The third millennium BCE witnessed a dramatic transformation of social, economic, and cultural values in the ancient Near East. The Early Bronze Age (EBA) marked a second renaissance of urban, complex society in Syria, evident both archaeologically and textually by at least 2500 BCE. This included urban centers with hierarchical political systems, monumental architecture, writing, and increased economic specialization. One sub-region that has recently been the object of an unprecedented spate of archaeological investigations is the Middle Euphrates valley, a zone that begins with the Samsat-Lidar sector in south-central Turkey and extends down to the confluence of the Balikh and Euphrates in central Syria. In this region, an important result of recent work has been the discovery of EBA monumental tombs, which are characterized by visibility, lavish contents, and integration within the large contemporaneous architectural spaces at the centers of communities.

The excavations at sites located in close proximity to the Middle Euphrates region like Jerablus Tahtani, Ahmar, the Banat settlement complex, and Gre Virike have recently revealed the existence of such impressive, aboveground mortuary monuments (e.g., Tomb 302 at Jerablus Tahtani, the re-opened Hypogeum at Tell Ahmar, Tomb 7 at Tell Banat itself, and three chamber tombs at Gre Virike). Perhaps the most famous is the Hypogeum from Tell Ahmar (figure 1), situated on the east bank of the Euphrates, in Syria, a corbel-walled two-chambered tomb constructed about the middle of the third millennium on the top of the mound. Initially reported as an isolated monument, more recent excavations have established that the Hypogeum was attached to another structure of thick stone walls to the north and that it stood at least partially above ground. The free-standing mausoleum was an integral component of a complex that was in existence for much of the second half of the

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2 Peltenburg 2007: Fig.1.1.
4 Thureau-Dangin – Dunand 1936; Roobaert – Bunnens 1999.
third millennium BCE.5

We are quite accustomed to thinking of mortuary activities in ancient Mesopotamia as inextricably related to funerary rituals and beliefs about death and the afterlife. This may also be true for complex, early Syrian society, where mortuary ritual as a critical element in the ancient funerary practices is less commonly recognized. My purpose here is to demonstrate the performance of ancient funerary rituals in the Tell Ahmar mortuary complex during the mid-late third millennium BCE. The size and contents of the Hypogeum testify to its high status, evident in its visibility, centrality, lavish contents, and proximity to the contemporaneous large complex. These provide useful clues to understanding the ceremonies and cult associated with death. To determine how material remains are to be used in the reconstruction of the funerary rituals of the Tell Ahmar community, we must examine the specific archaeological records in which the activities and expressions involved in the practice of funerary rituals have left their material imprint. It must be acknowledged that these inferences, drawn from material remains, will largely be preliminary and speculative.

Figure 1: Tell Ahmar on the east bank of the Euphrates River, Syria (from Bunnens 1989: Fig. #1).

5 Dugay 2005.
1.1 THE HYPOGEUM AND THE COMPLEX TO THE NORTH

The Hypogeum and related structures discovered at Tell Ahmar are located on the site’s acropolis, a feature measuring ca. 250×150 meters and on edge of a natural terrace that was originally 25 m above the alluvium plain of the Euphrates (figure 2). The identification of its earliest levels in the renewed excavations have shown that the site was not occupied prior to the Early Bronze Age. The earliest phases of the Early Bronze Age (EBA I/II) are best represented in Area A, where five strata (from 1 to 5) consisting of domestic buildings and a primary interment (not found in a container and underneath the wall of a building) were identified. Judging from these remains, Tell Ahmar was probably a small village in the first half of the third millennium BCE. The second half of the third-millennium witnessed a significant change from the previous period at Tell Ahmar, when the ostentatious and conspicuous funerary monument was built on the top of the mound. It was part of a substantial, imposing complex, otherwise comprised of a stone, thick-walled building next to the Hypogeum to

Figure 2: Map of the site showing areas that have been excavated since 1988 (from Verardi 2007: Fig. #1).

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the north and a staircase of thirteen stone steps going down southwards to the north-west of the building (figure 3). Another indication of the transformation of the site is the large stone building coated with white plaster situated on the southeast slope of the mound, constructed contemporaneously with or slightly later than the Hypogeum. Based on the monument’s unusual features, Bunnens is convinced of its significance and considers this building to have served a public function.

Figure 3: Plan of the Hypogeum complex, Tell Ahmar (from Dugay 2005: Fig. #1).

More recent excavations have revealed that the Hypogeum was partially sunk into the ground, rather than being

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8 Bunnens 1992: Fig. 2; Roobaert – Bunnens 1999: Fig. 2; Dugay 2005: Fig. 1.
9 Roobaert – Bunnens 1999: 166, Fig. 3.
a complete subterraneous structure, as identified by French archaeologists when it was first excavated.\textsuperscript{10} The Hypogeum was covered by five enormous slabs of limestone and conglomerate that were laid crosswise. Its floor was completely paved with irregular stones, which formed a hump running in a north-south direction. The tomb, with an east-west orientation, mainly consisted of a vertical entrance shaft to the west and a main chamber to the east, both features were connected by a narrow passageway (figure 4).\textsuperscript{11} The main chamber was built as a unit, rectangular in shape, and surrounded by thick walls constructed of large undressed stones. While its walls on the east and west are closer to vertical, the walls on both long sides corbel inwards and its arch has a depth of

Figure 4: Section (upper) and plan (lower) of the Hypogeum (from Thureau-Dangin – Dunand 1936: Fig. #8).

