

The great mound of Shechem, situated between Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal in the Samaria hills, was the creation of Middle Bronze engineers. They put up enormous earthen embankments surrounded by massive walls, thus transforming a low, vulnerable rise in the pass into a seemingly impenetrable fortress. Shown here is an exterior view of wall A at Shechem. With its massive cyclopean masonry built in typical inward-sloping or "battered" construction, this was both a retaining wall and a first line of defense. Inside of it, leading up to the inner wall B, was a tamped chalk glacis. The mound would have been an imposing sight. Despite its indomitable appearance, however, Shechem has three layers of the ash of destruction—evidence of violence shared by many other Middle Bronze sites in Palestine. Unless otherwise noted, photographs and drawings of Shechem courtesy of William G. Dever.

# The Middle Bronze Age

## The Zenith of the Urban Canaanite Era

by William G. Dever

**A** brief look at the succession of cultures in ancient Palestine might almost convert us to a cyclical view of history. It seems that civilizations rose briefly, only to fall, then repeated the process over and over. In this series for *Biblical Archaeologist* we have already surveyed the first such cycle (Richard 1987), in which the initial urban phase in the Early Bronze I–III periods (around 3400–2350/2300 B.C.E.) collapsed toward the end of the third millennium B.C.E. This was followed by a “dark age” of several centuries duration in Early Bronze IV (around 2350/2300–2000 B.C.E.), a period marked by a massive disruption and dislocation of population from the urban centers and a reversion to a pastoral nomadic life-style. But the light was soon to dawn again, and the archaeological record reflects it brilliantly.

**Archaeological periods.** Sometime around 2000 B.C.E. the long process of collapse in the southern Levant

was halted, and improved conditions soon set the stage for a sudden revival of urban life, ushering in what is termed the *Middle Bronze Age* (often abbreviated as MB).

**Sometime around 2000 B.C.E. the long process of collapse in the Southern Levant was halted. A sudden revival of urban life ushered in the Middle Bronze Age.**

The *Middle Bronze I–III* terminology that has recently been suggested (Dever 1980; Gerstenblith 1980, 1983: 2–3), and which is used here, retains the conventional three phases of Middle Bronze first distinguished in the 1920s by William F. Albright at Tell Beit Mirsim in his *Middle Bronze IIA–C*. The changed numerical designation, however, is based on the current recognition that Albright's *Middle Bronze I* is not the first phase of the true Middle Bronze Age in the cultural sequence of Palestine; rather, it is the last phase of the Early Bronze Age (now generally termed *Early Bronze IV–Dever 1980; Richard 1987*). Simply abandoning the older term, though, would mean that the Middle Bronze

### Comparative Chronology

| Comparative Chronology |                    |                |                   |              |  |
|------------------------|--------------------|----------------|-------------------|--------------|--|
| Palestine              |                    |                |                   | Dates B.C.E. | Egypt  |
| Present Terms          | Other Terms        |                |                   |              |  |
| Middle Bronze I        | Albright<br>MB IIA | Kenyon<br>MB I | Israeli<br>MB IIA | 2000–1800    | Middle Kingdom<br>(Twelfth and<br>Thirteenth<br>Dynasties)   |
| Middle Bronze II       | MB IIB             |                |                   | 1800–1650    |  |
| Middle Bronze III      | MB IIC             | MB II          | MB IIB            | 1650–1500    | Second Intermediate<br>(Fourteenth–Seventeenth<br>Dynasties) |

sequence would begin, rather awkwardly, with *Middle Bronze II*. Thus Kenyon (1973) and others have referred to Albright's *Middle Bronze IIA* as *Middle Bronze I*, and we carry this approach to its logical conclusion, adding *Middle Bronze II* and *Middle Bronze III*.

The change in terminology is thus partly a matter of newer perceptions of the transition between the Early Bronze and Middle Bronze periods, as well as a means of keeping the system of nomenclature consistent and as convenient as possible. It must be noted, however, that all terminologies agree on the essential unity and continuity of the several phases of the Middle Bronze Age in Palestine as a historical and cultural entity. Most Israeli archaeologists even go so far as only acknowledging two phases, arguing that there is still an insufficient stratigraphic and ceramic basis for subdividing the second phase into a second and third phase (Kempinski 1983). American authorities, on the other hand, generally retain Albright's threefold division, basing their view on the fine-grained stratigraphic sequence produced by recent excavations, especially those conducted at Shechem and Gezer.

There is also broad agreement on several other aspects of the period. First, the Middle Bronze Age represents not only a period of rapid recovery and reurbanization after the hiatus in Early Bronze IV but is, in fact, the zenith of urban development in the long Bronze Age in Palestine (about 3400–1200 B.C.E.). Second, Palestine was less isolated than it had been in Early Bronze; indeed, it was so much an integral part of Syria that it may be properly regarded as simply the southern portion of "Greater Canaan," whose existence is well documented in the literary texts of the time, comprising approximately modern coastal and south-central Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, the West Bank, Israel, and, probably, the northern Sinai. Third, the geograph-

## The New Archaeology

**N***ew archaeology* is a term coined by several Americanist archaeologists in the late sixties and early seventies for a new—and then highly controversial—approach to New World archaeology. The new archaeology differed from the old largely in arguing for the substitution of an overall theoretical framework that was in a sense less historical and more anthropological and scientific.

The new school contended that the traditional approach, which was basically concerned with studying culture history, had proven deficient. It had been too preoccupied with the relative dating, comparison, and classification of regional archaeological assemblages. The principal tool employed was usually typology, the exhaustive cataloguing of artifact types and their distribution. The major goal was setting up a relative chronology of the development of types, usually with the assumption that charting the diffusion of artifacts could adequately account for cultural contact and change. But the traditional approach, argued the *new archaeologists*, remained merely descriptive, because of its narrow perspective it lacked true explanatory potential. The ultimate goal of archaeology, in the new view, should be a science of cultural evolution.

The new archaeology demanded nothing less than a radical rethinking of the fundamental methods and objectives of archaeology. The debate, which continued into the early 1980s in Americanist circles, was marked initially by a bewildering variety of proposals and counterproposals, as well as by heated polemics. The leading American journals and the programs of the annual meetings of professional organizations like the Society of American Archaeology reflected the trends. The proliferating literature gradually revealed, however, despite some extremist positions, a growing consensus.

Today, there is general agreement that the new archaeology is here to stay, and the significant trends in theory and method may now be enumerated somewhat as follows. As we shall see, several of these trends have had an impact on Old World archaeology as well.

**An ecological approach.** This entails the study of sites in their total environmental, as well as historical and cultural, settings. The fundamental assumption is that culture is partly (though, of course, not exclusively) an adaptation to basic physical factors, such as geographical situation, climate and rainfall, natural resources, possibilities for exploiting plants and animals, access to natural trade routes, and the like. One may adopt here a version of general systems theory, a theory first developed by economic geographers and currently employed in many of the natural and social sciences today. The fundamental principle of this theory is that any system, biological or social, is the result of the complex interaction of many components, and the system either grows or declines as a result of the changing balance (homeostasis) it is able to maintain. Subsystems of a culture, such as agriculture and other economic strategies or population growth, will all preserve evidence to some extent in the archaeological record and should be investigated as fully as possible. Central place theory may also be employed to study settlement patterns, the relation of sites to each other, urban-rural dynamics, and the function of marketing economics.

**Multidisciplinary strategies.** The broader objectives of the ecological approach outlined above require the adoption of methods beyond the traditional tools of stratigraphy and typology. Thus the new archaeology pioneered many innovative methods in fieldwork and analysis, often borrowed from other disciplines. Today, alongside traditional skilled excavators and ceramic

experts, the modern dig staff may include geologists, geomorphologists, climatologists, physical and cultural anthropologists, paleobotanists and paleozoologists, historians of technology, computer programmers, and other specialists in allied disciplines. Thus a wide variety of data are collected, analyzed, and integrated into a systemic reconstruction of a past culture.

**Quantitative methods of analysis.** The collection of so much more, and more complex, data entails an attempt to quantify. This is necessary not only to deal efficiently with a mass of information but also to provide meaningful statistics that other disciplines can utilize. Increasingly, computers are coming into use to process the new data. For example, radiocarbon dating and neutron activation analysis to fingerprint the source of the clays used in ceramic production both depend upon computer counting. Even seed and bone samples may be so voluminous that they are unmanageable without computer analysis.

**A scientific (or nomothetic) orientation.** The heavy borrowing from the natural sciences and the desire to make archaeology a more systematic discipline inevitably suggested to some new archaeologists that archaeology should itself aim at true scientific status. Thus it was argued that archaeologists should not merely excavate to "see what is there," however responsibly, but should deliberately formulate and test hypotheses against the archaeological record. Moreover, they should do so with the goal of arriving at universal laws governing the cultural process, laws that would then be capable of verification by prediction—exactly as in the natural sciences. Not all were so explicitly scientific but nearly all soon adopted research designs that were deliberately focussed on solving certain very specific problems—sometimes traditional historical problems but more often problems derived from a broader cultural-anthropological perspective.

**Behavioral-processual objectives.** A natural outgrowth of the above trends was the attempt to move beyond the older descriptive-historical goals of archaeology, beyond the exclusive concern with artifacts and dates and isolated events, toward an understanding of human behavior in all its dimensions—indeed toward an explanation of the cultural process itself. Admittedly, this is an unattainable goal but it has broadened the horizons of archaeology today and made it infinitely more exciting.

Thus the new archaeology, which first developed in Americanist circles more than twenty years ago, made a somewhat belated impact on Near Eastern and Syro-Palestinian archaeology in the seventies and eighties. Not all of its agenda has been adopted, and, because it was pioneered by anthropologists on relatively recent and simple New World sites, it is not totally applicable to the long historical sequence of complex Middle Eastern mounds. But aspects of the new look are evident everywhere in our field: broader research designs, more sophisticated presentations at annual meetings and in publications, more ecological and interdisciplinary projects, more liaison with anthropology and the social sciences, and, particularly, a greater concern with professional and disciplinary status. It may be said simply that the older style archaeology of previous generations—always something of an amateur enterprise, and really a branch of biblical and theological studies—has finally come of age. Although now an independent, secular discipline, Syro-Palestinian archaeology today draws much from and contributes much to these and many other disciplines.

For more information, see William G. Dever, "The Impact of the 'New Archaeology' on Syro-Palestinian Archaeology," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, number 242 (1981), pages 15–29, and "Syro-Palestinian and Biblical Archaeology," pages 31–74 in *The Hebrew Bible and Its Modern Interpreters*, edited by D. A. Knight and G. M. Tucker (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980); G. Ernest Wright, "The 'New' Archaeology," *The Biblical Archaeologist*, volume 38 (1975), numbers 3 and 4, pages 104–15.

ical-historical entity thus demarcated may be designated *Canaanite* in a linguistic as well as cultural sense, since that term is well attested in contemporary texts. Indeed, the term *Canaanite* now occurs even earlier, in Syria in the Ebla archives of the twenty-fourth and twenty-third centuries B.C.E., where a parallel term, *Amorite*, seems to refer to the nonurban, or village-pastoral, element of the dimorphic population (Matthiae 1981). And, of course, both terms are correctly remembered and applied to Palestine by the writers of the Hebrew Bible centuries later (on the Amorites, see further Luke 1965; Buccellati 1966; Dever 1981). Nearly 400 Middle Bronze sites are known in Palestine, but the basic archaeological framework for the period has been elaborated over many years from such large tell-excavations as Tell Beit Mirsim (1926–1932), Megiddo (1926–1939), Jericho (1952–1958), Hazor (1955–1958), Shechem (1957–1973), Gezer (1964–1974), and Aphek (1973–1986). More recently, many smaller sites and regional surveys have added appreciably to the picture and have brought it into better perspective.

**Historical reconstruction.** As much as archaeology has revolutionized our knowledge of Palestine, or southern Canaan, in the first half of the second millennium B.C.E., we are still not in a position to write a full history of the Middle Bronze Age. Although there are growing numbers of specialist studies, we have only a few attempts at a synthesis of the data. Following Albright's early, fundamental treatments (perhaps best summarized in 1940; see also 1964), the major archaeological summaries are the masterly treatment of the broader historical context by Benjamin Mazar (1968; see also 1970), an authoritative analysis of the sites and stratigraphy by Kathleen Kenyon (1973), and briefer overviews by G. Ernest Wright (1971) and myself (Dever 1976, 1977—both with something of the history of scholar-

ship). Syria remains less well known archaeologically, although it has yielded vastly more textual remains (see Tocci 1960; Klengel 1969; Kupper 1973; and for the archaeology add now Matthiae 1984).

We readily recognize the pioneering achievements of the previous generation or two of scholarship, upon which our present understanding rests. It would be fair to say, however, that the preoccupation of that generation with stratigraphy and problems of ceramic chronology, as well as models drawn largely from what we may call "political history," resulted in a somewhat narrow picture. Currently, newer approaches, with models drawn more from anthropology and the natural sciences (see Dever 1981 and the accompanying sidebar), are beginning to make their impact on Middle Bronze studies. The ultimate objective, of course, is to write a socioeconomic history of Palestine in this period. We are already gaining a new perspective through several analyses of settlement patterns and demographic trends (Gophna 1984; Broshi and Gophna 1986; Mabry 1986). One of the most ambitious studies is an attempt to employ the "central place theory" of economic geography to the distribution and relationship of both the urban and rural Middle Bronze sites, so as to place these sites in their full ecological and cultural setting (Kotter 1986). Even treatments of older themes—such as fortifications, or chronology, or Palestine's relation to the so-called Hyksos period in Egypt—are today much more holistic. These are attempts to see the larger picture, to get at culture in all its dimensions, not merely "history" (which usually meant chiefly the chronology of great public and political events).

One of the more important of the new approaches to archaeology will be employed here—that is, a systemic approach (resting specifically on general systems theory; for an orientation, see Dever 1987). In

this view, culture is a uniquely human adaptation that cannot be understood apart from the complex interrelationships of a number of subsystems, all of which leave traces of patterned, human behavior in material-culture remains, in the archaeological record, when properly observed and interpreted. Such systemic components are: response to environmental factors; settlement distribution and type; subsistence and economy; technology; social structure; political organization; ideology, including art and religion; and the larger setting of international relationships. The systemic approach is relatively new and has not yet had time to produce sufficient data to answer all the questions that we are now asking. I believe, however, that it is salutary, and thus I shall employ its basic categories as an outline in what follows.

#### **Settlement Patterns and Types**

In Palestine, the revival of town life—and with it the beginning of a recognizable, distinctive new archaeological phase termed *Middle Bronze*—is best seen first in a radical shift in the distribution, size, and character of the settlements. A great transformation took place just after approximately 2000 B.C.E. Nearly all the old urban Early Bronze tell-sites, many of them abandoned for centuries, were reoccupied. Before very long they increased in area and density of settlement, and soon they boasted impressive new fortifications. In addition, many new sites were founded in previously unsettled regions during this initial phase (Middle Bronze I), greatly expanding the area of settlement along the coast and well up into the hill country. Here the confluence of prime agricultural land, access to trade routes, and defensible conditions favored urban growth. And, indeed, most of these new Middle Bronze towns, although small at the outset, continued to develop until they became major urban centers before the end of the period.

