CHAPTER EIGHT

NORTH SYRIA AS A BRONZEWORKING CENTRE
IN THE EARLY FIRST MILLENNIUM B.C.:
LUXURY COMMODITIES AT HOME AND ABROAD

In the initial charge to participants for the present colloquium on “Bronzeworking Centres of Western Asia c. 1000 B.C.–539 B.C.”, we were asked to determine (a) whether one’s particular area had a flourishing bronze-producing industry in the period, (b) what sort of material it was producing, and (c) how much of that material was being exported. In the case of North Syria, the evidence is strongly in support of conclusions that the region did indeed have a flourishing bronze industry; that, due to the incomplete nature of the archaeological record and the re-usable properties of bronze, probably only a partial typology of materials is possible at this time, but there is nonetheless a considerable range of utilitarian and luxury goods being produced; and finally, that the distribution of these goods is sufficiently wide to suggest that North Syrian bronzes were not only being exported, but were highly valued throughout the ancient world.1

In order to substantiate these claims, it will be necessary to first, define the region we would include within the boundaries of North Syria; second, identify the corpus, and within that, the typological categories of North Syrian bronzes; and third, elucidate the evidence for reconstructing the economic factors involved in production and consumption of these bronzes.


1 The present paper owes much to the comments of Peter Calmeyer, Robert C. Hunt and Oscar White Muscarella. The North Syrian attributions of most of the objects to be discussed have been made before, notably by R. D. Barnett, H.-V. Herrmann and O. W. Muscarella. I have therefore seen my role here mainly as a typologist and synthesist, with a reconstruction of the social and economic context of the manufacture and consumption of these bronzes, as permissible given limited evidence, being my primary task.
I. The Region

For purposes of the present paper, I would define the core area of North Syria in the early first millennium B.C. as bounded on the west by the range of the Amanus mountains, on the north by the Taurus mountains, on the east by the Euphrates River, and on the south by a line extending from the northern bend of the Orontes River across the Jebel Zawiyeh. This would include the regions of the plains of Jerablus, Kuweik and the Amuq, the valley of the Kara Su, the plain of Marash, and the foothills of the Kurd Dagh. Historical reference would thus be to the states of Carchemish, Arpad, Patina/Unki, Sam’al, Gurgum and Kummuḫ. Natural sub-divisions within the region led to each of these states being relatively autonomous units controlling at least one urban polity plus surrounding towns, villages, radiating routes and hinterland, except when threatened by external forces or combined artificially into provinces by outside powers.

The evidence supporting this tight definition of central North Syria comes both from geographical features, and from historical sources, such as which states were consistently involved jointly in the northern coalition against incursions by the Assyrians, or the dividing lines of provinces in the Ottoman Empire.

Neighboring states, such as Guzana (Tell Halaf), Hadatu (Arslan Tash), Bit Adini (Til Barsib), Milid (Malatya), Que (Cilicia) and Hamath (Hama) would then be viewed as closely related kingdoms on the periphery of North Syria proper, swing-states that were sometimes allied with the core, sometimes oriented outward during this period, depending upon historical circumstances.

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2 For the archaeological surveys conducted in this region, see Braidwood 1937, Seton-Williams 1954 and Mathers (ed.) 1981.
3 Arguments for this definition are presented in my doctoral dissertation on North Syrian ivories (cf. Winter 1973: chs. 1–2).