\textsuperscript{11} Thureau-Dangin – Dunand 1936: Fig. 8.
0.45 m.\textsuperscript{12} Opening in the south-west corner of the main chamber, its entry was blocked with a large, upright slab together with other small stones and capped by a massive lintel on top. The rectangular entrance shaft was built with polished stones next to the main chamber to the west. As recorded in the preliminary report of the initial excavations, the entrance shaft was filled with sand -- probably carried there by water -- and a thick layer of dust covered the floor of the tomb’s main chamber. In sum, the Hypogeum was solidly constructed, and this is one of the factors that account for the tomb’s contents having been well preserved over thousands of years.

An interesting discovery is a total of seventeen large, terra-cotta \textit{nails} found about 0.30 m beneath the ceiling of the main chamber.\textsuperscript{13} They were horizontally driven half-way into the walls, i.e., with half their length protruding from the surface of the walls. These \textit{nails} were regularly distributed at intervals of 0.60-0.80 m: seven in the northern side wall, six in the southern side wall, and two in the eastern and western side walls, as shown on figure 4. The \textit{nails} were approximately 0.40 m long and hollow inside, and were all found broken at the time of excavation, with only one exception (figure 5). Evidence for large terra-cotta \textit{nails} inserted into the upper walls of the tomb is not attested in the Euphrates valley or in Northern Syria, nor recorded in contemporaneous literary texts. These unusual objects found in the Hypogeum at Tell Ahmar require

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.2\textwidth]{figure5.png}
\caption{Terra-cotta nail from the Hypogeum (from Thureau-Dangin – Dunand 1936: Pl. #XX (2)).}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{12} Thureau-Dangin – Dunand 1936: 96.
\textsuperscript{13} Thureau-Dangin – Dunand 1936: Pl. XX (2).
interpretation and raise the question of their function. In the absence of other evidence there are two possible ways these artefacts might have been utilized: either as nails for decorating the tomb walls or as libation pipes for ritual purposes. In Mesopotamia, funerary ritual included the pouring of liquids by means of a clay pipe inserted into the ground, a ceremony that may have been intended provide drink to the deceased. The hollow nails/pipes in the Hypogeum at Tell Ahmar may have served the same function, but more evidence is required either to support such a proposition or offer other interpretations.

1.2 FUNERARY AND MOURNING RITUALS IN THE HYPOGEUM

The Hypogeum has been preserved almost entirely intact and was not subject to lootings in antiquity. In spite of the collapse of the roof, partially damaging the skulls of the dead interred there, the context in which the skeletal remains and grave furnishings were deposited remained largely untouched before the time of excavation. The Hypogeum contained two adult individuals with their skeletons placed in perfect anatomical order, but their exact age and gender were not able to be determined. The dead were buried parallel to each other on the floor in the eastern half of the main chamber, and the bodies in this dual interment are identically positioned: both were laid on their right side in the flexed or so-called sleeping position (with the legs together and bent), with their hands flexed toward the face (figure 4). Parker Pearson has suggested the possibility that the sleeping posture is the prelude to rebirth or arrival in the land of the ancestors. Orientation is often an important aspect of bodily positioning; in the Hypogeum, the bodies were west-east oriented, facing south. Primary inhumation of one to two individuals is often found in the graves at the site; hence, Tell Ahmar presents us with a site where primary burial appears to have been a major part of mortuary practices during the EBA. In contrast to Tell Ahmar, excavations at other contemporaneous sites located in the Middle Euphrates region (e.g., Jerablus Tahtani, and the Banat settlement complex) have revealed abundant evidence for the practice of secondary

16 Parker Pearson 1999: 54.
inhumations with the disarticulated skeletal remains usually found in collective tombs.\textsuperscript{17} Primary burial rituals have been shown to maintain the individual identities of the deceased by means of interring bodies anatomically intact, as opposed to secondary burial rituals which destroyed individuality in order to build a collective identity.\textsuperscript{18}

In addition to the human skeletal remains, the Hypogeum contents include animal remains, ceramics, and bronze objects. Among these, large amounts of animal bones belonging to goat were closely in association with the deceased individuals. Unfortunately, the remains of goats were not specifically analyzed, thus it is difficult to judge whether they were cooked or raw, entire or dismembered at the time of deposition. One can observe that evidence from the adjacent EBA sites in the Middle Euphrates valley (e.g., Jerablus Tahtani, Banat and Gre Virike) indicates that faunal remains, although vary in animal type and in their depositional contexts, have been found in human burial contexts (table 1). If it is natural to locate the important personal items or necessary goods for use in the afterlife accompanying the deceased individuals within the graves, the occurrence of animal remains in human burial contexts unquestionably provide enormous potential for the interpretation of ritual activities or expressions related to religious traditions in early Syrian complex society. It is acknowledged that sheep and goats are most significant types among the animals having been domesticated (e.g., sheep/goats, cattle, pigs and dogs) from the Neolithic period, due to its predominant physical attributes of the rapid reproduction and well adapting to unfavorable environmental conditions.\textsuperscript{19} They are of great importance of providing meat, milk and fur at the time. In the case of the Hypogeum, presumably the role of goats continues in the mortuary context as a major source of food, but intended for the deceased’s afterlife. A clue to support for this hypothesis is that all of the animal bones were collected among the human skeletal remains, not related to other types of remains in the grave. In rituals associated with the burials, goats may be highly symbolic of something else, sacrifices required by netherworld deities or ancestors, or the so-called man substitutes used in

\textsuperscript{17} At Jerablus Tahtani, secondary burials with multiple individuals are attested in at least two stone-built graves located within the fort, in the large and elaborate tomb (302), and in four pithos graves near Tomb 302, see Peltenburg \textit{et al.} 1995, 1997. Near and around Tell Banat, in Tombs 1/2/4/6/7, at large burial mound (White Monuments A/B/B2), see Porter 2002 a, Wilhelm 2006.