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**To understand Middle Bronze we must do more than merely compile a chronology of great public and political events. We must look at culture in all of its dimensions.**

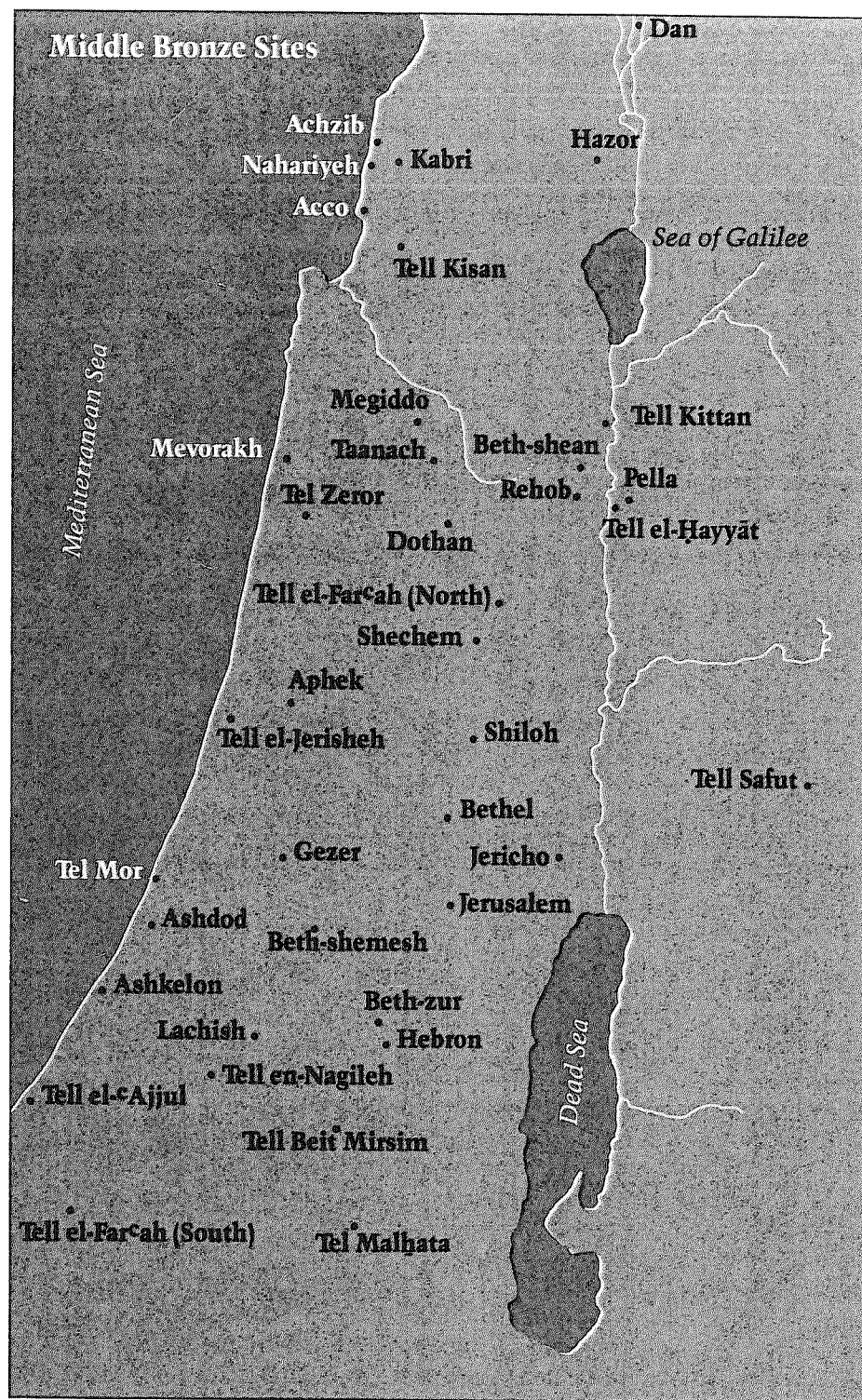
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Finally, the hundreds of small Early Bronze IV villages and pastoral encampments in the marginal zones, mostly in Transjordan and the Negeb-Sinai desert, were abandoned, most of them permanently, as the population moved back to the central regions. The brief transition between Early Bronze IV and Middle Bronze I witnessed the most dramatic shift of settlement patterns in the history of Palestine. As we shall see, there was also a nearly complete change in technology, economic basis, social structure, and political organization between approximately 2000 and 1800 B.C.E., as urbanism increasingly took hold. (For more on the Middle Bronze I period, see the résumé of Dever 1976, with full references; see also Gerstenblith 1980, 1983; Tubb 1983).

The urban character of Middle Bronze is reflected not only in the more nucleated and growing population but also in the various types of sites and their relationship to each other. Using a modified form of locational analysis employed by modern economic geographers (a common-sense application of the central place theory discussed in the accompanying sidebar), several recent studies have concentrated not so much on

By about 1800 B.C.E., 65 percent of the population lived in large fortified cities. The proliferation of these is the most characteristic feature of the period.

the few large urban centers, or city-states, as previous scholars did, but rather upon the relationship of these centers to each other and to the hinterland. It appears that the nearly 400 known Middle Bronze Age sites in Palestine can be grouped into three categories, arranged in a three-tiered hierarchy: large urban sites, about 20 to 175 acres, comprising some 5 percent of the total; medium-sized towns, about 7 to 20 acres, accounting for about 10 percent; and villages and hamlets of about 1 to 7 acres, making up about 85 percent (Kotter 1986). These data yield several interesting results when analyzed. For instance, demographic projections (Mabry 1986) indicate that by the Middle Bronze I period, some 65 percent of the population already lived in a relatively few large fortified cities of 50 acres or more; nevertheless, almost half of the settlements were smaller than 2 acres. Cross-cultural studies, both ancient and modern, indicate that such three-tiered, hierarchically arranged settlement patterns invariably characterize a highly urbanized culture. Thus, the larger sites were undoubtedly true city-states, dominating an economic hinterland, even though Palestine as a whole may not have



been a true state in terms of centralized administration.

#### Walled Cities

A combination of urban growth, complex social organization, increased prosperity, and advanced technology may be observed in town-

planning, and especially in defensive systems of the Middle Bronze Age. The proliferation of massive fortifications is the single most characteristic feature of the fully developed phases of the period. This was no doubt a response in part to the growing competition of local city-states,

but it may also have been a consequence of the threat of international intervention. These complex defense works also imply, however, a superior engineering and industrial capability. More important, they reflect a highly centralized system of planning and deployment of men and matériel — that is, an efficient socioeconomic organization that can produce surpluses, as well as a bureaucracy that can control and, if necessary, enforce public policy. (For earlier studies, see Parr 1968; G. R. H. Wright 1968; Dever 1973, 1974; Seger 1975.)

In seeking to chart the stages in Middle Bronze urban development, scholars seem inevitably to have defined *urban* as meaning *fortified*, and thus they have been especially concerned with determining when the earliest city-walls emerged. Yigael Yadin questioned the assumption, held by nearly all archaeologists since Albright, that defense systems began in the first phase, Middle Bronze I, and tried in fact to date all the city-walls to Middle Bronze II (Yadin 1973, 1978). The majority opinion, however, based on the latest excavations, holds that many sites were fortified early, by the nineteenth century B.C.E. at the latest (see Dever 1976; Gerstenblith 1983). Among these early walled towns would be Achzib and Acco in the north, as well as a group of Sharon Plain sites (Tel Zeror, Tel Poleg, Tel Burga, Yabneh-yam), and especially Aphek, at the headwaters of the Yarkon River. The latter is now one of our most important Middle Bronze I sites, thanks to the excavations of Moshe Kochavi and others since 1973, which have revealed two phases of the city-wall and a "palace" that must be dated fairly early in Middle Bronze I (Kochavi and Beck 1976; Kochavi and others 1979, specifically refuting Yadin).

Thus many of the larger sites in Palestine had already been fortified with city-walls and gates before the end of the Middle Bronze I period

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## The complexity of MB defense works is evidence for superior engineering, while their massiveness suggests an appreciation of psychological warfare.

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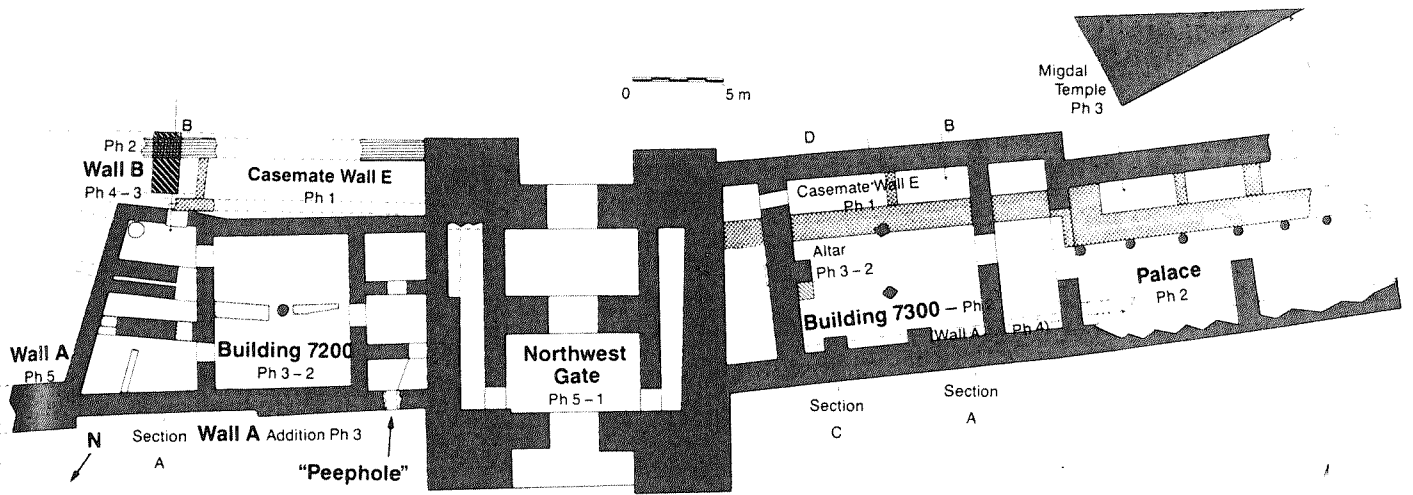
(that is, before about 1800 B.C.E.). But beginning with Middle Bronze II, and continuing until the end of Middle Bronze III, the archaeological record at nearly every site shows a continual process of defensive constructions. One element is added atop another, in an almost bewildering array and variety, as though each city tried to outdo its neighbors. Not only are all the larger sites fortified, as might be predicted, but even towns and villages as small as 2 to 4 acres are surrounded by city-walls, such as the tiny coastal fort of Mevorakh, or the small hill-country site of Shiloh. Indeed, scarcely a single excavated Middle Bronze Age site in Palestine has failed to yield formidable fortifications.

The basic defensive element is, of course, a city-wall, usually consisting of a high mudbrick superstructure on a stone socle or foundation. Often the main wall is of cyclopean masonry, with rough-hewn stone blocks 8 to 10 feet long and weighing a ton or more, laid to a width of anywhere from 20 to 50 feet. The Middle Bronze Age city-gate is of a standard type, apparently derived from Syria and Anatolia, with three entryways marked by pairs of opposing stone piers, and in between two

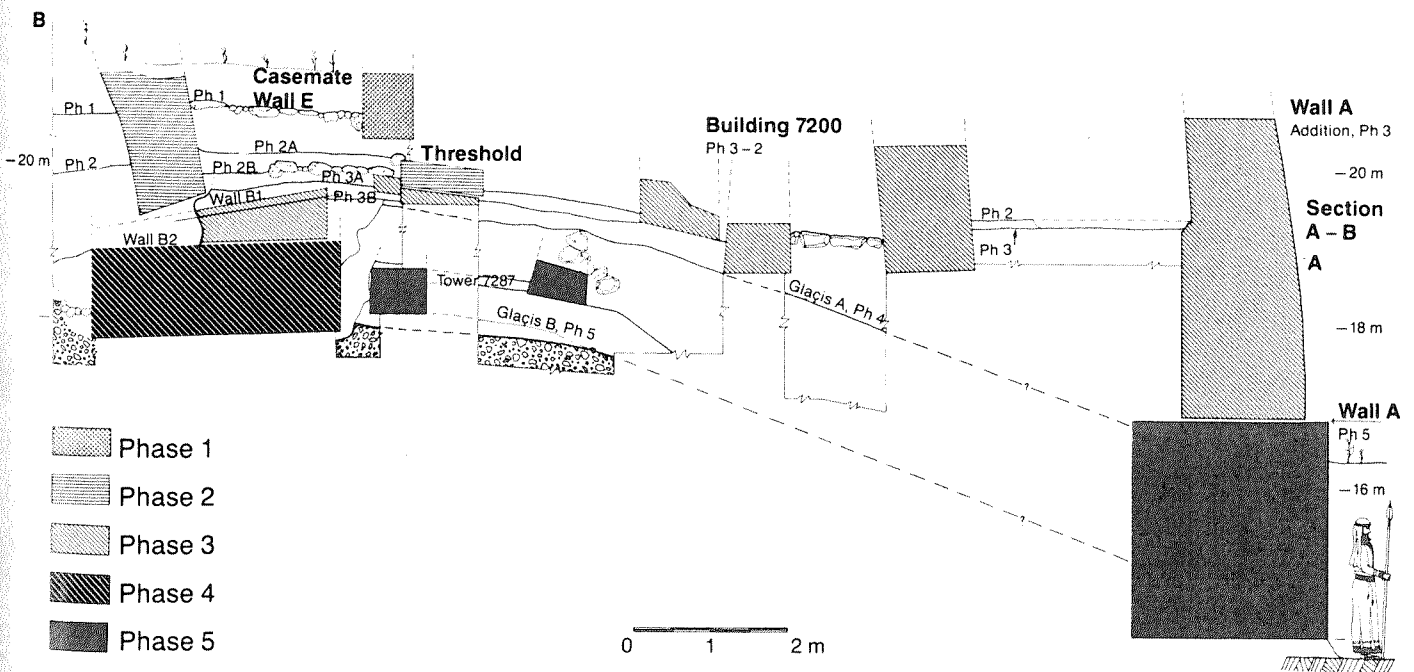
small chambers or guardrooms on each side (see Naumann 1971; Gregori 1986).

