12 ICAANE

Proceedings of the 12th International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East

Volume 2

Field Reports

Islamic archaeology

Harrassowitz Verlag

Proceedings of the 12th International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East

06-09 April 2021,
Bologna

Edited by
Nicolò Marchetti, Francesca Cavaliere, Enrico Cirelli, Claudia D'Orazio, Gabriele Giacosa, Mattia Guidetti, Eleonora Mariani

2023
Harrassowitz Verlag · Wiesbaden

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Cover illustration: © David Hawkins and Giulia Roberto
Typesetting: Federica Proni

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the internet at https://www.dnb.de/.

For further information about our publishing program consult our website https://www.harrassowitz-verlag.de/

Published by Otto Harrassowitz GmbH & Co. KG, Wiesbaden 2023
Printed on permanent/durable paper.
Printing and binding: Hubert & Co., Göttingen
Printed in Germany

ISBN 978-3-447-11903-0
Ebook ISBN 978-3-447-39354-6
DOI 10.13173/9783447119030

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Foreword to the Section "Field Reports"

Nicolò Marchetti, Francesca Cavaliere, Claudia D'Orazio, Gabriele Giacosa and Eleonora Mariani

Field reports generally represent the largest relative share of papers at the ICAANE. Reassessments of old excavations fall in this category as well. In Bologna, 95 papers were presented in four parallel sessions and 49 of them are published here. They have been simply arranged according to the alphabetic order of first authors (with the exception of course of the keynote paper, opening this section). They attest to a diversity of agencies, methods, perspectives and urgencies which represent a singular asset of our field.

While new digital architectures of knowledge are about to deeply transform the ways of our scientific dissemination, these reports do supply in the meanwhile loads of new information on near eastern sites, as well as on neighbouring areas, which are all too often insufficiently considered in our discussions.

DOI: 10.13173/9783447119030.001

Field Reports

Shedding Light on the Urban/Rural Nexus about 2500 BCE: The 2019 Excavations at Khirbat Iskandar, Jordan

Suzanne Richard*, Jesse C. Long** and Marta D'Andrea***[1]

Abstract
Khirbat Iskandar, Jordan is one of the rare sites in the southern Levant to include substantial Early Bronze (EB) III and IV occupation on the tell. The 2019 excavations, which afforded stratigraphic evidence for continuous occupation at the EB III/IV nexus, affirm the earlier postulated view of cultural continuity between the two. These data shed light on the controversial "collapse" of EB III urbanism, the mechanisms of recovery in the post-"collapse" period, and the subsequent ruralization during the EB IV period. This new dataset questions traditional views of collapse, suggesting rather that societal transformation in current theory resonates with the Khirbat Iskandar evidence along with a range of social constructs, like recovery, resilience, agency, along with transformation.

Introduction[2]

The backdrop to this paper is the long controversial history of scholarly debate over the causes for the demise of cities at the end of Early Bronze (EB) III (the urban "collapse"), the transition to the subsequent Early Bronze IV/Intermediate Bronze Age (EB IV/IBA) period (continuity or complete break), and the nature of the EB IV culture itself (nomadic interlude or rural period). For in-depth background on the history of these issues, see, e.g., Richard (1987; 2014; 2020), D'Andrea (2014), Dever (1980), Prag (2001; 2014), Philip (2001), Long (2003) and see below. Integral to these issues is the now widely accepted higher chronology for the Early Bronze Age of the southern Levant (Regev *et al.* 2012; Regev, de Miroschedji and Boaretto 2012; Höflmayer 2014). The recent radiometric (^{14}C)/Bayesian modeling strategies (the so-called second radiometric revolution) have shifted traditional dates by some 250 years: EB III dates are currently thought to date to 2800/2750-2500 Cal (not 2500-2300) BCE. Even more significant, the EB IV – now a 500-year period – dates to 2500-1950 Cal (not 2300-2000) BCE.