\textsuperscript{18} Parker Pearson 1999: 52; Porter 2002 a: 23.

\textsuperscript{19} Bienkowski – Millard (eds.) 2000: see “Animals and Animal Husbandry”.

8 / 33
Mesopotamian rituals to divert sickness or portend evil from the deceased. From Sumerian literary texts, we are well informed that the animals must have been an important component of funerary rituals. A written account from Drehem lists a total of 152 sacrificial animals delivered for funerary ceremonies in honor of Šu-Suen, the fourth king of the third Ur dynasty (2037-2029 BCE). According to the reading of this document, Katz has recognized that a lamb was sacrificed in the tomb of the king at the last stage of the three-day rituals, during which his body was buried and his spirit released to settle in the netherworld. This unique document provides us an opportunity to consider the ritual and symbolic significance of animals, rather than their role commonly considered as a source of food or labor. In the case of the Hypogeum at Tell Ahmar, the complete absence of animal remains associated with human bones in other mortuary contexts on the site suggests that the animals were privileged to be used in rituals honoring of the high-ranking persons buried in the Hypogeum.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sites &amp; Tombs</th>
<th>Species</th>
<th>Domestic animals</th>
<th>Wild animals</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>sheep/goats</td>
<td>equids</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jerablus Tahtani</td>
<td>T. 302</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahmar</td>
<td>Hypogeum</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Banat</td>
<td>Ts. 1/2</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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<td>T. 7</td>
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<td>WM B/B2</td>
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<td>Gre Virike</td>
<td>T. K 9</td>
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<td></td>
<td>T. J9/28</td>
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Table 1: Faunal collection from mortuary contexts at Jerablus Tahtani, Ahmar, Banat and Gre Virike (Note: x represents the presence of this animal type).

Grave goods seem to have served a variety of purposes. They may be personal adornments belonging to the

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deceased individuals in life, or items for use of the dead on the journey to the afterlife and after arrival in the afterlife. Given Near Eastern textual sources, another category may include objects donated by funerary participants and intended as gifts to ancestors or netherworld deities. Grave goods found in the Hypogeum included impressive collections of bronze objects and large quantities of pottery vessels. In the middle of the main chamber, a total of thirty-four objects of bronze were placed as a heap in front of the human skulls, including toggle-pins, needle, rein-ring, a variety of weapons and miniature bowls. Some of the bronze objects are primarily items of personal adornment in the form of toggle-pin (2) and bracelet (1). Toggle-pins are found in most of the third-millennium graves in the Near East. The function of toggle-pins was probably connected with the securing garment and fastening clothing together, since copper or bronze toggle-pins were often found on or around the skeletal remains. In the case of the Hypogeum at Tell Ahmar, it is evident that the ornaments were not placed above the skeletons, but were found together with other bronze objects in a group at some distance from the skeletal remains. Considering the untouched contexts of the tomb contents, it is almost certain that the deposition of the ornaments in the tomb was originally separated from the body. This makes it unlikely that they were used by the deceased individuals in life. These objects with their shapes consistent with personal adornment were probably the gifts donated by funerary participants; alternatively, the decision to deposit them separately from the body in the tomb chamber is due to some reasons, such as ritual restrictions on the proper time to place grave gifts in the tomb or the need to accumulate necessary recourses for the occasion of a lavish death ritual.

An interesting artifact found in the cluster of bronze objects is a rein-ring surmounted by two symmetrical, model animals (figure 6). The animals that appear to be wild asses or horses stand on top of a double-looped rein-ring with their forelegs leaning on a stick projected from the junction of the rings below. The elaborate rein-ring discovered from the Hypogeum at Tell Ahmar appears to have several aspects in common with those

22 For example, Ebla texts reveal that royal palace often donated gifts to be used in the funerals of members of the elite at Ebla and other places, see Archi 2002.
23 Thureau-Dangin – Dunand 1936: 107-8, Pls. XXVIII-XXXI.
24 For example, a pit grave (T. 956) at Jerablus Tahtani provides substantial evidence for its use in that two toggle-pins were found at the shoulder with the third one found at the chest on the skeleton, see Peltenburg et al. 1996: Fig. 11.
found in Sumerian sites such as Ur and Kish in terms of size, double-ring terrets, and decoration with animal models.\textsuperscript{26} A silver rein-ring illustrated on figure 7 is surmounted by an electrum equid and mounted on a single vertical bar, from Puabi’s tomb, Royal Cemetery of Ur, dating to ca. 2600-2400 BCE.\textsuperscript{27} In a functionalist term, double-ring terrets were fitted to the shafts of wagons behind the necks of draught animals; the semicircular base sitting on the shaft was probably secured by a leather thong and the reins passed from the animals’ noses through the rings.\textsuperscript{28} Unfortunately, this elaborate object discovered from the Hypogeum was not complete as found: one of the double rings on the right was broken and its entire base was missing. Since its design on the whole resembles typical Sumerian rein-rings as mentioned above, the same function might be expected for the one found in the Hypogeum at Tell Ahmar.