Almost always this inner line of defense is augmented with massive, steep earthen and plaster embankments along the outer face. Farther downslope there may be an outer revetment or retaining wall, and sometimes beyond that a fosse (or dry moat) with its own counter-scarp or wall. The earthworks, often termed *terre pisée* constructions, or *glacis*, are among the most typical and intriguing elements. Each differs, since they were designed for local terrain, and they were constructed quite ingeniously of whatever local soils and fill materials were available. Yet the purpose of each earthwork, however different, seems the same: to consolidate and augment the tell slopes, as well as to create a system of barriers for any attackers (see Parr 1968). The term *glacis*, from the typical medieval free-fire zone surrounding the city- or castle-wall, is probably a misnomer. These fills and plastered embankments do not seem designed to protect against chariots, as Kenyon supposed, although such vehicles were a formidable weapon being introduced at just this time. Rather, as Yadin showed (1955), the embankments were probably a defense against the Mesopotamian-style battering ram; the steep slopes and outer walls were meant to keep the ram away from the principal city-wall, and also to make the ram vulnerable to the defenders atop the wall.

Whatever the exact rationale of the builders may have been, the defense systems of the Middle Bronze Age exhibit two striking features. First, there is an almost endless variety of constructional elements — all, however, well integrated. Second, there is an attempt at mass, almost as though psychological warfare were being employed. The cumulative system not only required an enormous investment of resources but it must also have been the work of



**Above:** Plan of major Middle Bronze installations at Shechem around the Northwest Gate. In the center is the triple gate with an opening that has been narrowed so that only one chariot at a time could pass through it. On the left of the gate is a barracks or citadel (building 7200); note the "peephole" in outer wall A. On the right is a temple (building 7300). **Below:** Schematic section through all of the building layers of the gate area at Shechem. On the far right is wall A; built on a 3-meter-thick foundation, it continued to be developed throughout the history of the site. The earliest building phases, shown at the bottom of the drawing, rest on virgin soil or bedrock. Over this, two glacis were built in successive phases (phases 5 and 4); eventually this area was filled in. Wall B was the original city-wall, 11 meters inside wall A. In the final phases (3, 2, and 1), the casemate walls and buildings such as the barracks were added over the ruins of this earlier construction. The five phases indicated here all occurred within Middle Bronze II-III. Aerial photograph courtesy of Pictorial Archive.





many generations. A typical thick city-wall might run for a mile or more around the site, and it would have had many towers, several gates, and a huge embankment outside that. Its construction would have required perhaps hundreds of thousands of man-hours and the moving of thousands of tons of stone and earth. Such a system was probably under constant construction, alteration, and repair—and for a continuous period of 300 to 500 years at many sites in Middle Bronze Age Palestine.

Two sites may serve to illustrate the walled towns of the Middle Bronze Age. The great mound of Shechem, situated between Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal in the Samaria hills, was literally the creation of the Middle Bronze Age engineers. They put up enormous earthen embankments that were surrounded by massive walls, thus transforming a low, vulnerable rise in the pass into a seemingly impregnable fortress. The outer wall A, constructed of cyclopean masonry, is a massive retaining wall for the deep artificial fills behind it, and it still stands more than 30 feet high. Atop that is wall B, a double (or casemate) masonry wall. Between the two principal city-walls is the typical steep, faced slope, or glacis. Two gates are known: the East Gate, a rare, double-entryway gate (otherwise known only at Tel Mor, near Ashdod); and the Northwest Gate, a more typical, three-entryway gate. Adjacent to the latter, on the embankment between the city-walls, is an elaborate multi-roomed structure cleared in 1972 that may best be understood as a barracks or citadel, guarding both the city-gate and the adjacent palace (Dever 1974). The Middle Bronze defenses at Shechem—with at least five phases, all within Middle Bronze II–III and separated by no less than three destructions toward the end—illustrate most dramatically the phenomenon of walled cities of this period. (For more, see G. E. Wright



*Above: Wall A and barracks or citadel (building 7200) on the north side of the Northwest Gate at Shechem. This building had a stone foundation one meter thick, with a mudbrick superstructure, all of which was plastered on the inside. One room on the outside wall had a "peephole" that looked out over the city-gate. Below: Man pointing to the "peephole" cut through wall A at Shechem.*



1965; Dever 1974; Seger 1974, 1975.)

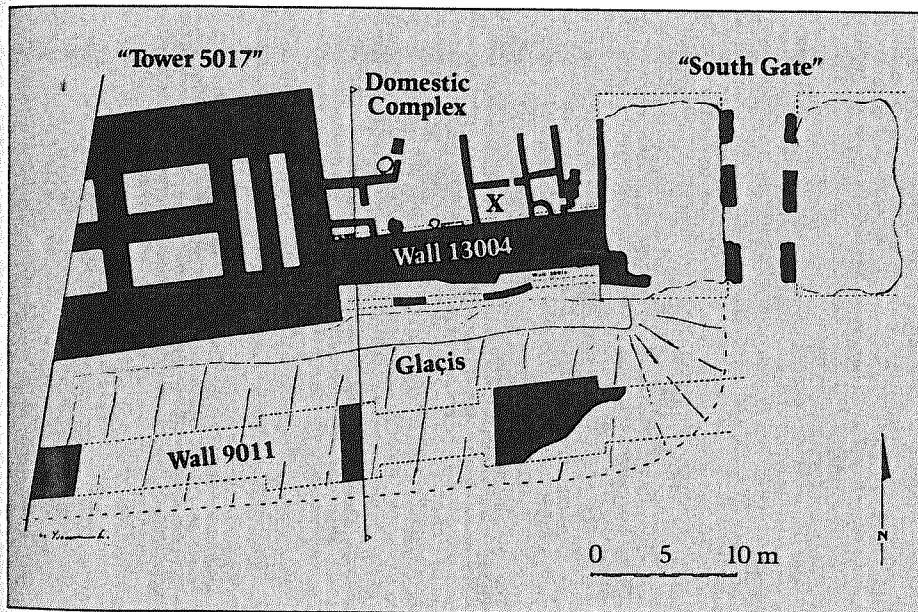
Gezer is even more impressive, now that American excavations in 1964 through 1974 have redated and clarified Macalister's monumental architecture (partially cleared in 1902 through 1909). The "Inner Wall," some 12 to 14 feet thick and

still standing as much as 15 feet high, circles the entire site—a length of about 1,600 yards, or nearly a mile. The "South Gate" is a magnificent triple-entryway mudbrick structure at least two stories high. Still preserved are the springers of the arched roof made of mudbrick



that covered the passageway; these are flanked by three pairs of massive stone piers, or orthostats. The manner in which these piers served to mount swinging wooden doors at the inner and outer gateway has now been illustrated by the splendid city-gate at Ebla (Tell Mardikh) in Syria, where the basalt orthostats and their door-sockets are still preserved (Matthiae 1984: 20). And more recently, an almost intact triple-entryway mudbrick gate of this type, with the arches still standing, has been found at Tel Dan (Biran 1984).

Two quite remarkable features of the Middle Bronze Age defenses of Gezer are "Glaçis 8012" and "Tower 5017." The glaçis, sloping up to the "Inner Wall" at an angle of about 45 degrees, is constructed of alternating layers of brown debris from the tell and of virgin chalk. These fills are laid in almost geometric perfection, tightly tamped, then surfaced over with a thick white plaster to make the slope not only impermeable to water and weather but difficult to negotiate as well. "Tower 5017" lies just west of the "South Gate." Only the stone socle or foundation of this elaborate, multistoried structure is preserved, but this consists of nine courses of cyclopean masonry, sunk entirely below ground level in a foundation trench some 14 feet deep. This massive tower or citadel is incorporated into a section of city-wall 53 feet thick—one of the largest single-phase stone structures in pre-Roman Palestine. (For more, see Dever and others 1971, 1974; Dever 1973; Seger 1975.)



**Top:** The "South Gate" at Gezer was a mudbrick structure that was at least two stories high. The massive stone orthostats or jambs shown here framed the triple sets of wooden doors. Photographs of Gezer courtesy of William G. Dever. **Bottom:** Located to the south and west of Shechem, Gezer was occupied at a much earlier date. Shown here is a plan of the "South Gate" complex at Gezer. A chalk glaçis, or embankment, which would have inhibited any approach to the city, was employed for defense along the outer perimeter. Connector wall 13004 was faced with cyclopean masonry to mask its weakness. Preliminary findings suggested that the destruction of the installations was associated with the campaigns of Tuthmosis III around 1482 B.C.E. New findings, however, suggest an earlier date around the reigns of Amenophis I (1546–1526) or Tuthmosis I (1525–1512). (An x marks the place in a room inside wall 13004 where a small hoard of gold and the skeleton of a woman were found in 1973.) Drawing used courtesy of Joe D. Seger.

### Town Planning and Domestic Architecture

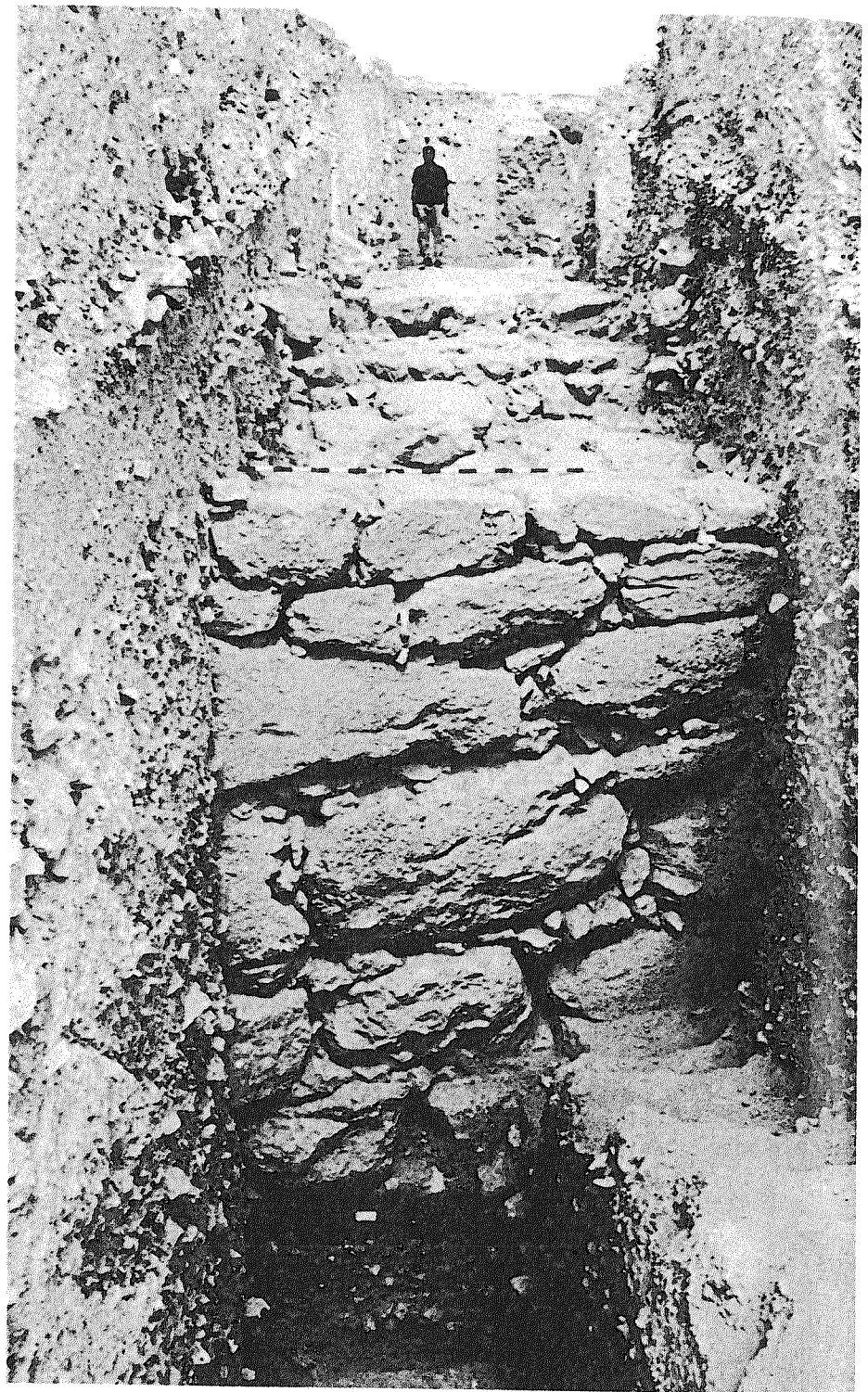
The defense systems just described imply the existence, of course, not only of relatively sophisticated engineering but also of the highly centralized planning that characterizes urban centers. Another aspect of town planning is spatial and functional layout of the entire area within the city-walls, virtually required by

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Though we don't have a complete plan for any MB city, there is evidence that town planning was highly centralized and sophisticated. Greater Canaan was no backwater.

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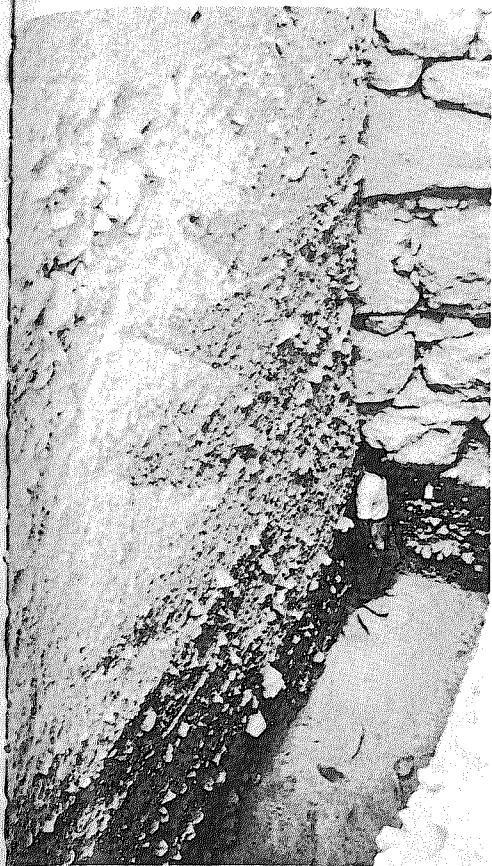
urban life with its dense population and varied activities. Thus we can distinguish in several Middle Bronze Age sites well-planned areas for administrative structures, public functions, temples, commercial and perhaps juridical activities, domestic housing, streets, courtyards, water- and food-storage facilities, stables, and industrial operations. We do not yet have, of course, the complete plan of any Palestinian city of the Middle Bronze Age, but the area of the Northwest Gate at Shechem includes many well-coordinated elements of what may have been a typical administrative and public area. These include the city-wall, gate, and barracks-citadel; a two-story palace with administrative hall; a large open-air plaza; and a monumental public "fortress-temple," possibly combined with a temple-treasury (Dever 1974). Such an arrangement clearly bespeaks sophisticated city planning. Very nearly the same basic plan is seen in stratum VII at Alalakh, near the mouth of the Orontes River in north Syria, and also at Ebla (see Woolley 1953: 64-82; Matthiae 1984: 19-21; Gregori 1986). Many of these elements are also encountered, al-



though on a grander scale, well up into central Anatolia and over into northern Mesopotamia. These common features in urban planning underscore the cultural continuum that we have already noted throughout Greater Canaan in the Middle

Bronze Age. Palestine may have been somewhat peripheral but it was no isolated backwater (as Kenyon concluded in the prestigious *Cambridge Ancient History*).

