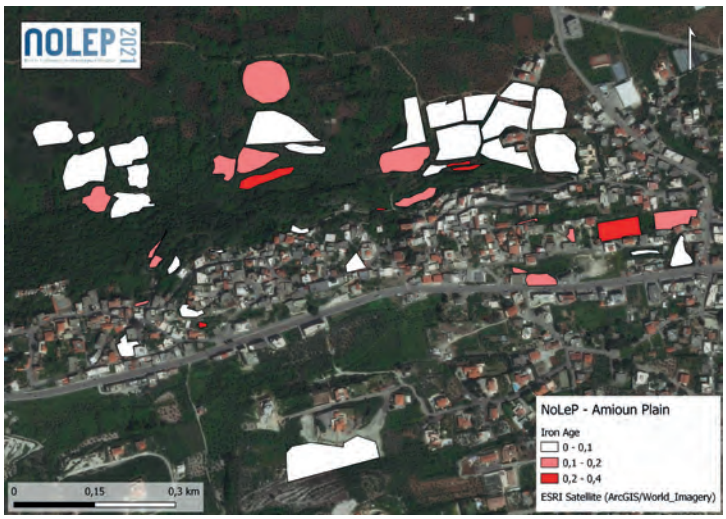

Fig. 14. Collection units with Iron Age sherds.

Considering the situation of Amioun and the Amioun plain, we can broadly allocate our material to the transitional period between Early and Late Iron Age – following the Tyre el-Bass dating scheme into which the time sequence of Phoenician ceramics can be divided.[67] This transitional phase can be connected with the final stages of Bikai's 'Kouklia Horizon'[68] as well as Tyre strata X to VI,[69] al-Bass cemetery Period II, Sarepta Levels D-1 and 2[70] and, roughly, the Iron Age IIA period. The assemblages contain body sherds that reveal hardly any information about the shape and function of the vessels they came from, but most clearly belong to diagnostic categories of the period (Pl. II: 25-30). Both bichrome and net patterns are

60 Thalmann 1983, pp. 217-221; Charaf 2007-2008, pp. 83-85.
61 Khalifeh 1988.
62 Doumet-Serhal 2006, p. 3; Bordreuil – Doumet-Serhal 2013.
63 Bikai 1978, pl. LXVI, and Núñez Calvo 2018.
64 Wagner-Durand 2020-2021, p. 73.
65 Wagner-Durand 2020-2021, p. 73.
66 Iamoni *et al.* 2019, pp. 151-152.
67 Anderson 1988, pp. 390-393; Núñez Calvo 2004; Aubet – Núñez – Trellisó 2004.
68 Bikai 1987, pl. VIII, 117.
69 Núñez Calvo 2004, pp. 282-283; Núñez Calvo 2008, pp. 26-70.
70 Anderson 1988, pp. 396-407.

Fig. 15. Iron Age painted sherd from Amioun.

present (Fig. 15), and are similar to examples from Kamid el Loz[71] dated to the end of the 11th century and beginning of the 10th century BCE, to Tell Qasile jugs[72] and to strainer jugs from Dor, which Gilboa dates to IA IB and IB/IIA.[73] These examples are all labelled as Phoenician pottery by Stern[74] and this type of Phoenician pottery first appears, also according to Stern, at the end of the 11th century BCE.[75] Net patterns are also common in Iron Age Cypriot imports and/or imitations, both during the IA I and the IA II.[76] Body sherds from bowls with a red slip occur as well and are similar to those from Sidon 9th and 8th century BC levels.[77]

Several types of storage jars with curved rims are found (Pl. II: 25-26); they are similar to jars found in Tyre and dated to 1070/1050-1000[78]. Parallels are also found at Sarepta[79] in strata G and E dated to 1320/1290-1050/1025 BCE, as well as at Tell Keisan, level 9c (Iron I).[80] Jars with short vertical rims (Pl. 2: 29) have parallels from Sarepta dating to 1150/1125-1050/1025 BCE.[81] Cooking pots occur with a thickened folded rim like (Pl. II: 28), similar to those found in Tyre and dated to 1070/1000 BCE. This type makes its appearance in the Bronze Age and continues to be important until roughly 850 BCE.[82]

It is interesting to note a fragment of a fine carinated bowl (Pl. II: 30) similar to the "Assyrian" or "Assyrianized" SD 4 typology of A. Hausleiter.[83]

71 Heinz *et al.* 2010, pl. 3: 1, nos. 8, 9 and10.
72 Mazar 1980, fig. 41: 13.
73 Gilboa 1999, fig. 6: 7-8, 12: 6.
74 Stern 2015, pl. 4.4.1.
75 Stern 2015, pp. 435-436.
76 Gilboa 2015, pl. 4.2.1: 9.
77 Doumet-Serhal 2006, fig. 25:7-9.
78 Bikai 1978, pl. XXXIX, 6, 7, 10-12; p. 45.
79 Anderson 1988, pl. 27, 8-9, and pl. 31, 6.
80 Puech 1980, pl. 67, 2.
81 Anderson 1988, p. 392.
82 Bikai 1978, CP 8, p. 52, pl. XXXV, 9.
83 Hausleiter 2010, pl. 75: SD 4.1-5.