Figure 6: Rein-ring from the Hypogeum (from Thureau-Dangin – Dunand 1936: Pl. #XXXI (7)).

\textsuperscript{26} Mallowan 1948: Pl. VII; Zettler – Horne (eds.) 1998: Figs. 51-2, catalogue no. 139.
\textsuperscript{27} PG 800, Height 13.5 cm, currently in the British Museum, London, see Zettler – Horne (eds.) 1998: Fig. 52.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.: 165.
Other bronze objects found in the Hypogeum, like three examples of small open bowls with flat or rounded bases (figure 8), pose the question of interpretation and function. They slightly vary in size ranging from 7 to 9.8 cm in diameter and from 3.7 to 4 cm in height.\textsuperscript{29} It is curious that they are so small, and perhaps only small quantities of precious liquids could have been used with them. One can infer that the small bronze vessels were deposited in the tomb, perhaps intended to provide a luxurious existence in the afterlife.

\textbf{Figure 8:} Three bronze vessels from the Hypogeum (from Thureau-Dangin – Dunand 1936: Pl. #XXVIII (1-3)).

Weapons are not very common in the EBA burials from the Middle Euphrates sites, but they were only found in high-ranking or wealthy tombs (e.g., Tomb 302 at Jerablus Tahtani, the Ahmar Hypogeum, Banat Tombs1/2,
and Tomb K 9 at Gre Virike). It would seem that the elites or wealthy individuals were accompanied by weapons of copper, copper alloy or bronze as prestigious items. The Hypogeum at Tell Ahmar contained a weapon assemblage impressive in both diversity and quality. A total number of twenty-four weapons, most of which were intact as found, were documented and illustrated in the preliminary report of the initial excavations, and their categories are represented by spearheads (6), flat dagger blades (8), flat axes (4), and socket-shaft axes (6). These bronze weapons may be personal possessions, indicators of wealth and/or social status, profession, manhood, or some combination of the above. The socket-shaft axes are among the most characteristic Hypogeum weapon types, since this form of weapon has been interpreted to be manufactured and used purely for fighting, referred to as battle axe (figure 9). Six examples of the battle axe from the Hypogeum at Tell Ahmar include especially an example with its blade vertically attached to the shaft on top, and the shaft has a horizontal ribbed decoration with η-shaped end (figure 9: 5). This pick-shaped socket-shaft axe, characteristic of the narrowing blade leading to a point, is capable of piercing armor, and for this reason this form of battle axes became one of the most devastating weapons of the ancient world by 2500 BCE. Previous studies have suggested that the Hypogeum weapons belong to the EBA III/IV bronze assemblages in North Syria, dating to approximately 2400-2300 BCE, comparable to the third Early Dynastic-Akkad period in South Mesopotamia.

The conspicuous consumption of bronze weapons may be consistent with social status of the interred individuals. The evidence from the Royal Cemetery at Ur in Southern Mesopotamia indicates that weapons were usually immediately in association with a particular individual, who is suggested to be a warrior. In the case of Tell Ahmar, one may presume that both adults were warriors, or individuals of warrior status, and they might have felt diminished without spears, daggers and axes even though these need never have been used in battle.

30 The categories of weapons are mainly represented by spearheads, daggers, flat axes, and, in Hypogeum and in Tomb 302 (phase 3), socket-shaft axes. See Philip 2007: Fig. 12, 1; Thureau-Dangin – Dunand 1936: Pls. XXVIII-XXXI; Porter 1995 a: Figs. 6-7; Porter – McClellan 1998: Fig. 23 (3, 4); Ökse 2002, Fig. 27.
31 Thureau-Dangin – Dunand 1936: Pls. XXVIII-XXXI.
Finally, lavish sets of bronze objects, mainly of weapons, were deposited in the tomb accompanying the interred individuals as acts that allow us to infer that the dead were sent on their last journey with donations or personal belongings, perhaps intended to preserve the deceased’s identity and rank. In addition, many of bronze objects such as bracelet, rein-ring, weapons and small vessels from the Hypogeum were not found in other contemporaneous burials on the site, suggesting that they were specifically reserved for funerary rituals in an attempt to display conspicuously the social status (warrior-class?) or wealth of the prominent dead.

![Socket-shaft axeheads from the Hypogeum](image)

Figure 9: Socket-shaft axeheads from the Hypogeum (from Thureau-Dangin – Dunand 1936: Pls. #XXIV (2, 4-8), XXVIII (5)).