Commercial and domestic areas also attest planning. A typical *suk*,



**Left:** This close-up of the "Inner Wall" at Gezer shows "Glaçis 8013," made of alternating layers of tamped brown debris from the tell and virgin chalk, in the section at the left. Note the steep angle of its incline.

**Above:** Section of "Tower 5017" at Gezer. The glaçis is shown clearly in the white (chalk) and earthen debris layers on the left. Only the stone foundation of this elaborate, multi-storied structure is preserved, but it was one of the largest single-phase stone structures in pre-Roman Palestine. The size of the fortifications at Gezer and the great care and skill shown in building them are indicative of the level of development and organization evident in Middle Bronze Age communities, as well as of the dangers the people faced.

or bazaar, not unlike those of modern Middle Eastern towns, is seen at Jericho, where two-story shops-residences line the street coming up the hill from the city-gate (Kenyon 1957: 228–232). At Gezer, several private houses in field VI are well

laid out around streets, terraces, and communal courtyards. The latter feature ovens, food storage and preparation areas, and animal shelters. Particularly noteworthy is a system of run-off areas, with plastered and covered subterranean drains that conducted rainwater to several deep cisterns hewn into the bedrock. So successful was this water-storage system that the cisterns were periodically cleaned out and reused for centuries, down into the Iron Age (Dever and others 1971: 126, 127; 1987). All these and other domestic installations point to relatively efficient planning as towns of the Middle Bronze Age grew into large and complex social units.

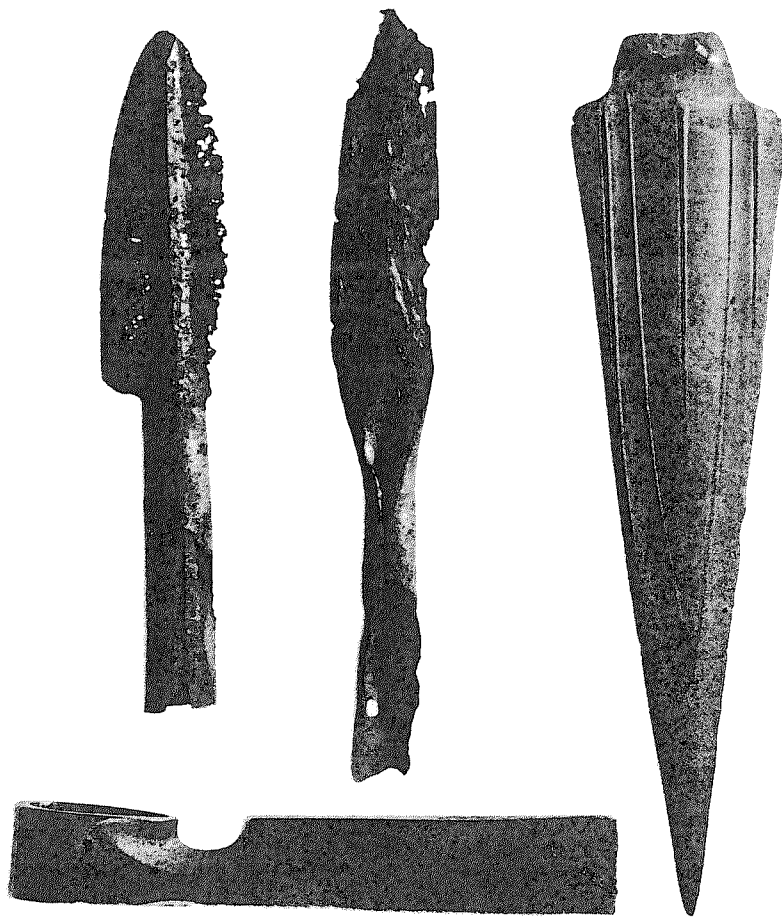
**Subsistence, Technology, and Trade**  
Archaeology's more recent ecological orientation, while seeking to avoid any form of economic determinism, rightly calls attention to the dependence of all cultures on successful adaptation to the physical environment and to available natural resources. Ancient Palestine's basically agrarian economy depended heavily upon the large role of peasants in the social structure, thus upon what economists might call the *domestic mode of production*. This consisted primarily of small-scale agriculture, mixed with some local crafts and cottage industry, supplemented by sporadic trade in luxury items.

This economic regime, well suited to the topography and climate of Palestine, had already been established by the Early Bronze Age, and even earlier. But such a diversified economic strategy depends upon stable conditions, as well as upon a delicate balance maintained by skillful and, to some degree, centralized planning. All this had collapsed, however, in Early Bronze IV as people abandoned cities and towns and reverted to pastoralism in the hinterland and the marginal and semiarid zones. What we see in Middle Bronze I is simply the dra-

matic reversal of that pattern. Reurbanization, the return to town life, was made possible first by the resumption of larger scale, intensive farming, then by the growth in industry and trade. Increased agricultural production not only fed the growing concentration of population in cities but it also generated surpluses, stimulated exchange of goods, and increasingly created an urban elite. Although the revolution took place in the cities, it was fueled by the hinterland.

Actual archaeological evidence for intensified agriculture is minimal, since our previous generation of biblical archaeologists had little interest in questions of subsistence and did almost no systematic collection of floral and faunal data. Nevertheless, the very location of the Middle Bronze settlements themselves is ample evidence. They are situated in well-watered regions along the coast, in the river valleys, and in the hill country—always within range of extensive arable lands. Defensible position and access to trade routes were, of course, factors in the growth of large tell-sites, but the primary consideration was the agriculturally based subsistence economy, similar to that of the Early Bronze Age. And, as I have already suggested, spatial analysis of the distances between and relationships among the three tiers in the settlement hierarchy strongly suggests that villages, towns, and urban centers were closely linked in a market economy, where agricultural products were redistributed through the larger "central places" (Kotter 1986).

Among plants cultivated again were wheat and barley, probably dominant, along with cereals, legumes, and various fodders. Olives, grapes, figs, and other fruits and vegetables were also grown and processed in various ways for home consumption or export. All common species of animals had long been domesticated, except perhaps the horse, then coming into limited use,



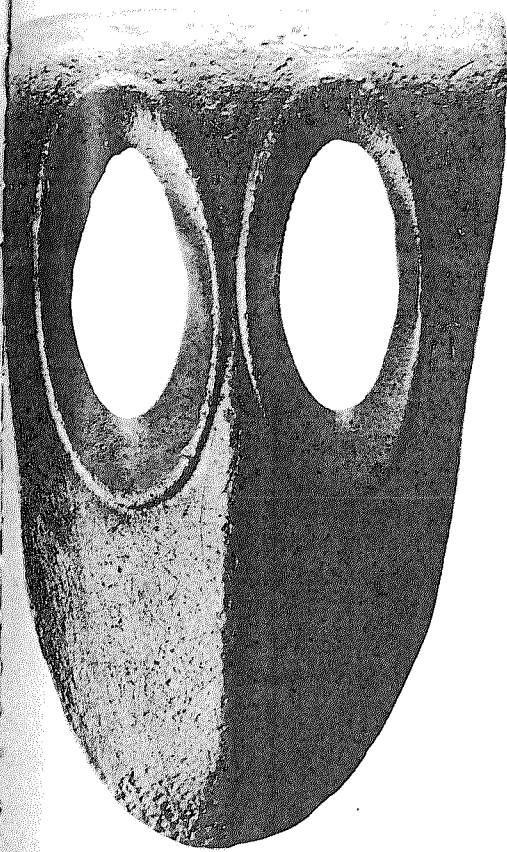
The Middle Bronze Age in Palestine witnessed the introduction of a true tin-bronze metallurgy. The result was a metal that was more malleable than that previously available, thus making it possible to shape tools and weapons into entirely new forms, ones that at the same time held a sharper edge. **Left:** Typical bronze implements from the early part of Middle Bronze. On top are two socketed spear blades and a dagger blade, below is a notched "chisel" axhead. The spear blades were attached to a wooden shaft; later examples are longer and have a tang instead of a socket. The broad, leaf-bladed dagger is approximately 17.5 centimeters long, with cast blood-rills down its length and two rivet holes at the top to attach it to a wooden handle. The axhead has a shaft hole (to the left) and a notch to secure it to a handle with thongs. **Right:** A beautifully cast duckbill ax with well-defined socket and fenestrations. Like the other bronze pieces shown here, it was found at Ain es-Samiyeh, north of Jerusalem; this weapon, which is about 10 centimeters in height, is a refined version of an earlier type often found from the end of the Early Bronze period. Photographs courtesy of William G. Dever.

and the camel (probably not domesticated until around 1200 B.C.E.). Sheep and goats were predominant, but cattle are also well attested. All were herded both by village farmers and by less settled pastoral nomads in the marginal zones (although the latter have left few archaeological traces and have scarcely been investigated for the Middle Bronze Age, unlike Early Bronze IV). The University of Arizona's recent excavation of Tell el-Hayyāt, a small agricultural village in the northern Jordan valley, has employed careful sieving and flotation to retrieve floral and faunal remains. Nearly all the above plants and animals are represented (Falconer and Magness-Gardiner 1984). Of particular interest is the high percentage of pig bones, which indicates that certain species of animals were intensively bred where local conditions were conducive. It appears that agriculture and herding in the Mid-

dle Bronze Age were highly specialized and more efficient than ever before. Pastoral hinterlands, village farmlands, and urban markets all constituted a well-integrated and stable economy that fueled the strongest continual period of urban growth up to that time in the history of Palestine.

The most conspicuous changes in the material culture of the Middle Bronze Age in Palestine had already been well established before the end of the first phase, in Middle Bronze I, which I surveyed above. These changes were not only interrelated, since urbanism was obviously an exceedingly complex, multifaceted phenomenon, but they took place relatively rapidly. So far I have described, for the most part, changing patterns of site location and new economic strategies, as cities and urban population grew. But what made these developments possible?

One factor was surely a more efficient technology. For example, the Middle Bronze Age, unlike the Early Bronze, is characterized by the introduction and rapid diffusion of true tin-bronze metallurgy. Somewhere in Syria and Mesopotamia in the final quarter of the third millennium B.C.E., it was discovered that the superior qualities of native arsenical copper could be duplicated by alloying copper with up to 10 percent of tin (by convention, 2 percent or more tin identifies "bronze"). The result was weapons and tools that were more malleable and could thus be cast in entirely new forms, forms that at the same time would take and hold a sharper edge. Just before 2000 B.C.E., as recent studies have shown (Stech, Muhly, and Maddin 1985), the new bronze technology reached Palestine; thus, with the beginning of the Middle Bronze I period, a whole new repertoire of sophisti-



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## The introduction of true tin-bronze metallurgy and advances in ceramic technology during Middle Bronze brought new forms of weapons, tools, and pottery, all mass-produced.

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cated bronze implements appeared in Palestine, all probably locally made but in imitation of Syrian prototypes (see Oren 1971; Dever 1975).

The implications of the bronze revolution must have been enormous. Copper was found locally, but where did the tin come from, and how was it acquired? The only known sources of tin in the ancient Near East were in Anatolia (beyond the Caucasus Range, in modern southern Russia), in the Taurus Mountains (in Turkey), or east of the Iranian plateau (in modern Afghanistan). We may suppose that tin from such sources was brought to Mesopotamia and then shipped to Syria-Palestine by donkey caravan—a distance of more than 500 miles. This is not mere speculation. Evidence for such long-distance trade in the Middle Bronze II period comes from several cuneiform letters found at Mari, the great Amorite city-state

on the Upper Euphrates. These eighteen-century-B.C.E. documents actually describe tin trade with two cities in northern Palestine, Dan and Hazor, known from excavations to have flourished precisely in this period (Malamat 1970). This new technology alone—the mass production of bronzes—stimulated international trade and diplomacy. It created a whole new industrial and mercantile class, as well as probably a guild-system of craftsmen. It brought immense wealth to some, opened up new frontiers in agriculture and construction to others, and may even have helped to equip the first standing army in Palestine. Thus, we cannot separate technology from ideology. Both contributed to, and benefited from, the growth of urbanism. And as the Middle Bronze period progressed, so did technology.

In ceramic technology, too, there were similar advances in Middle Bronze I and II–III. Primitive, slow potter's wheels had been used throughout the Early Bronze Age to smooth and finish ceramic vessels. But beginning in Middle Bronze I we get a whole new repertoire of sophisticated pottery. The characteristically elaborate shapes and eggshell-thin wares could only have been fabricated by a new technique: that of spinning by centrifugal force on a fast wheel. The basic forms, as well as the beautiful polished and painted decoration, are clearly influenced by the pottery of central and even northern Syria (Dever 1976; Gerstenblith 1983: 59–87). A generation ago we might have seen in this new pot-

tery a new people, possibly Amorites from the north. Today we would explain change as more likely the result of advances in technology and trade, as well as of the development of new forms of social organization. The new, mass-produced pottery of Middle Bronze I in Palestine was the finest pottery ever produced in the pre-Roman period, and its basic forms continued to evolve steadily throughout Middle Bronze II–III, and even after (see Cole 1984). More than any other medium, this distinctive new pottery may express the new technical mastery, as well as the heightened aesthetic sensibilities, of the urban Middle Bronze Age in Palestine (see Amiran 1970: 90–123).

I have already suggested in looking at the bronze implements that technology, industry, and trade are interrelated; raw materials must often be imported, and finished products need markets. International trade was certainly a decisive factor, not only in the reurbanization of Middle Bronze Palestine but also in bringing it out of its political and cultural isolation. Tin was clearly imported via Syria, and Syrian-style pottery is relatively abundant. Egyptian imports of the Twelfth and Thirteenth dynasties are even more conspicuous and include alabasters and faience (Sagona 1980), jewelry of semiprecious stones, and especially scarab signet-rings, which appear for the first time in Palestine during this period and are found at nearly every Middle Bronze site. (On scarabs, see Martin 1971; Tufnell 1984; and on Egyptian



Early Bronze IV vessel found at Khirbet Iskander. Photograph courtesy of Suzanne Richard.



Middle Bronze Palestine also saw significant advances in ceramic technology. Earlier potter's wheels featured a disk-shaped stone platform with a long knob that was fitted into a socket in a stone basin. The potter either turned the platform with one hand and worked the pot with the other or turned the wheel intermittently and used two hands to build the pot. An improved version (and one still in use today) was developed in Middle Bronze. It consists of two stone wheels connected by a long shaft. The lower wheel (called a flywheel or a kick wheel) is controlled by the potter's feet, while the upper wheel spins fast and allows the craftsman to use both hands to work the clay into more elaborate shapes. Shown here are several examples of Middle Bronze pottery. The thinner, more even walls, finished bases, and elegant shapes of these vessels stand in contrast to coarser wares of the Early Bronze Age. Drawings by Lealan Swanson. Photographs courtesy of William G. Dever.

relations generally, see Weinstein 1975). Not only was there extensive overland exchange but Palestine participated in maritime trade for the first time. Cypriot pottery began to be imported even before the end of Middle Bronze I, and by Middle Bronze II–III it included several varieties of Black-on-Red and White Painted wares. The very end of Middle Bronze III was characterized by Monochrome, Base Ring, and Bichrome wares, as well as by "Chocolate" ware that may show Cypriot influence. (For more, see Amiran 1970: 121–123; on the Tell el-Yehudiyeh ware, see Kaplan 1980; and on the Bichrome ware, see Epstein 1966).