This new periodization effectively makes moot several issues outstanding and controversial in the past. For example, as regards the demise of cities, the accepted view held that Egyptian raids of the 5th-6th dynasties were almost certainly germane in some fashion to the destruction/abandonment of EB III cities *ca*. 2300 BCE (the urban collapse). The new radiometric-derived dates locking in the end of EB III to 2500 Cal BCE militate against and indeed eliminate such raids as contributory cause for the "collapse" of EB III. Similarly, dramatic climate change (see especially Weiss 1997) must now also be considered moot, as the 4.2 ka BP climatic event (*ca*. 2300/2260 BCE) is far too late to have factored into

1 *Gannon University; **Lubbock Christian University; ***Sapienza University of Rome.
2 All images here are the copyright of the Khirbat Iskandar Expedition.

DOI: 10.13173/9783447119030.523

the EB III collapse (Richard 2020: 423). Regarding the transition to EB IV, ^{14}C determinations at several sites have tended to support the higher date for the beginning of EB IV to around 2500 BCE, for example Abu en-Ni'aj (Falconer and Fall 2016: 7; 2017; Fall, Falconer and Höflmayer 2021) and Khirbat Iskandar (Holdorf 2010b; see Regev, de Miroschedji and Boaretto 2012: 546, fig. 2). A new AMS ^{14}C sequence of dates from the latter site affirms this early date (Fall *et al*. 2022). A notable challenge posed by the modified dates is a lack of stratified sites and sequences of ^{14}C determinations to stretch EB IV occupation for 500 years, e.g., Bayesian modeling of the multiple phases at Abu en-Ni'aj suggests EB IV ends *ca*. 2200 Cal BCE (Fall, Falconer and Hoflmayer 2021). Nevertheless, the late EB IV materials are harbingers of the local Middle Bronze Age (MB I) tradition and suggestive of late occupation in the southern Levant (D'Andrea 2018).

The above rather dramatic re-evaluations of the second half of the third millennium, BCE notwithstanding, arguably the most consequential change in scholarly views is the noticeable absence of the terms "Dark Age/Nomadic Interlude" for the EB IV (and see earlier, Dever 1973: 56). In the past, it was assumed that after collapse there followed a dark age. Excavation, however, has revealed a far more complex organizational system in the EB IV than mere pastoral-nomadic subsistence. A range of permanent settlement sites (e.g., Khirbat Iskandar, Bab adh-Dhra', Khirbet el-Meiyiteh, Tell Abu en- Ni'aj, Tell al-Hammam, Khirbat al-Batrawy, Hazor, Megiddo) belie the nature of the period as a nomadic interlude. An earlier paucity of settlement sites (and no "urban traits") appeared to support the view of nomadism for the period (Dever 1980: chart, p. 26). The number of permanent sites today displaying "urban traits" has, however, led to the proposal that the EB IV be reevaluated as a "rurally complex" period, in which pastoralism co-existed (Richard 2020: esp. 424). Other notable shifts in traditional views find most scholars now embracing the idea of cultural continuity at the EB III/IV interface; even the break at the EB/MB transition (Dever 1980) is now being questioned (Cohen 2009; D'Andrea 2018; Kennedy 2015)

This article reconsiders traditional views on "collapse" at the end of the EB III period. There have been myriad explanations for the destruction and/or abandonment of the fortified EB III settlements: Egyptian raids (above), climate change (above), nomadic infiltration, the ebb and flow of ruralism, the cessation of Egyptian trade, etc. (see history of research cited above). That the transition from urban to rural was a complex, probably multifactor process (Richard 1987; 2014) that began as early as EB II (Dever 1980) is likely. Whatever the ultimate causes driving the "collapse," its lengthy demise militates against a sudden and/or devastating catastrophic event (Diamond 2005; Tainter 1988; Yoffee and Cowgill 1988; Weiss 1997). In a reconsideration of collapse theory, recent scholarship posits "collapse" as "part of a normal cyclical pattern" (Middleton 2017: 42), a process that presupposes and encompasses a post-collapse period: in *la longue durée,* collapse invariably leads to a period of transformation (eventually). For example, that transformation often leads to the regeneration of complex societies e.g., the regeneration of MBA urbanism in the northern Levant (Schwartz and Nichols 2006; McAnany and Yoffee 2010, and see Höflmayer 2017); notably, current theory looks to comprehend the post-collapse period, no matter what the outcomes (and see Faulseit 2016b: 18). These newer views on collapse theory have much to commend them for the EB III/IV interface as well. For a complete range of views on collapse, see McAnany and Yoffee (2010); Faulseit (2016a; 2016b: 3-26); Tainter (2016: 27-39); and Middleton (2017: 1-50).

