The Early Bronze Age of the Levant

ca. 3600/3400-2400 cal BCE
## What’s Happening in the NE?

Levant situated in between two already urbanized region – Egypt and Mesopotamia

<table>
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<th>Dates</th>
<th>Levant</th>
<th>Egypt</th>
<th>Mesopotamia</th>
<th>North Syria &amp; SE Anatolia</th>
<th>SW Anatolia</th>
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<tr>
<td>3600/3400</td>
<td>EB I</td>
<td>Archaic Period</td>
<td>Uruk Expansion</td>
<td>LC3-4 (North) Chaff-Faced Horizon (West)</td>
<td>Amuq F-G</td>
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<td>3100/3050</td>
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<td>First Dynasty (Old Kingdom)</td>
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<td>2700</td>
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<td>Dynasty</td>
<td>Dynastic</td>
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<td>Second to Fifth Dynasties</td>
<td>Early Dynastic</td>
<td>Multiple competing</td>
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<td>Nineveh (N)</td>
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<td>EB IV-MB</td>
<td>Sixth Dynasty</td>
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<td>2200</td>
<td>I</td>
<td></td>
<td>to Akkadian</td>
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The Early Bronze I

• Do your readings!
• Although called “Bronze Age”, it is not widely used yet
• Bronze an alloy of copper (80%) and tin (20%)
  – Makes metal stronger, holds an edge longer
• However, copper still dominant metal and still a rare, prestige item

• The issues:
  – Degree of continuity from preceding period?
  – Homogeneity and centralisation? (as seen in classification of the finds, especially pottery)
  – Migrations and origin of populations?
  – An urban society???
Internal Chronology

• Tripartite division of Bronze Age into EB I, II, III (G.E. Wright, 1937)
• Amiran & Kenyon proposed dividing EB I up into Proto-Urban A, B, & C (based on Jericho and appearance GBW)
• Division accepted, but now use EB Ia, EB Ib, EB Ic
• Big mess, but for our purposes its all EB I!
Site Location and Settlement Patterns

- Combination of continuity and change
- Settlement continues to be modest, unfortified farming villages – tells
- Major changes in settlement patterns
  - Areas densely settled in Chalco largely deserted
  - EB I sites in different locations even if in same area, only 20% reoccupation
  - New EB sites located fertile areas and focused near major water sources and trade routes
  - Many new sites became major urban centres in EB II
- End of EB I sees many sites abandoned, probably due to urbanization process
Megiddo tell
Jawa

• 15 ha site in the middle of the Basalt Desert
• Elaborate water supply system of dams and reservoirs – demo knowledge local environment
• Origin of population – Levant or Mesopotamia?
• Collapsed end of EB I
Site Plans and Architecture

• Limited excavations – Megiddo, Yiftahel, Beth Yareh, Tel Erani, Arad, Bab edh-Dhra’

• Northern Levant
  – Curvilinear, apsidal or round structures
  – Unknown in Chalcolithic and may be foreign tradition from north
  – Also associated with Grey Burnished Ware from north

• Only known public buildings are temples – hints at importance of priests and religious institutions
Apsidal Houses – Yiftahel
Economy

• Agriculture and sheep/goat herding, with focus on former over latter (different from Chalcolithic)
• New crops – figs, pomegranates, grapes (wine)
• Processing of olive oil (Tell Rakan)
• Semi-arid regions continue to be occupied by pastoralists, associated with vast cemetery at Bab edh-Dhra’ and *nawamis* in Sinai
Temples

Megiddo

Stratum XIX double temple

Pillared broad rooms with paved courtyard (rare art on stones)

Raised dais/platform for deity

Like ‘Ein Gedi

Yarmuth

Megiddo
Megiddo Temples
Other Temples

‘Ai EB Temple

Also found at Tell el-Far’ah
Mortuary Practices

- Multiple burials in artificial or natural caves (or rock-cut tombs) with pottery, metal, jewellery most common (generations?)
- Skeletons disarticulated, long bones and skulls arranged in rows (order out of chaos?)
- Bab edh-Dhra’ cemetery: 2 phases
  - EB Ia 1000’s shaft tombs, no settlement (pastoralists), 6-7 interments, disarticulated with bones arranged
  - EB Ib mudbrick circular burial structures for primary articulated multiple multiple burials, family tombs built by occupants permanent village
Burial Customs:
Bab ed-Dhra’ dedicated cemetery
Bab edh-Dhra’ Burial Structures

Shaft Tombs

Charnel Houses
Bab edh-Dhra’ Cemetery

Unique pottery forms and decoration
Local tradition
Early unpainted
Later painted

Shaft tomb entrance
Cave approached through vertical entrance
Other Burial Practices – Dolmens, Cairns and Cists

Common to Jordan Plateau

E.g., Tell al- ’Umayri

Finally proof of dolmen use in EB!