But what did Palestine export? We have no textual documentation from Palestine itself and little conclusive archaeological evidence of Palestinian objects found in neighboring lands. Working backward from the evidence of the subsequent Late Bronze Age, however, one can suppose that Palestine's well-known exports to Egypt had already begun earlier. These included agricultural commodities, especially grain, olive oil, and wine; cattle; timber; possibly copper; and probably even laborers, including slaves. Palestinian merchants and traders also transhipped goods overland between Syria and Egypt. A famous wall-painting from a tomb at Beni Hasan of the time of





Amenemhet I (around 1960 B.C.E.) depicts a party of thirty-seven donkey caravanners, probably nomadic traders, crossing the Sinai into Egypt. The inscription lists their Amorite-style (West Semitic) names and mentions one product, antimony, a compound used in making *kohl*, the black eye-shadow much favored in Egypt for cosmetics. The Hayes Papyrus (which dates to around 1750 B.C.E.) lists Asiatic slaves working in a household in Upper Egypt, all bearing Amorite names, many among them no doubt from Palestine.

### Social Structure and Political Organization

It has been observed that "archaeologists do not dig up social systems." Perhaps not, but these, like the other subsystems at which we have been looking, do leave observable traces in the archaeological record—insofar as material culture may reflect social organization as well as individual human behavior. Since earlier archaeologists, however, were more

interested in political history than in social history, little useful information has been collected.

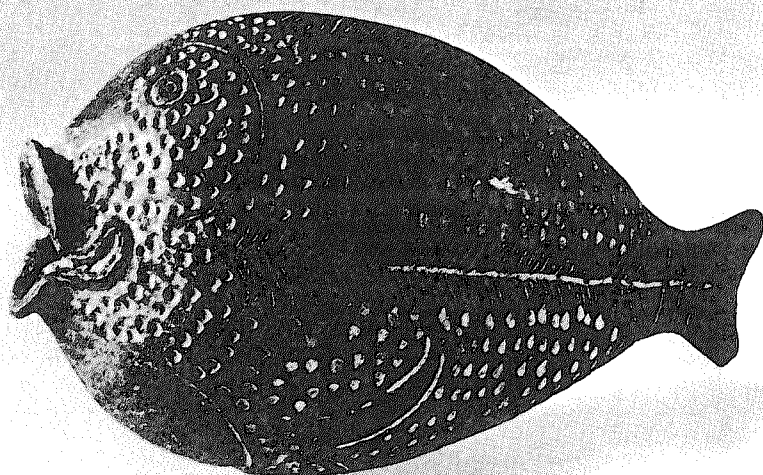
What evidence we do have reflects increasing social differentiation and stratification, which we should expect in an urbanized society. Middle Bronze Age tombs clearly demonstrate the existence of an elite upper class, as shown in some cases by expensive, often imported, luxury goods. Thus, burials at Gezer, Jericho, and elsewhere have produced gold jewelry, Egyptian alabasters and scarabs, along with ivory-inlaid wooden furniture, beautifully carved wooden utensils, and other expensive items. The Jericho cave and shaft tombs excavated by Kenyon had multiple, successive burials, with a considerable accumulation of wealth (Kenyon 1957: 233–55). They are probably the burial places of rich and powerful ruling families—merchants, aristocrats, possibly priests, and petty princes. (One may compare the recently published tombs of "The



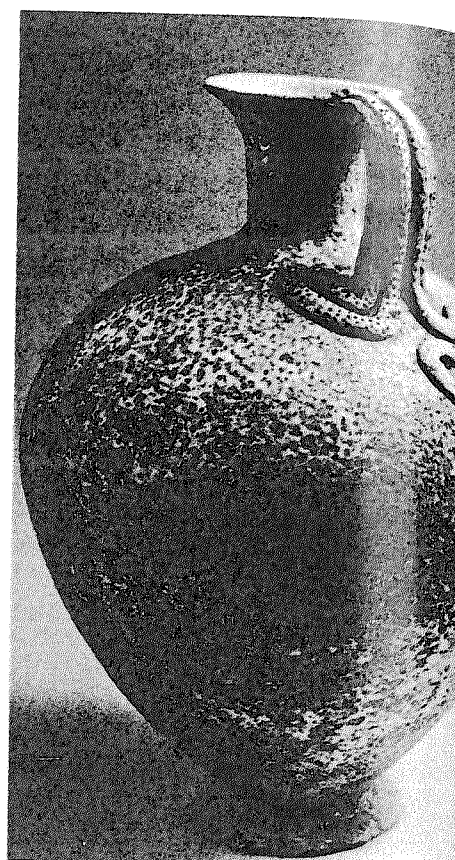
Lord of the Goats" and "The Princess" at Ebla: Matthiae 1984). Petrie's old "horse-burials" (or at least equids of some kind) at Tell el-<sup>c</sup>Ajjul, with elaborate bronze weapons, are probably tombs of warriors, perhaps belonging to a professional military class. (Similar burials of Asiatics are also found at Tell ed-Dab<sup>c</sup>a in the Egyptian Delta from the Hyksos period). By contrast, the predominant Middle Bronze burial is that of someone from the lower classes and is a rather pathetic affair, with adults laid in a simple cist-grave and children put into a storejar buried beneath a courtyard surface; there are usually few, if any, grave goods.

Architectural traditions point similarly to a society of "haves" and "have-nots." We have already suggested that the massive Middle Bronze fortifications required not only centralized planning and heavy taxation but possibly conscript labor. These defenses simply could not have been built by an egalitarian society or with volunteer efforts.





**Above:** Fish-shaped vessel, dating to around the eighteenth century B.C.E., found in a tomb at Tel Poleg. Measuring 11 by 19 centimeters, it is an example of Tell el-Yehudiyeh ware, named after the site in the Nile Delta where it was first found. This ware, which is always dark-slipped and burnished, with white-filled punctured decoration, has also been found in the Sudan, Cyprus, and as far north as Ugarit. Such a luxury product, spread over a wide area, suggests a general economic prosperity. **Right:** Jug with a snake handle. Measuring 32 centimeters high and dating to the mid-second millennium B.C.E., it is probably an example of what Sir Flinders Petrie termed "chocolate-on-white-ware," a type of pottery covered with a white slip, highly burnished, and decorated with a brown painted design. Although this example lacks the painted decoration, its fine workmanship is characteristic of the type and also suggests the tradition of excellence among potters of the time. Photographs by David Harris courtesy of the Israel Museum, Jerusalem.



Domestic architecture shows the same trend. Most private houses are simple mudbrick structures, with only a few earthen-floored rooms; the houses are rather closely crowded together around communal courtyards and narrow lanes. A few very large, multi-room structures, however, resemble "patrician villas," such as those at Hazor, Tell Beit Mirsim, and elsewhere. Finally, we have a growing number of even more elaborate buildings, such as the two-story colonnaded structure near the Northwest Gate at Shechem. These are almost certainly the palaces of local dynasts, such as the "kings" of several Palestinian city-states who are well known from the Amarna Age texts several centuries later. Again, the palace of Yarim-Lim in stratum VII at Alalakh in Syria provides a close contemporary parallel, complete with throne and audience room, as well as palace archive. And now Ebla has produced a Middle Bronze palace, succeeding the well-

known Palace G and its fabulous archive of administrative documents (Matthiae 1984). Social stratification in Palestine may not have been quite as pronounced, or the wealthy as wealthy, but class structure and differential access to resources are evident; and the growth of urbanism must surely have promoted, even required, growing social inequities.

The primary question about political organization in the Middle Bronze Age is whether Palestine constituted a state in the true sense. We have seen in earlier installments of this series (Levy 1986; Richard 1987) that the tribal level of organization typical of the Neolithic gave way to a chiefdom level in the Chalcolithic period, then to a more advanced city-state level in the Early Bronze Age. With reurbanization and the expansion of Palestine's horizons in the Middle Bronze Age, we might expect a further evolution toward the highly specialized form of political organization that we

characterize as the state, which had typified both Egypt and Mesopotamia since just before 3000 B.C.E.

Given the complete absence of texts and properly historical evidence from Palestine, it is difficult to be precise, but the country-wide unification, or centralized political decision-making, that essentially defines the state appears to be entirely lacking in Middle Bronze Age Palestine. There is no evidence whatsoever, on a nationwide scale, of a single dominant city or capital; of institutionalized kingship; of centralized policy and planning; of a standing army; or, for that matter, of any distinctive ethnic consciousness as nation or people. Palestine is certainly not a *primary* or *pristine* state in the usage of social theorists; it does not even appear to be a *secondary* or *peripheral* state. Nearly all specialists would see the term *state* as properly denoting not only social complexity and integration, which Palestine certainly had evolved even



Part of a wall-painting in a tomb at Beni Hasan in Egypt. The painting, which dates to around 1960 B.C.E., depicts Asiatic traders and thus is evidence for the presence of Asiatic peoples in Egypt before the Second Intermediate Period (at the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age).

by the Early Bronze Age, but also centralization of power, decision-making, and access to resources in the hands of a nonkinship-based elite. Palestine, by contrast, remained at an intermediate level of political development, which is usually referred to as that of the *city-state*.

Although the term *city-state* is frequently used, it is rarely defined. Often the implication seems to be that while the regional urban centers each control their own hinterland, they are in turn united in a larger centralized confederation—that is, they constitute a true state. Yet there is little evidence of that in Palestine of the Middle Bronze Age. Rather, it seems to have been bound together only by what we may call a common southern Canaanite culture. Politically it probably remained divided: each city-state enjoying quasi-independence and dominating the surrounding countryside, most likely rivalling other urban centers. I am giving, of course, a theoretical reconstruction, but such a situation of political fragmentation would provide a forerunner for the “Amarna Age” some three to four centuries later in the Late Bronze, when we have ample textual documentation for rival city-states—most of them precisely the urban centers we see in the Middle

Bronze Age. The same situation seems to have prevailed in Syria, where we see major city-states like Ebla, Yamkhad, Alalakh, Qatna, Ugarit, and the like, but not a unified national state such as Egypt or those in Mesopotamia.

#### **Ideology, Art, and Religion**

The ideational and symbolic aspects of a society, particularly a preliterate society, may be difficult to read directly from the “mute” remains of material culture. As Lewis Binford reminds us, archaeologists are poorly equipped to be “paleo-psychologists.” Yet we do possess innumerable and varied artifacts from Middle Bronze Palestine that clearly had some artistic or cultic significance—however difficult they may be to interpret.

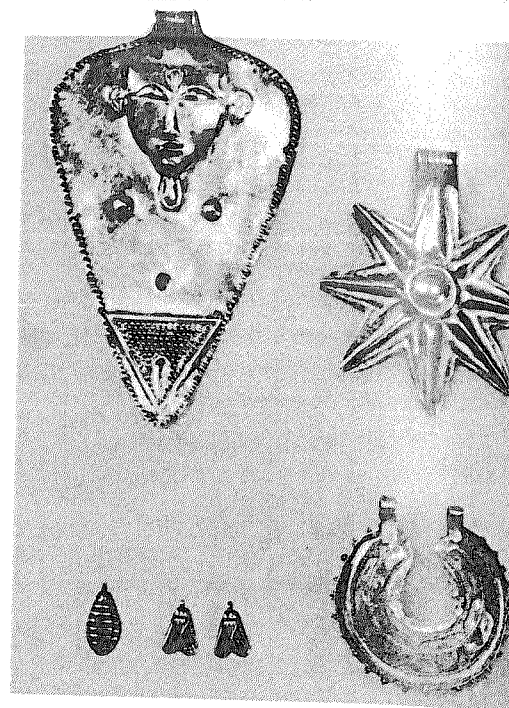
Let us look first specifically at artistic production (even though, strictly speaking, we cannot in general separate art from religion in the ancient world). There is no representational art from Palestine in this period, and little figural art. We have found nothing of Egyptian- or Mesopotamian-style statuary, or indeed monumental art of any kind. In the minor arts, however, Palestine has a tradition, albeit a provincial one. The principal arts include bone and ivory carving, particularly small geometric strip inlays for wooden fur-

niture and boxes or chests (Liebowitz 1977). These were locally made, the ivory coming either from Syria (where Egyptian records indicate that elephants were hunted in this period) or from wild boars of the immediate region. Most Middle Bronze sites produce these inlays, but the Jericho tombs have yielded both the inlays and the wooden furniture in an extraordinary state of preservation (apparently because Jericho was located in a tectonic area, where gases seeping through rock fissures rendered organic materials inert and prevented decay).

Jewelry from elite tombs has already been mentioned. There is relatively little gold, which was imported and prohibitively expensive; there is some silver, although usually not well preserved. The most common pieces are bead necklaces of semiprecious stones, often made of local red carnelian or the like but frequently of Egyptian frit or faience. Scarabs from Middle Kingdom Egypt became exceedingly common in Palestine during the Middle Bronze Age; they were mounted in signet rings and probably meant to be both articles of adornment (that is, prestige items) and practical devices for stamping seals on documents or other pieces of personal property. These scarabs are usually of ivory



*Left:* Although there is no representational art from Middle Bronze Palestine, and little figural art, there was a tradition of minor arts. Among these was bone and ivory carving, particularly small geometric inlays for wooden furniture and boxes. Shown here is a carved ivory inlay from wooden furniture from tombs at Jericho. From *Jericho I* (London: British School of Archaeology, 1960), by Kathleen Kenyon. *Right:* Shown here is a selection of jewelry dating to the mid-second millennium (the transition from Middle to Late Bronze) found at Tell el-cAjjul: a pendant depicting the goddess Hathor, a star pendant, an earring, and three fly amulets. The pieces found at this site, most of which came from private hoards, are the finest Canaanite jewelry known and they demonstrate the high level of craftsmanship that had been attained. Photograph by David Harris courtesy of the Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums.



or bone, carved on the back in the shape of a dung (or scarabaeus) beetle, with either a name-formula or merely a decorative design on the bottom. Many scarabs are imported and sometimes even bear the name of a well-known pharaoh, but others are local imitations and have only archaizing and often bungled decorative motifs. Mesopotamian-style cylinder seals also exist but are rare.