As in other EBA monumental or wealthy tombs in the Middle Euphrates region, a strikingly huge quantity of pottery vessels were deposited in the Hypogeum. The vessels did not suffer serious disturbance, and 1045 complete vessels survived. They were primarily found stacked one on top of another, forming an enormous heap

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35 Thureau-Dangin – Dunand 1936: Figs. 29-32, Pls. XX-XXVII. Tomb 302 at Jerablus Tahtani contained more than three hundred pottery vessels found in the primary deposits, see Peltenburg et al. 1995: Figs. 10, 11, 27-8; Peltenburg et al. 1996: Fig. 19. Tomb 7 at Tell Banat contained about 200 pots, see Porter 2002 a: 19. Tomb K 9 at Gre Virike contained 66 reconstructable vessels, see Ökse 2002: 274-77, Fig. 24.
along the western and northern inner walls in the western half of the main chamber (figure 10). Pottery material exhibits a marked diversity of vessel shapes and types: cups, bowls, goblets, tall-necked or globular jars, pedestal jars, long-stemmed champagne cups, tripod feet and spouted vessels, and miniatures (figure 11). The majority of vessels were manufactured from Plain Simple Ware (PSW). In particular, bowl shapes of PSW is the most numerous type of vessels (up to 279 pieces), mainly consisting of small open bowls and medium-sized hemispherical bowls. Barrel-shaped, corrugated goblets are among the second most numerous types, with 190 pieces. Tall-necked jars are also one of the predominant PSW forms. Euphrates Banded Ware (EBW) vessels appear to constitute a significant part of the ceramic assemblage in funerary contexts at Tell Ahmar from the second half of the third millennium. The surface was sometimes marked by horizontal ring burnishing over the entire body, while some of the vessels were painted with red horizontal bands either on the neck or upper body of the vessel. The Hypogeum pottery otherwise comprises pedestal jars of Horizontal Reserved-Slip Ware (HRSW) and Metallic Ware (MTW) in the form of bowls and jars.

Figure 10: Pottery vessels from the Hypogeum (after Thureau-Dangin – Dunand 1936: Pl. XX (1) #).

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According to Carter and Parker, the elite status in North Syria and South Anatolia is signaled by number rather than heterogeneity of grave goods, and the quantity clearly much depends on the burial population in a communal tomb.\textsuperscript{37} This may be true for a similar monumental tomb at Jerablus Tahtani, where this free-standing corbelled tomb (Tomb 302), although robbed, still contained the remains of twelve adults and children and rich accompanying grave goods, including non-ceramic objects of precious materials and more than three hundred pottery vessels.\textsuperscript{38} However, in the case of Tell Ahmar, this argument is probably invalid, since the Hypogeum contained only two interred persons. Here the question arises: whether more than a thousand pottery vessels were assembled together, at the time, during the interments, or whether they were added gradually in later years?

Pottery material from the Hypogeum has demonstrated a homogenous ceramic horizon (2B) in the Euphrates Valley, belonging to the EBA IV A in the Syrian traditional chronological sequence.\textsuperscript{39} The Hypogeum pottery, therefore, cannot be subdivided into earlier and later ceramic periods, and this argument is consistent with the

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{vessel_figs.png}
\caption{Various PSW vessel forms from the Hypogeum.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{38} Peltenburg et al. 1995: Figs. 11-13.
\textsuperscript{39} Jamieson 1993: 52-8, 68-71, Fig. 4.
evidence for a single use of the tomb structure. This makes it unlikely that the vast quantity of pottery was brought to the Hypogeum over many generations after the dual interments. Where is problematic is in the explanation of the pattern to deposit over a thousand of vessels during the primary burial process. We may infer that pottery vessels in such a large quantity often derive from varied events. Like the bronze weapons, the pottery vessels may have been collected by the elite family for a period of time prior to their deposition. It is also probable that many of them were donated by family members, close friends or other people in the community, who were invited to participate in the Hypogeum rituals. Therefore, the vessels were probably deposited as acts that allowed their living descendants and other members of the society to claim their privileged affiliation with the illustrious dead. The decision to collect the vast quantity of pottery is probably due to the need to prepare for a lavish ritual in celebration of the death of the interred individuals.

In several cases, one can observe sets of vessels of differing sizes, placed one inside another, and apparently to be used together. We may highly assume that sets of vessels had been already used in some ritual event like funerary banquets before they arrived in the tomb. Peltenburg already argued for numerous champagne cups recovered in the monumental Tomb 302 at Jerablus Tahtani to reflect a funerary banquet. Alternatively, the Hypogeum mourners probably offered receptacles in order to symbolically represent a banquet, which would be held after the arrival of the spirits in the netherworld. Taking some of distinctive vessel types into consideration, tall-necked jars with long spouts with fifteen examples found in the Hypogeum at Tell Ahmar, for instance, might be expected as a set used for the pouring of liquids or libations in funerary rituals. Other vessel forms like long-stemmed cups - namely, champagne cups or fruit-stands - may have also been used in a ceremonial way. A total number of 96 examples of champagne cups, some of which have extremely long, heavy stems with the height of the entire vessel of 0.30 m, were recovered from the Hypogeum. The champagne cup is a particular PSW vessel type and is widespread in the Euphrates Valley from Carchemish Dam to Tishrin Dam basins, where its variations appear in significant quantities especially during the first half of the third

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40 Peltenburg 1999.
43 Thureau-Dangin – Dunand 1936: Fig. 29.
millennium BCE. Initially understood as the vessels exclusively to be manufactured for funerary use, more recent excavations have revealed that “they were also used within the contexts of daily life as extensively as in the tombs during early EBA”.

Peltenburg notices that a typical Euphrates champagne cup is carried by a lavishly attired female on a shell inlay from Mari and further argues their use connected to ceremonial drinking in mortuary feasts. Whatever their intended function, this champagne cups, among the most characteristic vessel forms in the Euphrates Valley during the EBA, may be of the ritual and symbolic significance associated with both funerary and life ceremonies.