Megiddo shaft tomb
EB Pottery

- Intact pots in tombs
  - Small painted jars as burial gifts
- Pottery groups: north vs. south and early vs. late
- Few stratified deposits
- Hole-mouth jars from Chalco
- Ledge handles – hallmark
- North
  - Large “grain-washed” jars
  - Red burnish
  - Grey Burnished Ware
    - Esdraelon ware
    - Carinations, rope decoration common
EB Pottery

GBW locally-made but forms and decoration originate from north (movements of people)
Hacinebi, Turkey

- Contemporary occupation of Syria and Turkey by Late Chalcolithic/EB groups and Uruk outposts and colonies – contact with Levant
- Parallels in pottery, metal objects, other trade goods
- Influence for urbanism?
Technology and Art

• Art rare (decorated pillars, incised stones)
• Cylinder seals
  – Adopted from Mesopotamia
  – Impressed into jars before firing – denote ownership of pot (vs. goods in Meso)
  – Designs parallel Syria and Mesopotamia
• New flint technology – Canaanean blade
  – Long blades from single platform cores
  – Sickles and knives
  – Produced in specialized workshops
• Basalt vessels common, figures rare
Egyptian Connections: The Sinai Evidence

• Major movements of people and trade goods over very long distance – Egypt & Sumer

• Trade routes established over land through Sinai
  – 200 km of desert, 14 clusters of settlements and campsites connect Egypt to Negev, especially at Arad and Tell Erani (centre of trade network)
  – Tell Erani large settlement, urban city, dense mudbrick architecture, mix of local and Egyptian artifacts

• Sites in Delta contain EB I pottery (held oil, wine)

• Egyptian artifact rare in north
Egyptian Connections: Economically Motivated

- Agricultural products as main exports to Egypt
  - Grapes, olives, figs, pomegranates
- Production of wine and olive oil coincides with settlement increase in cultivable areas of Levant (central highlands, JV, coastal plain)
- Trade with Egypt generally seen as impetus for urbanization
  - Trade connections, Egyptian colonization to protect trade, Egyptian invaders with military force???
- Later in EB II new route by sea with Byblos as main port, Egyptian interest in Sinai abandoned (pottery decreases)
Connections with Egypt

Narmer – first Pharaoh
Inscriptions on jars from Tel Erani

Smiting the Asians –
fortified city being raided

4.26 Egyptian troops lay siege to a fortified city in Asia. A relief from a tomb at Dashasheh (5th Dynasty, 24th century B.C.E.; see page 141).
Urbanism in EB II-III?

Beth Yareh granary, ‘Ai water reservoir, temples

Fortified cities along major water sources and trade routes
EB II-III
Influences from the North

Khirbet Kerak Ware
Tell el-Marra
Royal Tomb
Gold and Silver

Like Uruk:
Central authority
Surplus
Organization
Origins of EB I Culture

1. Local continuity from Chalcolithic
2. Immigration of people from north (Hennessy)
3. Immigration of people from Mesopotamia (Kenyon)
4. Contact and exchange with Egypt and Mesopotamia

• Combination of all these!
• Generally acknowledged as Proto-Urban, but not to the extent as we see in Mesopotamia
Summary of the EB I

• Period whose cultural features represent an integration of a) continuity from local Chalcolithic, along with b) new features from immigrating groups in north and east and from Egypt

• Pressure from all sides to catch up – foundation for further developments culminating in “urbanization” of EB II-III
The Origins of Urbanism

The Early Bronze Age?
Characteristics of Complex Societies:

1. Social Stratification (at least 2 levels of social status)
2. Settlement hierarchy (centralization)
3. Craft specialization
4. Integrative and complex cultic/ritual activities
5. Historical trajectories of an unstable nature, invariably leading to collapse
   - A re-enforcing feedback mechanism that allows the society to sustain itself – Ideology/Religion
V. Gordon Childe: The 5 Characteristics of Urbanism

1. Great enlargement of an organized population with a much wider level of social integration

2. Full time specialists: craftsmen, labourers, merchants, priests, officials
   - specialized production was institutionalized as was the system of distribution and exchange
V. Gordon Childe: The 5 Characteristics of Urbanism

3. Concentration of surplus – a social means for the collection, management and redistribution of surplus products from farmers and workers

4. Class-structured society – a ruling class of religious, political and military functionaries who absorb the surplus

5. State organization – social organization based on residence rather than kinship
The 5 indicators found in archaeological record

1. Monumental public works
2. Long distance trade
3. Standardized monumental art
4. Writing
5. Arithmetic, geometry, astronomy

Push to see these in EBA of Levant???
Theories on the Origins of Urbanism

• Water hypothesis (Mesopotamia)
  – Collection of surplus water, technology and organization to control it (irrigation), monopoly of power (central authority to coordinate)

• Craft Specialization and Irrigation
  – Irrigation allows surplus – allows craft specialists – allows technological developments and surplus – allows trade – allows interregional control of resources and elites who coordinate it – allows development of writing, art, science

• Population pressure
  – Increased population – leads to subsistence intensification – leads to desire to control resource access – leads to surplus – leads to elite to control surplus and administration to redistribute

• Multivariate
Multivariate Hypothesis

Expansion in new regions and extension of water control systems

- A: Population increase
  - Intensification of agriculture
    - Increase in settlement size
- B: Specialized food production
  - Redistribution of foodstuffs
- C: Need for foreign raw materials
  - Long-distance trade
- D: Warfare
  - Increase in concentration of wealth
  - Increase in need for information flow
- E: Class-stratified society and administrative elite
  - Influence on controlling and organizing of resources

- Taxation and corvée
- New markets
- Control
- Conquest
- Increasing distance between administrators and population

- Social tension in large population aggregates
Five characteristics of a city:

1. Large and dense population
2. A high degree of complexity and interdependence – diverse populations with different vocational strategies
3. Formal and impersonal organization
4. Many non-agricultural activities
5. A diversity of central services for both inhabitants of city and surrounding communities
EBA Urbanism?

- Mosaic of urban and rural systems following independent trajectories
- 20 non-unified city-states who control only immediate towns and villages
- No writing, administration, bureaucracy
- Transition from chiefdom to emerging urbanism
- Collapse of the EBA – MBA rural settlements