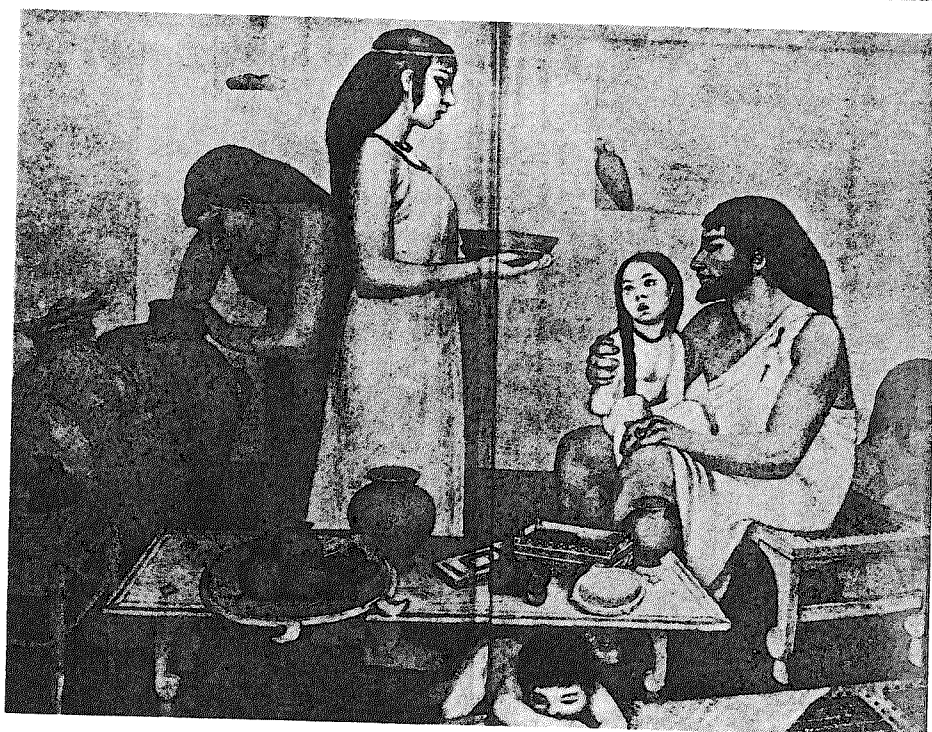
Also of Egyptian manufacture are a variety of alabaster and faience vessels, ranging from small unguentaria and cosmetic containers to larger vessels (Sagona 1980). These were often imitated in local calcite, an inferior material. In both cases, these vessels were probably status symbols, for they are relatively uncommon.

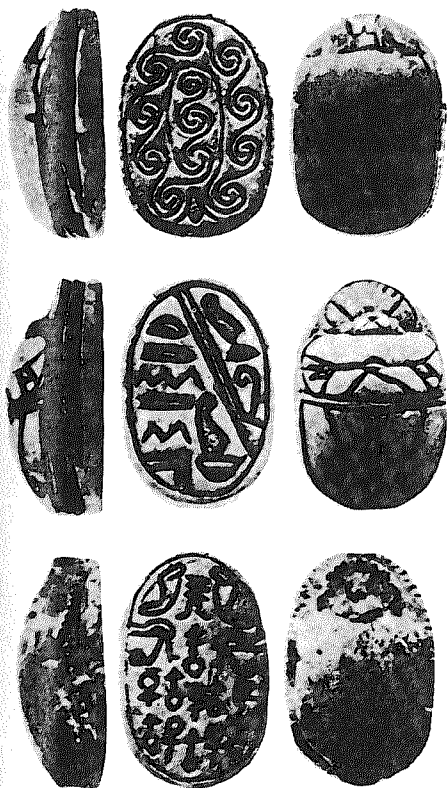
Some artistic and architectural remains attest to religious practices. We have several styles of temples from the Middle Bronze Age. Large single-room fortress (*migdal*) temples, with exceptionally thick walls, are known from Middle Bronze III levels at Shechem and Megiddo, with a close parallel in the temple in area D at Ebla. (On the Palestinian examples, see G. E. Wright 1965: 80-102; Dever 1974: 39-48; on Ebla, see Matthiae 1984: 20). These single-

room temples were once thought to be a typically urban style, but now a sequence of four successive mud-brick temples of this type, on a somewhat smaller scale, has been found at the tiny village-site of Tell el-Ḥayyāt; these temples date from Middle Bronze I to III (Falconer and Magness-Gardiner 1984, 1987). Syrian-style bipartite or tripartite temples are also found, especially

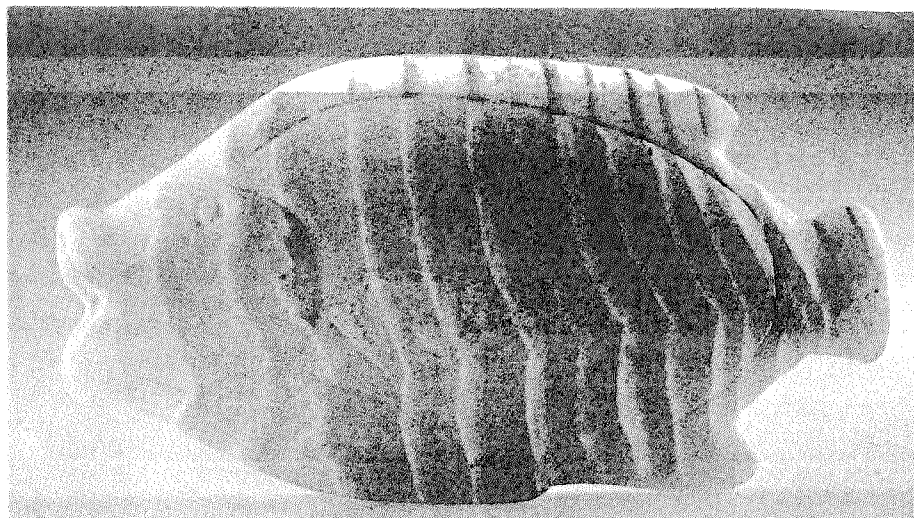
at Shechem (the prototype of the famous temple of Solomon—Dever 1974: 48).

Two cultic installations are unique. The first is the so-called Canaanite high place (Hebrew *bāmāh*) at Nahariyeh, on the coast just north of Acco; this features a long rectangular structure with an adjacent outdoor stone altar where charred organic remains were found.





**Left:** These three examples of scarabs found at the Middle Bronze site at Hazor are interesting because of their often bungled hieroglyphs, which suggests either that the scarabs were made locally to supply a taste for Egyptian objects or that they are related to the years of the Hyksos (or "foreign rulers") in Egypt. They are, in any event, clear evidence of Egyptian influence in Palestine in the Middle Bronze period. From Hazor: *The Rediscovery of a Great Citadel of the Bible* (New York: Random House, 1975), by Yigael Yadin, courtesy of the estate of Yigael Yadin. **Above:** This alabaster fish, dating to the mid-second millennium B.C.E., was found at Tell el-<sup>c</sup>Ajjul. Almost six inches long, it could have been used as an unguent container. This luxury good is of Egyptian manufacture and thus suggests that Egypt and Canaan engaged in trade during Middle Bronze. Photograph by David Harris courtesy of the Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums.



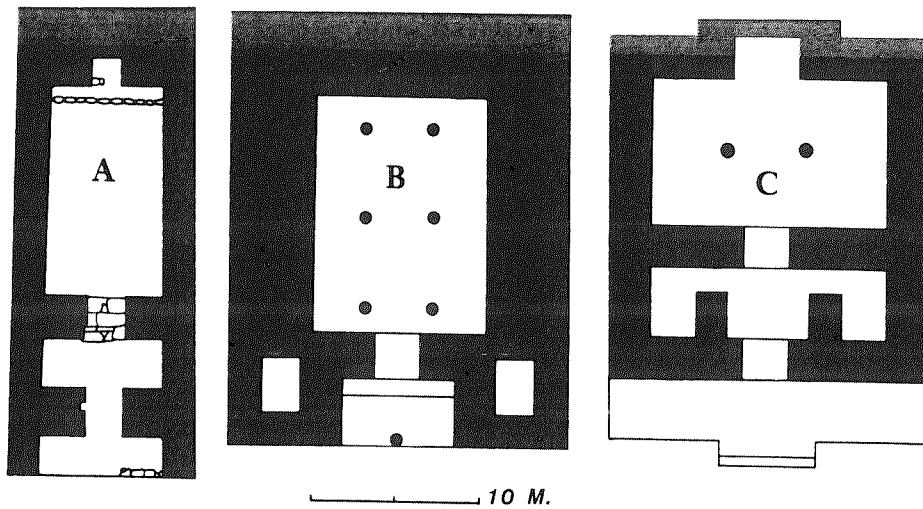
**Below left:** Artist's reconstruction of a room with Middle Bronze furniture like those pieces found in a tomb at Jericho. From Kenyon 1957. **Below:** Display at Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, Canada, that reproduces the scene in the reconstruction. Photograph courtesy of Louisa Curtis Ngote.



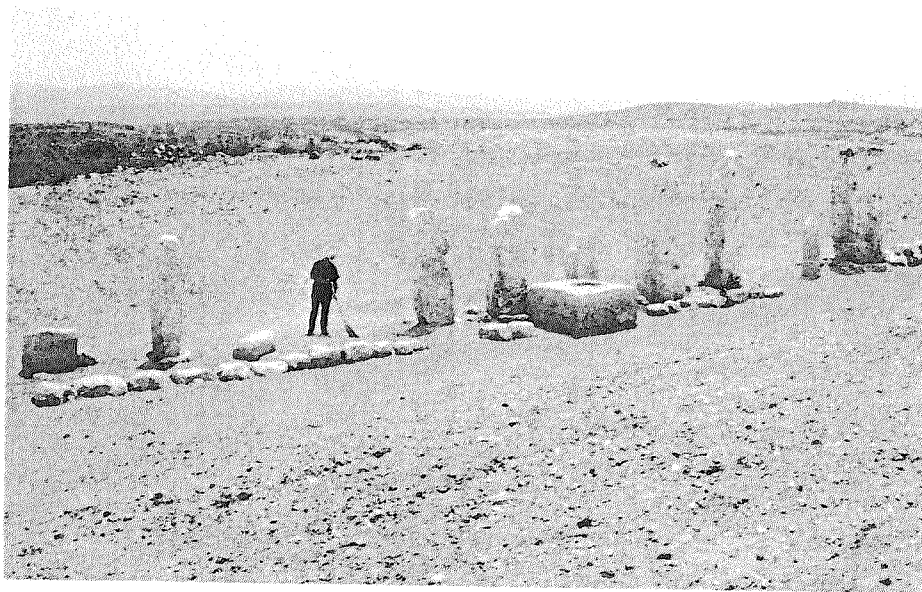
Among the remains were also a number of bronze and terra-cotta female figurines, as well as the molds for making them (Dothan in Biran 1981: 77). Since the Nahariyeh temple is right on the seashore, it may have been a shrine dedicated to Asherah, the consort of the Canaanite high-god, El; Asherah's principle epithet is 'Athiratu-yammi, "She who treads upon/subdues the sea."

The other installation is the famous "High Place" at Gezer, excavated by Macalister in 1902-1909, then recleared by the American expedition in 1968 and dated to Middle Bronze III. It consists of ten enormous stelae (standing stones) in a north-south alignment, with an associated stone basin surrounded by a plastered pavement. It was not a mortuary installation, as previously thought, but was probably an outdoor covenant-renewal shrine, the ten stelae representing ten towns in league (like the later Delphic leagues). Charred sheep and goat remains testify to animal sacrifice (Dever 1973; Dever and others 1971: 120-24).

Religion in the Middle Bronze Age is also attested by several types of cultic paraphernalia, found not only in temple but also in domestic contexts. Cylindrical terra-cotta stands, usually fenestrated and topped by detachable bowls, were probably used for food and libation



Plans of Middle Bronze fortress (migdal) temples from Ebla (A), Shechem (B), and Hazor (C). This type of Canaanite temple often had a distinctive three-part organization that included a courtyard, entranceway, and an inner sanctuary. It also frequently had a tower in the front that may have given access to a second story. Note that A and C have a niche in the rear wall of the sanctuary for a statue of a deity.



The Middle Bronze "High Place" at Gezer (reexcavated by the Hebrew Union College-Harvard Semitic Museum expedition in 1968) consists of ten standing stones in a north-south arrangement, with an associated stone basin surrounded by a plastered pavement. The whole grouping was erected simultaneously and contains all the biblical elements of covenant-making: the setting up of stones to commemorate the occasion, oath-taking (the ten stones possibly representing ten towns in league), blood sacrifice (possibly represented by the basin), and a covenant meal (there were charred animal remains found in conjunction with the stones). Photograph courtesy of William G. Dever.

offerings, as well as for burning incense. Other clearly cultic artifacts are small terra-cotta figurines; interestingly, we have only female examples (the so-called Astarte figurines). These depict the "mother goddess" nude, en face, often with exaggerated sexual characteristics; they are undoubtedly fertility figurines—that is, talismans to aid

women in conception, childbirth, and lactation. They may safely be connected with the veneration of Asherah, the principal Canaanite mother goddess, whose cult continued into the Late Bronze Age and was popular even in ancient Israel.

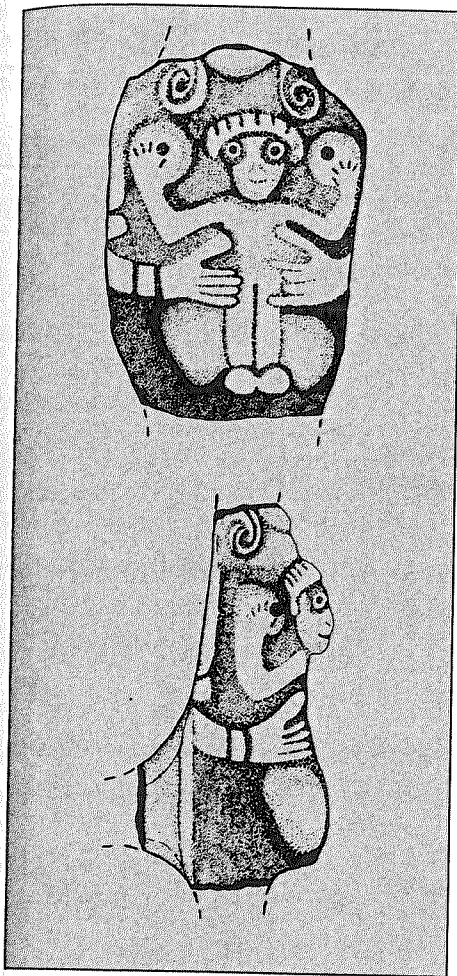
The most spectacular Middle Bronze figurines of Canaanite deities are two sheet-gold pendants from



Female figurines were popular in Canaan, usually inexpensively produced from clay. Relatively rare are examples in metal. Thus the two sheet-gold pendants shown here, part of a small hoard from a storeroom just inside the "South Gate" at Gezer, were a spectacular find (see the plan of "South Gate" on page 157). Measuring 16.1 and 10 centimeters in height, they are probably representations of Asherah, consort of the Canaanite high-god El. Photograph by David Harris courtesy of the Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums.

the destruction of the "South Gate" at Gezer; these depict in Syrian-style bas-relief two females, representations no doubt of Asherah. Similar reliefs are found in the Late Bronze Age, especially at Tell el-ʿAjjul (Seger 1976).