This article maintains that post-collapse societal recovery and regeneration is applicable to rurally complex societies as well, in particular, the EB IV permanent sites of the southern Levant (Richard 2020). Thus, we look to contextualize the stratigraphic profile at Khirbat Iskandar within the framework of collapse as a continuum or a process, utilizing several theoretical constructs, such as resilience, agency, transformation /metamorphosis, as vehicles of explanation for the stratified evidence from seven continuous phases at Khirbat Iskandar.

The Site of Khirbat Iskandar at the EB III-IV Nexus

Area B

Khirbat Iskandar is in the central plateau area in Transjordan near the Dead Sea, some 20-25 km south of Madaba (Fig. 1). The site's pivotal location on the ancient "King's Highway" and the banks of the Wadi al-Wala surrounded by arable land infers a rationale for its long occupation throughout the Early Bronze Age. As one of the most important EB IV sites in the southern Levant, Khirbat Iskandar is a regional center boasting remarkable stone architecture in its multi-phase occupation including fortifications, a gateway, a public complex facility, and evidence for interregional trade and workshops. Summarily, Area B (Fig. 2) has revealed two major EB IV settlements, the earlier (Phase B) is the "public complex" phase, while the later Phase A settlement – prosperous but more village-like occupation – arose immediately above the destruction of Phase B (see Richard *et al.* 2013). A real conundrum is the asynchronous EB IV phasing on a 2.7 ha mound, two phases in Area B and three phases in Area C. In Area B, the severe EB III destruction within the fortifications obscured the transition somewhat. The 2016 and 2019 expeditions sought a new stratigraphic profile of the transition away from the fortifications. That destruction in Area B provides the essential backdrop to the topic at hand.

The fallen mud-brick walls, stone wall collapse, burnt palaeobotanical remains, a burn layer of carbonized material, even burnt human remains testify to a severe EB III destruction in Area B (Richard *et al.* 2013). As typical of EB III sites, Khirbat Iskandar exhibits multiple rebuilds and strengthening of the fortifications, including a possible late EB III/IV segment (Richard 2016), appearing more plausible now considering the new discoveries in Area C (below). Also relevant to the discussion, the unpublished ^{14}C dating of that destruction is 2750/2700 BCE, a relatively early date that begs the question, based on late EB III ceramics on the mound, of where the late EB III occupation is. The Area C excavations may have resolved this problem.

Area C

In Area C, three phases of substantial, even monumental architecture witness to the growth and transformation of society in the EB IV period (Richard *et al.* 2010). The earliest (Phase 1) occupation displays domestic architecture and EB III/IV pottery. The (Phase 2) settlement above, in contrast, comprises a well-made stone/mud brick broad-room house with contiguous courtyard, a lithic workshop, and classic EB IV fossil types derived from Syrian ceramic tradition. Phase 3 is the multiphase gateway (Long 2010). A quantitative ceramic study affirmed the phasing (Richard 2010; Holdorf 2010a).

The 2016/2019 Excavations in Area C

Squares C6 and C8

As the completed Area C excavations in 2007 had offered a glimpse into pre-EB IV occupation, we returned there in 2016 and 2019 with the objective to investigate the EB III/IV transition and test the three-phase hypothesis (Fig. 3). The following section describes the discoveries of 2019 summarily; for more detailed information, see Richard *et al.* (2018); Richard, Long and D'Andrea (forthcoming); Long, D'Andrea and Richard (2018); D'Andrea, Richard and Long (2020; 2022).

In 2016, excavation in Square C6 reached traces of mud bricks below the EB IV Phase 1 surface. Expecting the appearance of the EB III destruction level, in 2019 these traces emerged as a nicely defined corner of a mud-brick structure (running into Square C8 to the north), whose associated metaled surface included EB III pottery (Fig. 4). This unexpected occupational level (clearly post-destruction) led to the tentative designation of the layer as EB III Pre-Phase 1a.