Apart from the vessel types presented above, highly decorated vessels are notable. These remain a consistent component of the PSW tradition. Four examples were published, including a pedestal vessel with zoomorphic patterns on the mouth of spout and main body of the vessel and a sieve implement filling in the mouth (figure 12: 1). An intact vessel was applied with a naked, model male sitting on the body of the vessel and keeping his mouth open like singing (figure 12: 4). The fourth one is distinct from the other vessels in that it appears to imitate an entire animal, with head, long neck, globular body and short tail discernible (figure 12: 3). Especially, the main body of the vessel was completely decorated with numerous vertical raised lines, perhaps imitation of the animal feather. These decorated vessels from the Hypogeum are very peculiar and their specific use remains to be determined. Despite of differences in morphological shape of each vessel, all of them seem to have been used for the pouring of liquids. Their functioned in the same way as the long-spouted jars included in the Hypogeum for pouring liquids in funerary rituals, or they might have carried other symbolic or magical meanings.

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44 Sertok 2007: Fig. 16.5.
45 The champagne cups were recovered in domestic layers at sites Horum Höyük, Zeytini Bahçe, Mezra Höyük and Shiyukh Tahtani, see Sertok 2007: 243-4.
46 Peltenburg forthcoming: 5, Fig. 6.
However, there is no reason to omit an explanation for the deposition of pottery vessels as being intended, along with their contents, for use in the afterlife. Near Eastern literary texts underscore the importance of providing deceased individuals with food and drink in the afterlife, since the netherworld is believed to be infertile, devoid of basic necessities for existence.\textsuperscript{47} The most common ones among funerary gifts, therefore, are ceramic vessels, which could have contained foodstuffs and potable liquids. However, in the case of the Hypogeum at Tell Ahmar, the French archaeologists have noticed that all of the vessels were completely empty inside, and there were neither corns nor bones, not even sands which could have infiltrated into the vessels. This makes it unlikely that the vessels contained substantial material at the time of deposition. Parker Pearson asserts that funerary vessels need not have contained sustenance, and they may simply have stood for the symbolic meal partaken by the dead.\textsuperscript{48} In this case, the Hypogeum mourners probably offered only receptacles without any substantial provision inside, and they may have employed other means for food offerings. As interpreted above,

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{47}] Katz 2007: 171.
\item[\textsuperscript{48}] Parker Pearson 1999: 10.
\end{itemize}

Figure 12: Highly decorated vessels from the Hypogeum (from Thureau-Dangin – Dunand 1936: Pl. #XXVII).
the segments of animals immediately associated with the human remains in the Hypogeum might hint to their role as a food source for the deceased’s afterlife.

While some aspects of animal remains and artifactual materials bear the indications of funerary and mourning rituals, circumstance in the tomb chamber may facilitate these to take place. A stretched area along the southern wall in the main chamber, beginning at the front of the entry and extending to the rear wall of the tomb (c. 5.35-5.4 m), was largely devoid of grave goods and bone remains. This area seems to have deliberately been unoccupied, and why it was done is presumably intended for the transportation of large quantities of grave goods time after time in rituals. Although it was too small (less than one meter wide) to contain many funerary participants, one can infer that the mourners traversed the length of the main chamber and brought funerary gifts into the tomb. The Hypogeum was last properly sealed, indicative of the finishing of the rituals associated with death, and the remains of ritual performances partly remained in the tomb.

1.3 THE DEAD AND THE LIVING

Contemporary with the construction of the Hypogeum (Phase C10), the imposing complex on the summit of the site acropolis included not only the mortuary monument but also the thick-walled, stone building next to the Hypogeum to the north and staircase north-west of the Hypogeum.  

This partially preserved complex may also include other structures or chamber tombs and raise the possibility for the connection with the large public building situated on the southeast slope of the mound, but we have no chance to examine them in excavation. According to the latest report, the adjacent northern room contained multiple layers of construction, use, renovation, re-use and destruction, and stratigraphic evidence indicates that this structure was built as early as the construction of the Hypogeum and existed largely corresponding to the existence of the Hypogeum till the end of the third millennium. In other words, the Hypogeum and adjacent northern room did co-exist over a considerable period in the second half of the third millennium. The initial function of the northern room is still

49 Dugay 2005: 37.
50 Dugay 2005.
ambiguous; however, its location in the close proximity to the Hypogeum could indicate its use in some way associated with the mortuary monument. Similar cases come from other EBA sites along the Middle Euphrates valley, where the free-standing mausoleums were integrated into the passage (Tomb 302 at Jerablus Tahtani), large courtyard of a public, terraced building (Tomb 7 at Tell Banat), or mortuary complex (three chamber tombs at Gre Virike). These spaces are suitable for sizable ritual activities, such as processions, ceremonies, and gatherings, which occurred at the time of interments or persisted long after the death of the interred individuals. In the case of Tell Ahmar, the northern room also gives us an indication of where funerary and mourning ceremonies may have taken place. In sum, the evidence for the centrality and visibility of funerary monument at Tell Ahmar emphasizes the incorporation of funerary rituals honoring the high-ranking humans in the world of the living within the community in the mid-late third millennium BCE.