Finally, votive offerings are known. Most consist of miniatures of common ceramic forms; these are



The religious practices in Palestine during the Middle Bronze Age are suggested by this so-called Astarte figurine, part of an incense stand, found at Shechem. Such figurines may be connected with the veneration of Asherah, the principal Canaanite mother goddess, and were usually meant as talismans to aid in conception, childbirth, and lactation.

usually found in temple precincts, often at the entrance or near the altar, which is characteristically located on the rear wall. Ceramic zoomorphic figurines are also occasionally recovered in connection with these votives. All these vessels probably symbolize the principal activity in worship: the presentation of food and drink offerings to the gods in their house. The Canaanite deities, well known from contemporary and later texts in Syria, were mostly connected with the fertility cult, and thus rites of worship were bound up with the agricultural year and its produce, as well as with

human and animal reproduction. The Ugaritic texts of the Late Bronze Age give us a particularly vivid and dramatic picture of this religion, and we may safely project it back into the Middle Bronze Age. Certainly the temples and cult paraphernalia of the periods are in direct continuity.

Toward the end of Middle Bronze, around 1650–1600 B.C.E., the first system of writing emerges in Palestine. Writing appears late in Palestine, of course, in comparison with Mesopotamia and Egypt, but when it does appear, it marks a stunning advance. We have only a few fragments of these early Proto-Sinaitic or Canaanite inscriptions, but they introduce a vastly simplified alphabetic system of writing with some twenty-two characters, one that became the basis for all modern Western writing systems. For the first time in the world's history, literacy was within the grasp of the ordinary individual.

Before the turn of the present century, Sir William Flinders Petrie discovered the first of these so-called Proto-Sinaitic inscriptions at Serabit al-Khadem, in the western Sinai. Here Asiatic slaves from Palestine were kept by the Egyptians in the Middle Kingdom to work the turquoise mines. These miserable slaves scrawled graffiti all around on the rock surface, mostly dedicatory inscriptions specifying offerings, usually a lamb, to various West Semitic deities. Especially favored were the male god, El, and his consort Ba'alath/Elath, the "Serpent Lady." One inscription reads, understandably, "O my god, rescue me from the interior of the mine!"

The language of these inscriptions is Canaanite. The system of writing, however, is not the cuneiform script of Ugarit on the Syrian coast, much less the Akkadian cuneiform script of Mesopotamia with its hundreds of signs. Instead, a vastly simplified script is employed, one that uses only about twenty-two signs — one for each sound, rather

**Compared to Egypt or Mesopotamia, writing appeared late in Palestine. When it did there was a stunning advance: the introduction of a vastly simplified alphabet.**

than for each idea, word, or syllable. The script developed by means of the acrophonic principle, and it became possible thereby for a person to write whatever he or she heard. Thus the sound *b* came to be represented by a much-simplified picture of a house, because the initial sound of the word for house (*beth*) is *b*. Likewise, the sound *m* was represented by a rendition of water, because the initial sound of the word for water (*mem*) is *m*. (See the accompanying chart for the full alphabet and equivalents; see also Albright 1966).

These simple signs, with very much the same order and even the same names, eventually evolved into the modern alphabet employed by all Western languages. Borrowed by the later Hebrews from the Canaanites, it was also adopted by the Phoenician seafarers along the coast and thus spread to the Greek mainland by about 1000 B.C.E., thence to the Romans, then to Europe, and finally to the New World. The original *aleph-beth* — that is, alphabet — signs remain transparently clear in modern signs (see the original signs for the modern letters A, Y, and M in the accompanying chart), as well as

# The Development of the Alphabet

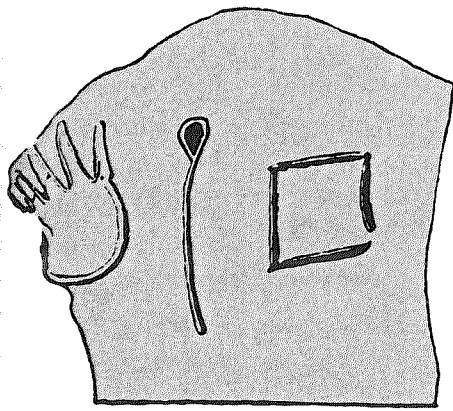
| Hebrew | Proto-Canaanite | Early Letter Names and Meanings | Early North-west Semitic | Phoenician | Early Greek | Early Monumental Latin | Modern English Capitals | Phonetic Value |
|--------|-----------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|------------|-------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------|
| א      |                 | alp oxhead                      |                          |            |             |                        | A                       | ·              |
| ב      |                 | bêt house                       |                          |            |             |                        | B                       | b              |
| ג      |                 | gaml throwstick                 |                          |            |             |                        | C                       | g              |
| ד      |                 | digg fish                       |                          |            |             |                        | D                       | d              |
| ה      |                 | ?                               | ?                        | [I]        |             |                        |                         | d              |
| ו      |                 | hó(?) man calling               |                          |            |             |                        | E                       | h              |
| ז      |                 | wô (waw) mace                   |                          |            |             |                        | F                       | w              |
| ח      |                 | zê(n) ?                         |                          |            |             |                        |                         | z              |
| ט      |                 | hêt(?) fence?                   |                          |            |             |                        | H                       | h              |
| י      |                 | hâ(?) hank of yarn              | ?                        |            |             |                        |                         | h              |
| כ      |                 | tê(t) spindle?                  |                          |            |             |                        |                         | t              |
| ל      |                 | yad arm                         |                          |            |             |                        | I                       | y              |
| מ      |                 | kapp palm                       |                          |            |             |                        | K                       | k              |
| נ      |                 | lamd ox-goad                    |                          |            |             |                        | L                       | l              |
| ס      |                 | mêm water                       |                          |            |             |                        | M                       | m              |
| ע      |                 | nahš snake                      |                          |            |             |                        | N                       | n              |
| פ      |                 | šamk ?                          |                          |            |             |                        |                         | s              |
| צ      |                 | cên eye                         |                          |            |             |                        | O                       | c              |
| ק      |                 | ga ?                            |                          |            |             |                        |                         | g              |
| ר      |                 | pi't corner?                    |                          |            |             |                        | P                       | p/f            |
| ש      |                 | ša(d) plant                     |                          |            |             |                        |                         | š/z            |
| ת      |                 | ?                               | ?                        |            |             |                        |                         | d              |
|        |                 | qu(p) ?                         |                          |            |             |                        | Q                       | q              |
|        |                 | raš head of man                 |                          |            |             |                        | R                       | r              |
|        |                 | tann composite bow              |                          |            |             |                        | S                       | š/š            |
|        |                 | ?                               | ?                        |            |             |                        |                         | š              |
|        |                 | tô (taw) owner's mark           |                          |            |             |                        | T                       | t              |

**Notes:** The scripts represented in this chart are from a variety of sources and time periods. The designation *Proto-Canaanite* includes the Proto-Sinaitic inscriptions from the Serabit al-Khadem mines in the Sinai (fifteenth century B.C.E.) and both early and late Palestinian inscriptions (seventeenth to twelfth centuries B.C.E.). Proto-Canaanite inscriptions were initially written in any direction; they have been discovered written left to right, right to left, vertically, and boustrophedon. By the end of the eleventh century B.C.E. the direction of writing had become standardized, right to left.

The chart is keyed to the modern Hebrew script and includes a number of phonemes that existed in Proto-Canaanite but were not adapted into Hebrew. Of the original number of phonemes in Proto-Canaanite (27 according to Albright, 29 according to Naveh), at least 5 were lost in Hebrew. The following phonemes merged from two or more originally separate symbols: Proto-Canaanite *z* and *ḏ* became *zayin* in Hebrew; *h* and *ḥ* became *het*; *s*, *š*, and *ṣ* merged to *šade*; *t*, *š* and *š* merged to *šin/shin*; and *g* and *c* became *ayin*.

One may also trace the development of the alphabet from Proto-Canaanite to English. Around the tenth century B.C.E., the Greeks adapted the alphabet from the Phoenicians. It spread from them to the Romans, and ultimately to Europe.

This chart is based on those in Albright (1966) and Naveh (1982).



The "Gezer Potsherd," a surface find in Proto-Canaanite script. The three characters perhaps read "Caleb."

in their earlier Latin, Greek, Phoenician, and Hebrew versions (Naveh 1982).

What is of note here is that this astonishingly simple and nearly universal writing system was the work of some anonymous genius (or perhaps a committee?) somewhere along the Levantine coast, probably in Palestine, in the Middle Bronze Age (the seventeenth and sixteenth centuries B.C.E.). Early examples of Proto-Sinaitic (or, better, Proto-Canaanite) inscriptions have been found at Megiddo, Shechem, Bethshemesh, Lachish, and elsewhere in Palestine, as well as in ancient Syria, all dating to the Middle and Late Bronze Ages. One of them was also discovered at Gezer in 1929 by a visitor on a field trip from the American School of Oriental Research in Jerusalem and published later by the director of the school, William F. Albright. The Gezer inscription is scratched on a sherd of a typical cylindrical cult stand of the Middle Bronze Age, the three characters perhaps reading *Klb*—the name "Caleb."

The few texts we have just described in the local Canaanite script hardly constitute literature, and they do not give us much insight into either the history or ideology of the Middle Bronze Age. We know, however, that some individuals were not only literate but multilingual.

We have a few fragments of Akkadian tablets written in cuneiform (the language of North Syria and Mesopotamia). From Hazor come two tablets, one dealing with a real estate transaction, another a lexical text (Landsberger and Tadmor 1964). At Gezer, from destruction debris of Middle Bronze III, we found a fragment of the clay "envelope" of a tablet with a list of names. Most are Semitic, but one of them is clearly Hurrian, the earliest evidence we have thus far of Indo-Aryans from the Lake Van region pushing down into Palestine (Dever and others 1971: 111–13). Only recently a much longer cuneiform inscription has been reported from Middle Bronze levels at Hebron, with a list of sacrifices. These are but tantalizing hints of the earliest known literary tradition of Palestine, but we shall undoubtedly find more in the future.

#### International Relations

As already suggested, Palestine's real international connections (that is, beyond Syria), apart from sporadic trade with Cyprus and Mesopotamia, were largely with Egypt. Indeed, Egypt provides not only part of the stimulus for reurbanization in Palestine but its chronology is also the basis for a fixed chronology of the Middle Bronze I–III period in Syria-Palestine.

In Egypt, the First Intermediate Period—a "dark age" there, too—ended just after 2000 B.C.E.. At that time, the Middle Kingdom was founded under the vigorous Twelfth Dynasty pharaohs, who reinstated the old dynastic succession. The date of 1991 B.C.E. for the accession of Amenemhet I (the founder of the Twelfth Dynasty) is our earliest astronomically fixed date in ancient Near Eastern history. We owe it to the Egyptians' observation of a solar eclipse and their correlation of that event (which we can date, of course, to the exact year) with the accession dates of early pharaohs of the dynasty mentioned in the King lists.

The Middle Kingdom (the Twelfth and Thirteenth Dynasties) lasted for nearly 500 years. It not only revived the glories of the Old Kingdom and the legendary "Pyramid Age," it also carried Egyptian culture to new heights and enormously expanded Egyptian influence and power abroad.

Among the first efforts of the early pharaohs of the Twelfth Dynasty was the resumption of the old sea trade with Byblos and the Phoenician coast (see Posener 1971; Weinstein 1975; Dever 1976). Within a short time, Egyptian luxury goods were flowing into Syria. The contents of the famous Royal Tombs of the local rulers at Byblos (north of modern Beirut, on the Lebanese coast) reflect just how fond the Syrians were of Egyptian culture. The Byblian princes not only filled their treasury, and later their tombs, with expensive Egyptian imports, they also wrote their Semitic names in Egyptian hieroglyphs, and even adopted the Egyptian title "governor." And that is not all. Elsewhere along the Phoenician coast, in the inland centers and well down into Palestine, nearly all of the major sites of the renaissance Middle Bronze Age have produced Egyptian artifacts of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Dynasties. Among the most intriguing items are small carved-stone statuettes, inscribed with the names of a number of high-ranking Egyptian officials of the early Middle Kingdom, even of the royal family. Thus, from Syria we have several sphinxes of Amenemhet III and IV, as well as of their princess-daughters. These may have been sent from the Egyptian court as temple gifts or, more likely, were intended to cement diplomatic and commercial relations with Syria.

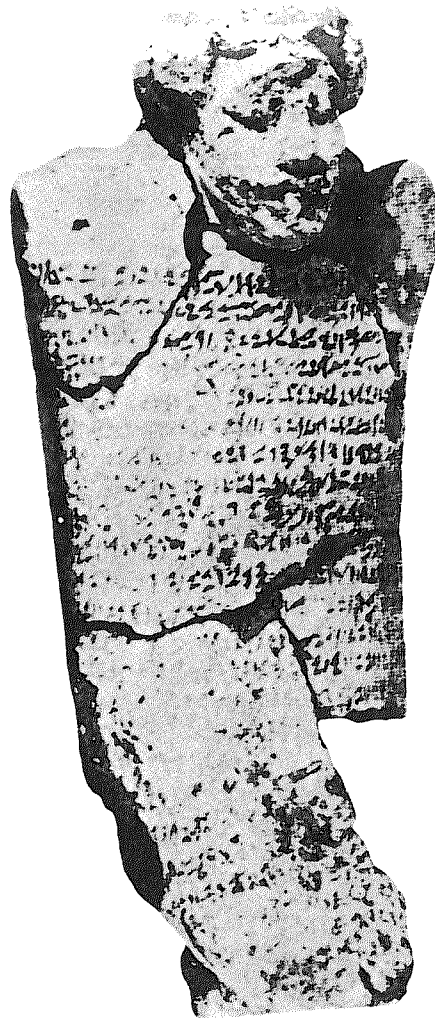
From Palestine, we have further evidence of international relations. At Megiddo, there was found a broken statue of one Thut-hotpe, a well-known nomarch (or governor) at Hermopolis, who served under Amenemhet II (approximately 1929–1895 B.C.E.) and Sesostri III (approx-



mately 1878–1843 B.C.E.). His inscribed and decorated tomb has been excavated at Deir el-Bersha. What was he doing in Palestine—unless he was a commercial attaché, or even a sort of ambassador, of the Twelfth Dynasty? Another contemporary Egyptian official, Sebek-khu, left his stele at Abydos; it describes an Egyptian campaign to *škmm*, almost certainly Shechem near Nablus, which German and American excavations have shown to have been founded precisely in Middle Bronze I. Why would Egyptians be campaigning in northern Palestine and maintaining commercial and diplomatic relations both there and in Syria?

To put it precisely, what were the Twelfth Dynasty interests in Syria-Palestine and how may they have contributed toward the urban renaissance there shortly after 2000 B.C.E.? The artifacts show, without any doubt, that the contacts existed; they do not in themselves, however, specify the exact nature of the relationships. Again, just as they are on the beginning of the first urban era in Early Bronze I, archaeologists are divided. Some prefer to see in the artifacts only peaceful trade relations, while others suppose that we confront an actual Egyptian empire in Syria-Palestine (see Posener 1971; Weinstein 1981; Dever 1976).