Fig. 16. Banquet scene relief of Ashurbanipal (detail), ca. 645–635 B.C. Gypsum alabaster. Assyria, Nineveh, North Palace. ©British Museum.

The carinated bowl with its ovoid body and everted rim shows a likeness to the Assyrian fine carinated bowls from the so-called Palace Ware or Eggshell Ware.[84] The geographical distribution of the carinated bowls was very wide, and they are found in many Iron Age sites from all around the Near East such as the kingdom of Hamat,[85] dated between the end of the eighth and the first part of the seventh century.[86] The ceramic bowls are thought to be imitations of those in precious metals.[87] This type of bowl was used in Assyria for libations and banquets, and probably to drink wine[88] as depicted in several Assyrian reliefs such as the Banquet scene relief of Ashurbanipal from Nineveh (Fig. 16). The bowls are considered to have been used for the consumption of fruit juices or any other beverage containing residues or sediments. The carinated body would have had the function of retaining the latter.[89]

The presence of such a particular type of pottery in Amioun demonstrates that during the first half of the Iron Age Amioun retained a certain importance and was directly under the cultural, if not also political, influence of an Assyrian province, probably that of Kar Esarhaddon. We already know from the Annals of the Assyrian kings that *Bitirumme,* modern Batroun, *Shigata,* modern Chekka, and *Ampi*, modern Anfe were among the cities belonging to the kingdom of Sidon that were incorporated into the province of Kar Esarhaddon.[90] It is therefore plausible to hypothesize a similar fate also for ancient Amioun. Further investigation in the area together with a more detailed analysis of the ceramic evidence collected during the survey will help us further clarify an important historical phase not only for Amioun but also for the region.

MH

84 Rawson 1954, p. 169; Oates 1959, p. 132.

85 See Baaklini 2021, chapter 8, for an extensive study of the carinated bowls from Hamat.

86 Hausleiter 2010, p. 291.

87 Anastasio 2010, p. 41.

88 Hamilton 1966, p. 2.

89 Baaklini 2016, p. 98. Also in the same article the author used experimental archaeology to check whether the carinated body can effectively retain the residues of certain beverages. He concluded that no residue reached the mouth of the drinker during the experiment.

90 Borger 1956, p. 48.

3. Conclusions. The Importance of Amioun in the Ancient Landscape of Northern Lebanon

The data gathered by means of the survey conducted at Amioun have revealed the presence of an impressive settlement sequence that, for length and complexity, can match sites of great importance for the archaeology of Northern Lebanon. The picture provided by the investigations carried out by the joint Italian-Lebanese mission provides a firm basis supporting Amioun's identification with the ancient settlement of Ammiya. Furthermore, the project has brought to light a major Bronze Age centre of the Northern Levant whose origins reach back into the crucial formative phases of Levantine complex societies. Amioun/Ammiya began as a simple EBA rural site (possibly part of a network of small villages) that, in the second half of the third millennium BCE, started to grow significantly. From the beginning of the 2nd millennium (MBA) the site acquired a different status, emerging as an urban settlement in the inner plain of Koura. Throughout the LBA its role must have further increased; it became a major political centre dominating the inner plain of Koura and competing with other famous cities of the period, an interpretation that is in complete agreement with historical sources of the LBA from the 16th/15th-13th centuries BCE. The rediscovery of the ancient roots of Amioun/Ammiya represents a milestone for the archaeology of Northern Lebanon since it contributes to improving our reconstruction of the socio-political landscape of the Central Levant during the 2nd millennium.

The importance of Amioun/ancient Ammiya must have continued into the following era, the Iron Age. The significant evidence collected during the survey investigations, and in particular the presence of pottery that might have been Assyrian, suggest that the site continued to be a strategically crucial settlement for the control of the region during the first half of the first millennium BCE. The position of the site, as well as the prestige that it acquired after its emergence in the 2nd millennium as the major centre dominating the inner plain of Koura, must have resulted in its continued prominence, notwithstanding the turmoil that characterised the Levant during the transition between the Late Bronze Age and the Iron Age. As explained above, Amioun/ancient Ammiya seems to have survived this passage more or less without any negative consequences, thus consolidating in this way its predominance in the inner area of Koura and attracting the interest of the expanding Assyrian empire that was determined to consolidate its control of the Levant, especially after the formation of the Assyrian provinces in the Levant under Tiglat Pileser III's rule.[91] The following Classical and Medieval eras further confirmed the determinant role played by Amioun in the Koura area and definitively established its importance for the archaeological investigation of Northern Lebanon.

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