1.4 THE ILLUSTRIOUS ANCESTORS AND OTHER DEAD

After the Hypogeum was constructed, five graves were placed in the vicinity of the Hypogeum (figure 13). Their location related to the Hypogeum is specifically described in the 1936’s report: Tombs 1/2 were built next to each other and situated to the west of the Hypogeum, next to its shaft to the south; Tombs 3/4/5 were probably arranged in a row from west to east, near the eastern wall of the Hypogeum. They exhibit a homogenous architectural character: vertical limestone slabs formed a cist, covered with massive slabs, and stone-paved floors; only Tomb 3 was built with mud bricks. Stratigraphic evidence indicates that these adjacent graves were

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51 Peltenburg forthcoming; Fig. 3; Porter 2002 b: a plan in page 157; Ökse 2005: Fig. 3.
52 Thureau-Dangin – Dunand 1936: 108-10, Pl. XXXII.
dug into the same structural horizon as the Hypogeum came from. Pottery material recovered from these graves is all in PSW tradition, of which the vessel forms are entirely comprised in the pottery assemblage from the Hypogeum. As for their comparative date, these graves are contemporary with or after the Hypogeum in the second half of the third millennium. There seems to have been a desire to locate them as close as possible to the monumental tomb. For the above reasons they can be regarded as satellite graves. They include well-preserved human skeletal remains of primary interments: a single burial was found in Tombs 1-3, and others contained dual inhumations. In terms of the body’s manipulation, the satellite graves and Hypogeum have many in common: primary interments, body posture in the flexed position, and orientation of the body west-east; in Tomb 1, hands flexed toward the face. This may reflect the imitation of the way that the dead were buried in the Hypogeum. However, one can observe that the heads of the dead faced north, as opposed to the Hypogeum, where the deceased’s heads faced south. As in the Hypogeum, the same direction faced by the corpse can be
observed in the burial deposit of the earlier period on the site (EBA I/II). Slight differences in the facing direction of the dead between the Hypogeum and its satellite graves may help to reveal differences between groups within the same settlement. Accompanying grave goods were predominantly pottery in a limited quantity ranging from 3-7. Considering the quantity and quality, grave goods from the satellite graves cannot compare to those from the Hypogeum that was lavishly provisioned. PSW vessels are represented by less numerous ware forms: bowls, small/medium-sized jars, pedestal cups, and, in Tomb 4, large champagne cups. There is an absence of luxury wares that were recovered in the Hypogeum. The vessels included in these graves were placed adjacent to the skeleton/s (figures 14, 15), in contrast to the Hypogeum, where the deposition of pottery was deliberately separated from the deceased’s bodies. In Tomb 3, an open bowl was laid behind the skull, but in others single pedestal cups or sets of vessels were usually found next to the feet of the body. Apart from pottery, the only evidence for non-ceramic objects is provided from Tomb 3, where a carnelian bead and a leaky stone disk were found. The bead of precious material was probably an item of personal adornment and the stone disk might be understood as child’s toy. These objects may have been possessions of the deceased in life, or mourner’s gifts to their child. In sum, differences in the composition of grave furnishings and in their depositional contexts between the Hypogeum and its satellite graves may depend on several factors, such as differentiation in social status of interred individuals, or differing attendant rituals.

Apart from these satellite graves, we have evidence that at a later date the adjacent northern room contained the remains of babies interred in pits/ Cooking Pots, or exposed on the ground. Located within the same context, there were two conical-shaped plaster-lined pits found adjacent to the child burials. One pit contained bones of small rodent and flecks of charcoal although the pit itself was not subject to the fire. The other pit was covered with a stone lid and its inclusion was comprised of basalt pebbles and broken PSW pottery sherds. A comparable case comes from Gre Virike, where twelve small, unroofed chambers contained numerous plastered pits with ash/charcoal or pottery jars inside. The plastered pits filled with ash and charcoal in chambers d, e and f bear strong indications of the cooking of food, whereas others with jars that had been deliberately broken or scooped

out found in chambers c, l and t have been interpreted as installations for libations. However, in the case of Tell Ahmar, the intended function of the plastered pits is ambiguous, with little artifactual material associated with them. The unusual character of careful plastering and proximity to the contemporaneous child burials may hint of their use in funerary rituals. Although they could have been storage pits, it is tempting to see these pits as ritual installations related to the burials. Evidence for a Cooking Pot exposed on the floor adjacent to one of the plastered pits suggests that the occurrence of the plastered pits was consistent with ceremonial feasts meant to take place in the northern room. The interment of babies as well as ritual installations was still associated with the Hypogeum in the post-interment period? Alternatively, it would be natural to bury babies died of natural or other causes in Cooking Pots and/or under the house floor, a practice that was relatively common for prehistoric cultures all over the world. However, with no other EBA mortuary activities at Tell Ahmar for the comparison, there is a debate as to whether these funerary/ritual remains contained in the adjoining building were associated with the mortuary monument, or they reflect another mortuary behavior in the succeeding period on the mound summit at Tell Ahmar.

Figure 14: Tomb 1 at Tell Ahmar, view from northeast (from Thureau-Dangin – Dunand 1936: Pl. #XXXII (1)).

54 Ökse 2005: 41.
55 Dugay 2005: 37.
Figure 15: Tomb 2 at Tell Ahmar, view from north (from Thureau-Dangin – Dunand 1936: Pl. #XXXII (2)).