We do have, however, further evidence in several groups of Twelfth Dynasty execration texts from Egypt. These are curse formulas, specifically mentioning dozens of places in Syria-Palestine and naming their rulers, all of whom bear distinctive West Semitic or Amorite-style names. One group of texts (the Berlin texts, so-called because of their place of publication) is inscribed on small clay statuettes of bound captives; another (the Brussels texts, which are slightly later) is inscribed on red ceramic bowls. These curious items were used in magical rites; they were deliberately smashed, and thus a hex was placed upon the enemy named on the statuette or



*Clay figurine from Saqqara of a captive Asiatic prince with an execration text written across it in Egyptian script. Such figurines were smashed after the curse (execration) was written, and thus a hex was placed upon the enemy named in the text. These texts form an important primary source for our knowledge of Levantine political developments from the Middle Bronze period because they list the names of rulers and city-states in Canaan, southern Syria, and along the Mediterranean coast. Photograph courtesy of the Institut Royal du Patrimoine Artistique, Brussels, Belgium.*

bowl. However we may understand the motives of the Egyptians regarding these princes, one thing is clear—Egyptian intelligence was superb. They possessed a singularly detailed knowledge of topography, local conditions, and sociopolitical organization in Syria-Palestine during Middle Bronze I. (On the execration texts, see especially van Seters 1966; Posener 1971; Weinstein 1975).

**The Hyksos in Egypt and Palestine**  
As we noted in the previous section,

the initial phase of the urban revival in Middle Bronze I correlates with the re nascent Twelfth Dynasty in Egypt (approximately 1991–1785 B.C.E.). The second phase of development and consolidation in Palestine, occurring during Middle Bronze II, is roughly coeval with the succeeding Thirteenth Dynasty (approximately 1785–1652 B.C.E.). The zenith of the development of the local Canaanite culture in Middle Bronze III (approximately 1650–1500 B.C.E.) then coincides almost precisely with the Second Intermediate Period in Egypt (approximately 1652–1544 B.C.E.). The latter, like the First Intermediate Period, is a time of collapse and disorder; external factors apparently played a part in this case, however. (On the Hyksos periods, see especially von Beckerath 1964; van Seters 1966; Redford 1970; Helck 1971; Hayes 1973; Bietak 1979, 1984; Weinstein 1981; Dever 1985).

Among the threats, real or perceived, to the old line of Theban rulers was the presence of increasing numbers of Asiatics in Egypt. The Asiatics—Amu, or “Sand Dwellers,” as they were called—were alternately hated and feared as foreigners by the xenophobic Egyptians. One famous text describes vividly the miserable homeland of the Asiatics—from the Egyptian perspective—obviously somewhere in central and southern Palestine:

Lo, the wretched Asiatic—it goes ill with the place where he is, afflicted with water, difficult from many trees, the ways thereof painful because of the mountains. He does not dwell in a single place, [but] his legs are made to go astray. He has been fighting [ever] since the time of Horus, [but] he does not conquer, nor yet can he be conquered. He does not announce a day in fighting, like a thief who ... for a gang. (*The Instruction for King Men-Ka-Re*; see Pritchard 1955: 416)

Various groups of these West Semitic peoples from Syria and Palestine suc-

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**“Tutimaios. In his reign, for what cause I know not, a blast of God smote us; and unexpectedly from the regions of the East invaders of obscure race marched in confidence of victory against our land. By main force they seized it.”**

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ceeded in penetrating the Delta in larger and larger numbers, beginning already in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Dynasties. By the Fifteenth Dynasty, they rose briefly to power. In the Second Intermediate Period, where the rival Sixteenth and Seventeenth Dynasties vied simultaneously for power, revealing Egypt's weakness, a series of Asiatic kings actually ruled northern and central Egypt for a hundred years under the Fifteenth, or Hyksos, Dynasty.

The Egyptian word for Hyksos (*ḥk3w-ḥ3swt*) means simply “foreign ruler,” not “Shepherd King” as formerly thought because of the supposed connection between these Asiatics and the biblical patriarchs and their migration to Egypt. But we can show that these “foreign kings” were in fact Semitic—that is, from Syria-Palestine. Fortunately we possess lists of the names of the six kings of the Fifteenth Dynasty; at least three of them are demonstrably West Semitic. Indeed, these kings bear typical Amorite- or Canaanite-style names. One is called *Yaqub-har*, “May the Mountain Deity overreach”—a name that is almost identical in style and meaning to the original form of the name Jacob in the Hebrew Bible. Several scarabs of these Hyksos kings have been found in the Middle Bronze levels of Palestinian sites.

How did these Syro-Palestinian interlopers manage to seize power in Egypt—something that never occurred before or after in that supposedly inviolable country? The chauvinistic Egyptian texts of later periods always portray the hated

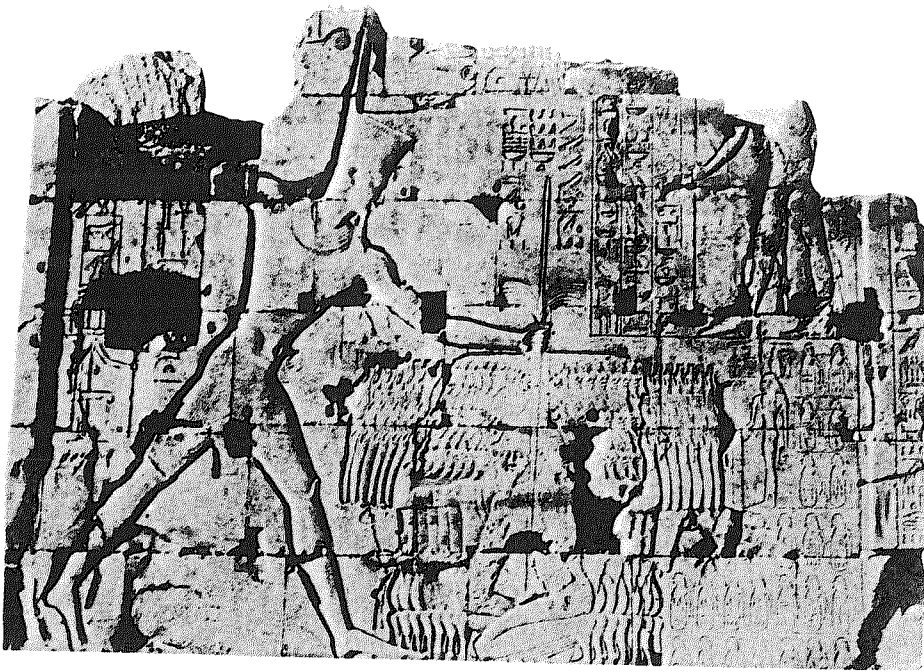
Hyksos as barbarians who temporarily overran the country. This tradition survived into the Roman period, when the Jewish historian Josephus described the Hyksos through Egyptian eyes thusly:

Tutimaios. In his reign, for what cause I know not, a blast of God smote us; and unexpectedly from the regions of the East invaders of obscure race marched in confidence of victory against our land. By main force they seized it without striking a blow; and having overpowered the rulers of the land, they then burned our cities ruthlessly, razed to the ground the temples of the gods, and treated all the natives with a cruel hostility, massacring some and leading into slavery the wives and children of others. Finally, they appointed as king one of their number whose name as Salitis; he had his seat in Memphis, levying tribute from Upper and Lower Egypt, and always leaving garrisons behind in the most advantageous places. (*Against Apion*, book 1, chapter 14, line 75 and following; see Thackeray 1961)

It is not surprising that most scholars until recently assumed a Hyksos invasion, which was thought to have been the direct cause of the dissolution of the Second Intermediate Period. But recent Austrian excavations have discovered the location of long-lost Avaris, frequently mentioned in the Egyptian texts as the Hyksos capital, at Tell ed-Dabca in the Nile Delta (Bietak 1979, 1984). What the excavations have

brought to light is fascinating: a large settlement that was founded about 1900–1800 B.C.E., with domestic and temple architecture, pottery, metal implements, and burial customs almost identical to those of Palestinian Middle Bronze I. The population and material culture of Avaris were, then, clearly Canaanite. Furthermore, the settlement is pre-Hyksos—founded in the late Twelfth or early Thirteenth Dynasty—and it is the result not of a sudden military invasion but rather of a long, relatively peaceful process of colonization (for this reinterpretation, see Dever 1985, contra Bietak). Thus Asiatics had long been settled in the Delta. Their takeover of Egypt under the Fifteenth, or Hyksos, Dynasty, after some 250 years, was more the result than the cause of the collapse of central authority in the Second Intermediate Period. Already acculturated, and having a large power base in the local Canaanite population of the Delta at Avaris and elsewhere, the Asiatic pretenders to the throne probably simply took advantage of internal weakness and seized power in a lightning coup. The Hyksos remained in control of a good portion of Egypt for a hundred years, until the kings of the late Seventeenth and the early Eighteenth Dynasties succeeded in reuniting Egypt and expelling them, ultimately driving them back into Palestine and Syria. This is where the fortifications described above came into play.

My interpretation of the data, including the new evidence from Tell ed-Dabca, is somewhat contro-



*Victory inscription of Tuthmosis III on the walls of a temple at Karnak, from the first years of the revival of the Eighteenth Dynasty pharaohs. Tuthmosis III is depicted holding Asiatic enemies by their hair, a common convention in Egyptian art to show the subjection of foreign enemies to the king. The successful reestablishment of Egyptian hegemony in the Delta meant the expulsion of the hated Hyksos, or "foreign rulers."*

versial. If I am correct, however, then we have for the first time a rational explanation for the enigmatic Palestinian defenses, which attained their maximum buildup in Middle Bronze III, 1650–1550 B.C.E.—precisely the time of the Hyksos period in Egypt. The Palestinian city-states constituted the power base for the Asiatic expansion in the Delta. They were the heartland of Canaanite culture, which sustained and supplied the colonies in Egypt. The Palestinian sites were heavily defended not against the rival city-states of the local regions but rather against the possibility of a forced retreat and Egyptian retaliation. This eventuality became more and more a concern late in the period, as Asiatic rulers pushed their power to its limits in Egypt. In time, what was feared happened. The fortifications were needed but they failed.

The end of the Second Intermediate Period and Hyksos rule came around 1540 B.C.E., when Kamose, the last pharaoh of the Theban Seventeenth Dynasty, re-

asserted himself. A well-known text describes the pharaoh's war council:

His majesty spoke in his palace to the council of nobles who were in his retinue: "Let me understand what this strength of mine is for! [One] prince is in Avaris, another is in Ethiopia, and [here] I sit associated with an Asiatic and a Negro! Each man has his slice of this Egypt, dividing up the land with me. I cannot pass by him as far as Memphis, the waters of Egypt, [but], behold, he has Hermopolis. No man can settle down, being despoiled by the imposts of the Asiatics. I will grapple with him, that I may cut open his belly! My wish is to save Egypt and to smite the Asiatics!" (*The War Against the Hyksos*; see Pritchard 1955: 232)

Other texts recount that, as they pushed north, the Egyptians besieged Avaris and destroyed it, and the excavations at Tell ed-Dab<sup>a</sup> reveal that the site was burned around 1540 B.C.E. and lay destroyed for cen-

turies thereafter. Kamose's brother Ahmose, founder of the Eighteenth Dynasty and the New Kingdom, continued these campaigns against the Hyksos, as subsequent pharaohs did well down into the fifteenth century B.C.E.. Several Egyptian texts detail military campaigns against a number of sites in Palestine and into Syria as far as the Upper Euphrates, mentioning specific sites by name. The most explicit text is the victory account of Tuthmosis III, found inscribed on the walls of the great temple of Amun at Karnak (near modern Luxor). It lists dozens of identifiable sites in Palestine and Syria, which the pharaoh claims to have taken on his famous first Asiatic campaign, around 1482 B.C.E. Later texts document almost annual campaigns of the Eighteenth Dynasty pharaohs, down to the time of Tuthmosis IV at the end of the fifteenth century B.C.E. (Weinstein 1981; Dever 1985).

Some historians still dismiss these Egyptians texts, which were popular for centuries, as propaganda (see Shea 1979; Redford 1979), as a bombastic attempt to focus blame for the Second Intermediate interregnum on the Asiatics, and also an idle boast of Egyptian triumph over them. But the fact is that every single Middle Bronze III site excavated thus far in Palestine shows one or more destructions precisely between about 1550 and 1480 B.C.E.—so devastating that most sites were abandoned for a generation or more thereafter, well into Late Bronze I. Shechem suffered three destructions in rapid succession in the Northwest Gate area, leaving heaps of burned mudbrick that are still visible on the mound's surface today. Gezer is a parade example, and also one of the most closely dated destructions. The "South Gate," "Inner Wall," and massive "Tower 5017" were violently burned and so badly damaged that they were never rebuilt. Inside the gate, houses were found filled with up to six feet of destruction debris. Among the smashed pottery and

stone implements on the floors was the crushed body of a young woman in her twenties; she had apparently returned to retrieve the gold deity pendants discussed above but was killed when the burning roof fell on her. It is likely that we can date the destruction during Middle Bronze III at Gezer precisely to the spring of 1482 B.C.E., among the latest in Palestine. It would thus be connected with the first Asiatic campaign of Tuthmosis III, on his way to the famous battle at the Megiddo pass in that year. This campaign is recorded in detail on the wall of the great temple at Karnak, and Gezer is specifically mentioned as one of the sites taken (Dever and others 1971: 102, 103; 1974; Seger 1975, 1976). Not even the smaller Palestinian forts of two to three acres escaped this long series of Egyptian campaigns, as shown by the recent excavation of Tel Mevorakh on the coast.

It is irresistible to connect these violent destructions in Palestine with the campaigns that the Egyptian texts describe following the expulsion of the Hyksos from the Delta. The Middle Bronze III sites in Palestine were at their absolute zenith, climaxing nearly 500 years of steady, peaceful, urban development. They were not only heavily fortified but also more populous and prosperous than they would be until the Roman period. They exhibited the maturity of the long, homogeneous Canaanite culture in Palestine. It is unlikely that these city-states suddenly turned on each other and destroyed themselves in little more than a generation. It is also unlikely that the foe came from the north, for most of the rival urban centers in Syria had already been destroyed (like Ebla) by the Hittite advance around 1600 B.C.E. A far more plausible explanation for the devastation in Palestine, as several scholars have suggested recently, would be the Egyptians' vengeful pursuit of the Hyksos as they retreated to their homeland and made

a last, unsuccessful stand at the fortified sites there (see Weinstein 1981; Dever 1985). It was this eventuality that had been anticipated all along and that had no doubt motivated the augmentation, if not the construction, of these enormous Middle Bronze I-III defenses. With that came the end of the second, brilliant urban era in ancient Palestine.

### Conclusion

It would be a generation or so after the Middle Bronze destructions before Palestine would recover. Many sites were abandoned for a generation or more, until the Late Bronze IB period (approximately 1450-1400 B.C.E.). Those that were reoccupied were shadows of their former selves, depopulated and impoverished, until full recovery finally came in the Late Bronze II period, under Egyptian hegemony (approximately 1400-1200 B.C.E.). The cycle with which we began our story—the periodic rise, collapse, and renaissance of civilization—had come full circle again. And this time Palestine would not regain her former degree of urbanization until the Classical era, many centuries later.

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