Immediately below the Pre-Phase 1a mud-brick structure, on a slightly different orientation, an earlier EB III stone structure came to light (Fig. 5). On the associated surface were found two badly preserved tabuns (one with an EB III holemouth cookpot), amidst a great deal of charcoal and burning (Fig. 6). Though fragmentary, the intact tabun wall sections resembled the EB III mud-brick horseshoe oven found in Area B, Square B1 (Long, D'Andrea and Richard 2018: 59). This "tabun" phase in Square C6 we identified as EB III Pre-Phase 1b.

Further excavation uncovered another phase: a stone wall and door socket (W. C6085) with associated surface (Fig. 7), an apparent doorway feature below W. C6064, which we designated EB III Pre-Phase 1c. While exposing the surface toward the south, traces of a carbonized debris layer below became apparent, and excavation ended. This hypothesized destruction layer, apparently corresponding to the EB III destruction elsewhere on the mound, was tentatively identified as EB III Pre-Phase 1d. The stunning discoveries in Area C6 found some tentative corroboratory stratigraphy in contiguous Square C8 to the north. Excavation confirmed the stratigraphic suggestion by Long that the multi-phased W. 8018 was probably an original EB III structure rebuilt and reused in EB IV Phases 1-2 (2010; Figs. 8-9). A series of surfaces traced to W.8018 pointed to multiple occupational layers and build-up in EB III and EB IV. The layer of mud brick encountered below the EB IV Phase 1 surface likely will link up with the mud brick level in Square C6 (EB III Pre-phase 1a). On the interior of W. 8018 the multiphase wall segments are clear, but whether the benches or paving stones jutting out of the balk relate to EB III or EB IV is not certain (Fig. 9).

Interpretation and Final Conclusions

The superposition of EB III/IV strata in both Squares C6 and C8 offers a new and extraordinary lens through which to view the post-collapse trajectory at the site. Assuming that the above stratigraphic analysis is correct, then following the EB III destruction: 1) there was no occupational break on site; 2) there was an EB III recovery in 3 phases, and 3) there is continuity at the EB III/IV nexus. These three inferences will serve as hypotheses to test next season.

This stratigraphic evidence for EB III/EB IV continuity at Khirbat Iskandar, along with the 7-phase post-collapse trajectory, is unique in the southern Levant. The urban/rural transition finds its closest parallel in the Stratum 6/Period E settlement at Beth Yerah, described

as a transitional phase from urban to post-urban. The latter, suggested to resemble early EB IV at Jericho, Phase Sultan IIId1 seems, however, to be more of an abatement, followed by an abandonment (Greenberg and Eisenberg 2006: 157). At the micro level, the new evidence from Khirbat Iskandar affords insight on antecedent forces driving the transformation to this prosperous EB IV settlement (as early as Phase 1); on a macro level, the new dataset has the potential to elucidate the Transjordanian regional development of EB III-IV strata on the mounded sites.

Granted the need for further exposure of these levels, the new dataset, nonetheless, hints at the dynamics underlying momentous events along the collapse/post-collapse continuum. It also alludes to the mechanics of continuity and change in sociopolitical organization, highlighting tradition and memory, the dynamic of growth, resilience, and finally transformation. The following interpretive framework tentatively links the 7 stratified occupational phases to a range of social constructs, like recovery, agency, and transformation in the second half of the third millennium BCE.

Beginning with the probable collapse/destruction in Area C EB III Pre-Phase 1d (equals the Area B destruction), there is no clear picture to draw yet as to its cause(s), whether natural or military or a combination. The pertinent issue here concerns the recovery set in motion by the agency of survivors looking to maintain the sustainability of the site in the aftermath of collapse (evident in EB III Pre-Phases 1a-c). Adapting antecedent Early Bronze Age traditions – the notion of keeping traditions alive being a defining concept of resilience (Middleton 2017: 42) – testifies to the resilience of the surviving population in the aftermath of collapse. Although speculative, the late defensive rebuild in Area B may be an indicator of surviving elites re-establishing a traditional symbol of urban power. Despite the geomorphological data suggesting anthropogenic and climatic degradation of the floodplain beginning in the latter part of EB III (Cordova 2007; Cordova and Long 2010), the maintenance of a traditional agricultural/horticultural/herding regimen is certainly indicated, another driver of the recovery.