The same tendency to cluster inhumations executed in a variety of more simple styles above or around large and impressive mortuary monuments are observed at Jerablus Tahtani where pithos and pit graves occur near Tomb 302, and at the main mound of Tell Banat where stone-built burials and other simpler burial deposits under piles of stones were gradually added in the area around Tomb 7 across both Banat periods (III and II). In another example of satellite graves, Gre Virike has revealed abundant evidence for burials of young children or infants subsequently inserted into the paved summit on the elevated terrace, where the monumental mortuary complex was built on top of it in the preceding chronological sequence at the site (Period IIA). In all the cases mentioned above, the number of the inhumations and prolonged chronology largely corresponding to the history of monumental tomb at each site indicate that the mortuary complex was not only the mortuary-related ritual center, but also the equivalent of a substantial cemetery. There is little doubt that these cemeteries were used over a number of generations, during which the burials or burial deposits were gradually added, rather than taking place as single acts. A major issue is that who were privileged to be buried within the extraordinary cemeteries after death. Did they necessarily have some relationship with the illustrious ancestors buried in the nearby tombs, perhaps servants who would be buried in the family cemetery, or other forms of group affiliation? Is there any other possibility, like who generally intended to claim closer proximity to the important ancestors

56 Peltenburg et al. 1995: 13, Figs. 21, 22, 23; Peltenburg et al. 2000: 71, Fig. 16; Porter 2002 a: Fig. 7.
57 Ökse 2006: Fig. 2.
was buried there? But in the absence of supporting evidence there are many ways that these relationships may have been constituted. Whoever they were, the practice of interring other dead in the immediate vicinity of the illustrious dead was relatively common in the third quarter of the third millennium BCE in the Middle Euphrates valley (e.g., Ahmar, Jerablus Tahtani, Banat, Gre Virike). We should consider this pattern as evidence for the long-lasting veneration of elite ancestors.

1.5 CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, attempts to understand funerary practices have emphasized the concept of ritual as our primary objective. The most elaborate efforts have tried to examine the specific archaeological manifestations of funerary rituals performed in the monumental tomb as well as in its related installation at Tell Ahmar during the EBA. It is hoped that I have highlighted important issues with respect to the evaluation upon various categories of tomb contents, with a particular emphasis on the ways in which these remains were contextualized and associated. These analyses and interpretations have revealed that a variety of tomb contents, including human/animal skeletal remains and grave furnishings, can be taken as evidence for funerary and mourning rituals during the primary burial process. The majority of the rituals occasioned by a death belong to this stage, during which the deceased’s bodies were interred anatomically intact, perhaps intended for the maintenance of the individual identities. The enactment of primary burial rituals seems to have involved other behaviors: goats were offered in the tomb adjacent to the interred bodies, the placement of the donations by funerary participants, providing of the dead with bronze weapons to preserve their warrior status, and collection and deposition of large quantities of containers. Before the tomb was last properly sealed, lavish grave furnishings were eventually assembled in the grave, perhaps both to assure a luxurious afterlife and to display conspicuously the social status or wealth of the prominent dead.

Ritual and ceremony in honor of the elite persons buried in the monumental tomb consist of not only those performed at the time of interments but also commemorative activities that may have involved a wider community and persisted a lengthy of time after the death of the interred individuals. In this case, the Hypogeum
rituals seem to be official ones in contrast to private rituals accompanying other tombs that were rapidly covered by earthworks. The imposing complex on the summit of the site acropolis included not only the mortuary monument but also a thick-walled, stone building and a staircase adjacent to the Hypogeum to the north. As the question addressed above, the original function of the northern room is uncertain. However, as the case with what may have happened on the artificial terrace at Gre Virike, the attached room provides potential for the location, in which kispu(m) ceremonies may have taken place.\textsuperscript{58} After the mortuary monument was closed, inhumations of more simple styles were subsequently placed on the mound summit, including six child interments gradually taking place under the floor of the adjacent northern room of the Hypogeum, and other constructed tombs clustered in its adjacent areas to the west and east. All of the burials or burial deposits in this period are confined to the close proximity of the adjoining, mortuary monument, indicating that the latter functioned as a symbol of the elite ancestors in the post-interment period inferred elsewhere.\textsuperscript{59} In this period, the central complex at Tell Ahmar continuously served for ritual ceremonies in the cult of the dead up to the end of that millennium, although the rituals venerating them had probably changed. Rituals associated with the Hypogeum that occurred during/after the interments are strategic representations, so that the elite of early Ahmar complex society and other centers in North Syria found the veneration of illustrious ancestors useful for the reinforcement and legitimization of their status and authority, as inferred by other scholars with evidence from additional examples of large and well-finished elite tombs.\textsuperscript{60} In sum, this study has made us aware different kinds of ritual activities even practiced within the communities of minor politically influence in the Euphrates Valley, and an interpretation of funerary rituals relying mainly on the specific archaeological evidence has provided valuable insights into the cognitive world of early urban civilizations emerging in the region.

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\textsuperscript{58} On the high mud-brick terrace at Gre Virike, the close proximity of permanent kitchens to the monumental tombs as well as the types of goods in the kitchens, give us an indication of ceremonial feasts involving the cooking, consumption and serving of food meant to take place in these features; see Ökse 2005: 41. Peltenburg suggests the possibility that some other form of open-air rituals took places simultaneously in the rest of space on the high terrace, since the mortuary complex occupied only one third of the entire paved summit; see Peltenburg 2007-8: 221.

\textsuperscript{59} Peltenburg 1999; Porter 2002 a-b; Schwartz 2007.

\textsuperscript{60} Porter 2002 a-b; Schwartz 2007.
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