EARLY BRONZE AGE SOCIO-POLITICAL ORGANIZATION
IN SOUTHWESTERN JORDAN

BY

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THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts in Anthropology
in the Graduate School of the
State University of New York
at Binghamton
1983
Accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts in Anthropology
in The Graduate School of the
State University of New York
at Binghamton
June 29, 1983

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Anthropology
Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

"It would be an oversimplification to say that traditional Near Eastern historical archaeology was giving way to the more anthropological archaeology of prehistorians and New World archaeologists, but the rapprochement between orientations formerly thought to be antithetical is pertinent [Dever 1981:15].

Syro-Palestinian archaeology is undergoing a change in perspective. The descriptive-historical methodology used successfully in the past to establish precise chronologies and detailed descriptions of ancient sites is now, more and more, being combined with anthropologically oriented approaches. The result can be a rewarding coalescence of a well established field methodology, detailed chronological information, and anthropological models and theories.

The purpose of the following study is to establish an outline of socio-political organization during the Early Bronze Age for the Kerak plateau and southern Ghor regions of Jordan. The methodology used is settlement pattern
analysis on both micro and macro scales. It is believed that changes in settlement patterns from one period to another reflect changes in the structure of the society. The analysis will be undertaken from an anthropological perspective.

The primary sources of archaeological data used for the study are: P.W. Lapp's "The Cemetery at Bab edh-Dhra', Jordan" (1966) and "Bab edh-Dhra' Tomb A76 and Early Bronze I in Palestine" (1968); W.E. Rast and R.I. Schaut's "Survey of the Southeastern Plain of the Dead Sea, 1973" (1974), "A Preliminary Report of Excavations at Bab edh-Dhra', 1975" (1978), "The Southeastern Dead Sea Plain Expedition: An Interim Report of the 1977 Season" (1979), and "Preliminary Report of the 1979 Expedition to the Dead Sea Plain" (1980). In addition, J. Maxwell Miller generously allowed me to use the unpublished data from the Central Moabite Survey (J. Maxwell Miller in prep.). Supplementary information was gained through many conversations with Robin Brown, who participated in several seasons of the Moabite Survey and also was an excavator during the 1979 season at Bab edh-Dhra'.

**Historical Background**

The Near Eastern Early Bronze Age (3200-2200 B.C.) is
divided into four periods: Early Bronze I (3200-2900),
Early Bronze II (2900-2700), Early Bronze III (2700-2300),
and Early Bronze IV (2300-2200). This Age is marked by a
sequence of florescence of centers of state formation, a
period of consolidation and expansion, and subsequently a
breakdown of the various centers. While state polities
existed in Egypt and Mesopotamia in earlier periods (Nagada
II and Uruk respectively), unification of existing states
in Egypt and the blossoming of urban centers in Mesopotamia
from one or two to many competing polities of the Early
Dynastic Period occurred at the beginning of the Early
Bronze Age. The establishment of centers of apparently
complex societies also occurred in Palestine during this
age (Early Bronze IB, II). However, while there is an
obvious gradual continuity in the evolution of complex
societies in both Egypt and Mesopotamia as evidenced by the
archaeological record, the Palestinian record shows no such
gradual socio-political development. Early Bronze I is
generally a period of small village sites and the
appearance of the large walled communities in the Early
Bronze II period is relatively sudden and unprecedented,

This apparently rapid change in the settlement pattern
during the Early Bronze periods in Palestine cannot be
attributed to lack of archaeological data for the Early
Bronze Age. Although Palestine does not have the outstanding architectural remains that Egypt and Mesopotamia have, it has had a long history of archaeological interest and investigation because of its Biblical importance (Fetrie 1991, Bliss 1894, Albright 1922, Mallon 1924, Frank 1934, Garstang 1935, Glueck 1935, Marquet-Krause 1935, G. Wright 1937).

The problems with explaining socio-political changes in Early Bronze Palestine are exacerbated by an archaeological methodology that is descriptive and site-specific. The comparison of material from large well-stratified sites provides a precise chronology of changes in the archaeological record of Palestine but does not provide explicit models of socio-political organization or account for the internal dynamics of socio-political change. The use of only descriptive, site-specific techniques has been called into question by Dever (1981) and there is an increasing trend towards problem-oriented investigations and regional surveys (Baron 1981, Simons 1981). A problem-oriented archaeological research design can formulate questions about social organization and change that the data can be used to answer. Regional surveys provide information about sites of all sizes in an area rather than just the largest site, thus providing a more balanced perspective. A few systematic regional
surveys have been done (e.g., Ibrahim et al. 1976, Miller 1979), however, most of the published material is site-specific referring to other sites only to clarify questions of chronology. Be that as it may, the site intensive archaeology in Palestine has yielded an extensive body of detailed site reports and major contributions to archaeological method.

Thus there is no question as to the sequence of archaeological events in Early Bronze Age Palestine. There are questions with regards to what kind of socio-political organization accompanied these changes and also questions of causality. What was the nature of Early Bronze Age societies? Why did these walled centers become established suddenly and then disappear?

**Current Problems**

At present there is a general consensus (de Vaux 1971, Amirian 1968, Rast and Schaub 1974, Callaway 1980) that Early Bronze II and III occupations at large sites with defensive walls and cemeteries such as 'Ain, Tell Gath, Tell Beir-Mirsim, Megiddo, and Bab edh-Dhra' are urban centers, while light occupation periods such as Early Bronze I and IV at these sites are associated with simple societies. This descriptive classification carries with it only an
implicit assumption of accompanying social formation, thus
the actual socio-political structure of the society is not
clear. Without an explicit model of the internal structure
of a society it is difficult to explain why it changed.

The problems of causality for the Early Bronze Age
transformations have led to a variety of proposed macro-
scale explanations for the sequence of site growth and
development. The appearance of urban sites in the late
Early Bronze I and Early Bronze II has been attributed to:
(1) invading peoples from the east who brought urban
traditions (Wright 1937, de Vaux 1971); (2) a defensive
reaction to invading Egyptian armies (Callaway 1978); or
(3) a dramatic rise in population (Aziran 1970). The
collapse of the urban Early Bronze III period which marks
the chronological interface between the Early Bronze III
and IV periods has been attributed to several different
possible invaders: (1) an Egyptian invasion (Callaway
1978, Mazor 1968); (2) an Amorite invasion (G. Wright 1971,
Albright 1922); and (3) an invasion of peoples from Trans-

In a recent study Richard (1980) has pointed out that
the broad region-wide destruction of sites at the end of
the Early Bronze III is more apparent than real.
Furthermore, she argues that the non-urban to urban to non-
urban sequence of the Early Bronze Age (I-IV) occurred
within the context of a material culture which demonstrates a certain level of continuity, suggesting that the invasion theories are somewhat tenuous.

Before new explanations for the causes of the Early Bronze Age changes in Palestine can be formulated, it is first necessary to establish an explicit outline of the socio-political organization for these societies. This study will use general anthropological models of socio-political forms and their archaeological implications in order to clarify the observed changes in the archaeological record of the Early Bronze I, II, III, and IV in one region of Palestine. The study will use a regional body of data rather than data from a single site in the belief that to arrive at a formulation of socio-political organization, settlement patterns, residence patterns, and mortuary practices of the region must be incorporated. In conclusion, a possible explanation for the Early Bronze Age transformations will be presented.