The unbroken stratified profile at the interface of EB III/IV now raises questions about describing the EB IV period as a recovery (see earlier Richard and Long 2010; D'Andrea 2014). EB III Pre-Phases 1a-1c identify the recovery and reoccupation within the EB III. Absent evidence for a destruction layer in Area C at the EB III/IV nexus, it may be more accurate to describe the transition to the EB IV as a transformation to rural organizational strategies enabling the continuation of settlement, but on an alternative orbit in the absence of urban infrastructure. Although without more comparative analysis of EB III/IV material culture and economic foundations, the mechanisms of this transformation remain shrouded, still the stratified profile of 7 phases depicts a picture of continuity amid change. Phases 1a-c exhibit Early Bronze Age urban traditions gradually transforming and inaugurating ruralism at the site, which by all accounts, is visible in the EB IV Phase 1 settlement. It is almost as though the settlers and settlement imperceptibly metamorphosized from a complex sociopolitical and economic organization into a rurally complex organizational system at the EB III/IV interface. It is hoped that the stages of this transformation will become clearer with more extensive exposure of the EB III Phases 1a-c in future seasons. Be that as it may, the only logical inference is that the EB III survivors were the agents of recovery, continuity, and change as evidenced in the Phase 1 early EB IV ceramic corpus, in which the first appearance of new influences becomes apparent.

On firmer ground, it is safe to infer that the process was gradual and perhaps inevitable, again with reference to the geomorphological study showing accelerated erosion of the flood plain occurring concurrently at the start of the EB IV period, *ca*. 2500 Cal BCE (Cordova 2007; Cordova and Long 2010). This underscores the lessened fertility of the fields, yet pollen and seeds pointing to a diverse agricultural corpus of grapes, olives, dates, and barley witness to a level of sustainability. Such a continued diverse agricultural regime must have underpinned the continued EB IV occupation at the site, along with trade and interconnectivity with Syrian traditions. Given the hybrid nature of the Phase 2-3 ceramic corpus – Early Bronze Age tradition merged with the dominant Syrian EB IV "caliciform" culture – it is reasonable to surmise the direction from which the impetus to growth and prosperity originated. The Phase 2 settlement, which developed into a gateway in Phase 3 points to a reinvigoration of social organization at the site. Ultimately, however, the destroyed floodplain and eroded wadi cumulatively led to abandonment of the site sometime near the end of the third millennium BCE, probably hastened by the 4.2 ka BP event.

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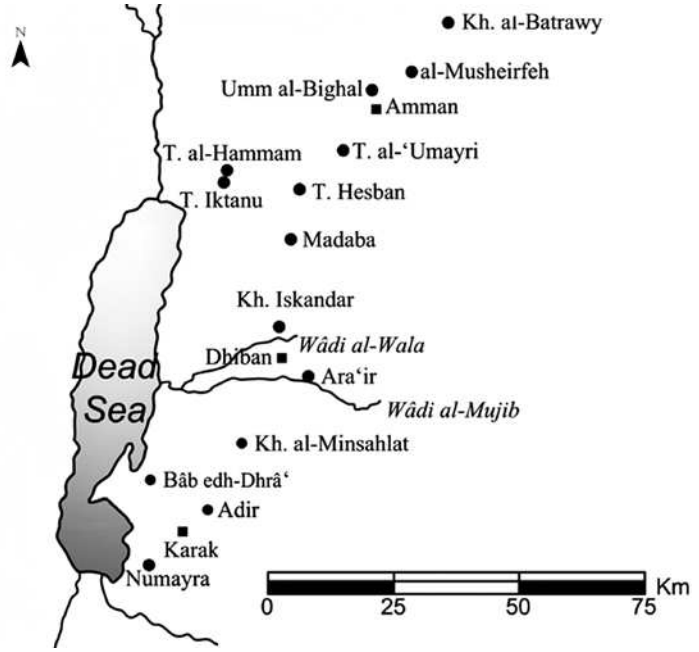

Fig. 1: Map showing the location of Khirbat Iskandar, north of Dhiban

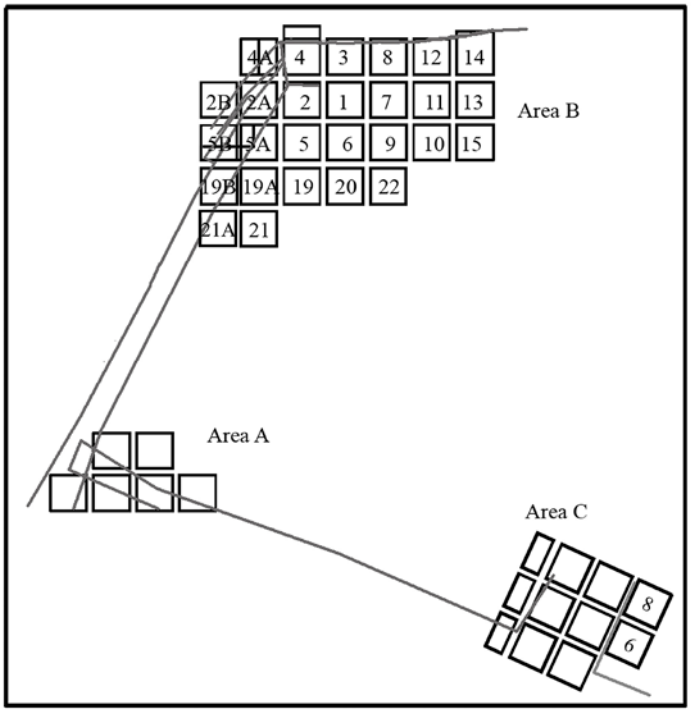

Fig. 2: Plan showing excavation areas at Khirbat Iskandar

Fig. 3: Plan of Area C, the EB IV gateway (Richard *et al.* 2010)

Fig. 4: Area C, Square C6: EB III Pre-phase 1a mud-brick structure below EB IV Phase 1

Fig. 5: Area C, Square C6: EB III Pre-phase 1b stone wall, tabuns on associated surface

Fig. 6: Area C, Square C6: EB III Pre-phase 1b blackened cookpot in tabun

Fig. 7: Area C, Square C6: EB III Pre-phase 1c wall and door socket; Pre-phase 1d ash

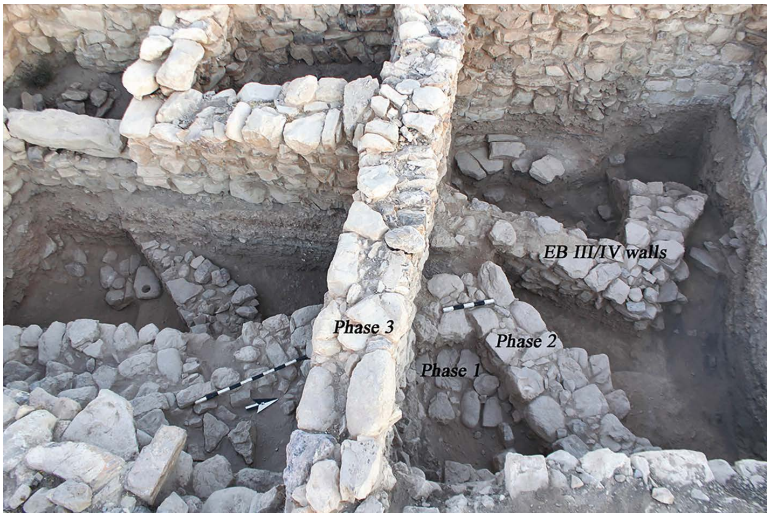

Fig. 8: Area C, Square C8: Phases 1-2 structures (bottom); EB III/EB IV walls at back

Fig. 9: Area C, Square C8: interior of EB III-EB IV Phase 1-2 walls superimposed