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Mortuary Archaeology and the Middle Bronze Age Southern Levant

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Abstract

This article seeks to understand better the mortuary materials of the Southern Levant in the Middle Bronze Age (MBA). Previous studies of the MBA have investigated burial and settlement remains without differentiation. The mortuary data have therefore never been treated to the sorts of analyses that they require. The approach employed here is based on understanding that funerary artefacts were deposited intentionally, while most other archaeological remains were not. When the intent behind depositions of funerary artefacts is considered, it becomes possible to discuss the shifting priorities and perspectives of the populace. Once this intent is acknowledged, the patterns that emerge from the mortuary remains reveal several new points about the MBA. First, there appears to be a linkage between the placement of burials and ancestor reverence, which underscores the importance of family and clan relations at this time. Secondly, an association between burial location and territorial claims emerges. Finally, a gradual shift in societal priorities becomes visible during the course of the MBA.

Introduction

Tombs and burials have always been of interest to scholarship on the Southern Levant, yet discussions of mortuary remains often suffer from the lack of a unified research approach. Although even the earliest excavation reports contained drawings and descriptions of tomb shapes, as well as of tomb pottery and metal artefacts, it was not until recently that tombs of the Levant have been gathered together and analyzed in a comprehensive manner (e.g., Gonen 1992b; Bloch-Smith 1992; Hallote 1994). Often tomb materials are cited almost haphazardly when ceramic parallels are called for. Furthermore, the

cemeteries and tomb groups most often referred to are those which were excavated the earliest, or whose publications are the clearest, rather than those which are most significant for understanding a particular trend or region. This use, or abuse, of tomb material is apparent in many key studies on the Bronze Age. There has seldom been a *modus operandi*, a context or reason behind the study of tombs, even though mortuary archaeology is a very well-developed subdiscipline outside of the Levant.

In an attempt to remedy this situation, this article presents the information available for the tombs of the Middle Bronze Age (MBA; ca. 2000-1550 BC) by

using an approach appropriate to tomb materials of the Southern Levant. The Middle Bronze Age is a particularly useful period on which to conduct such an analysis, since a large number of tombs and cemeteries, over 170 tomb sites in total, have been found throughout the area in question, and many of these are often cited for comparative purposes. Furthermore, certain types of tombs known for many centuries afterward first came into use in the MBA.

Mortuary Theory and the Southern Levant

Previous Research

A large portion of the theoretical approaches and analytical techniques which comprise mortuary archaeology do not function as appropriate tools for the data of the Southern Levant. This is probably why so little mortuary theory has been applied in the attempt to understand funerary practices in this part of the world. In many instances the techniques commonly in use call for more detailed data than are available from southern Levantine tombs and cemeteries. Materials found in undisturbed, well-excavated and well-recorded tombs are simply not sufficiently abundant. Furthermore, while comparative techniques of analysis open up many possibilities, they provide no sound method of distinguishing the probable from the unlikely.

Theories concerning mortuary practices, from the turn-of-the-century sociological approaches of Hertz and Van Gennep (Hertz 1960; Van Gennep 1960), to the functionalist and structuralist schools of the 1960s and 1970s (Radcliffe-Brown 1964; Malinowski 1960; Levi-Strauss 1976), have never been incorporated into

studies of the Southern Levant. Processual approaches, such as those outlined by Binford, Saxe and Tainter, have barely been discussed (Binford 1971; Saxe 1970; Tainter 1975; 1978). The two short studies which did attempt to apply processual methodology to the Early Bronze IV/Middle Bronze I (EBIV/MBI) tombs of Jericho came up with contradictory results (Palumbo 1987; Shay 1983). Furthermore, postprocessual arguments (Shanks and Tilley 1987; 1992) have not been examined at all for southern Levantine material.

In the attempt to remedy this situation, this study presents arguments from within the study of mortuary theory which may yield useful results for southern Levantine data. The core of the current approach lies in acknowledging the concept that societal intents and perspectives are evident in mortuary remains. It also takes into account the association between territorial claims and tomb placement (termed the Saxe/Goldstein hypothesis — see Morris 1991), and the existence of horizontal, as opposed to vertical, stratification.

The Idea of Intent

Mortuary archaeology is one of the few venues through which the conscious intent of individuals is more easily detectable than the unconscious structure of the society. Most archaeological remains, including domestic architecture and artefacts of everyday use, are arbitrary depositions. These items were neither intentionally deposited, nor intentionally removed by those who made them.

Conversely, funerary equipment includes items through which a social group consciously sought to portray itself. Mortuary artefacts were chosen with specific intentions by members of a social group. Tombs and their furnishings are the

archaeological features that most closely represent the individual perceptions of those who buried the dead — that is, those members of the society being investigated. The southern Levantine data in particular bring to mind this interesting, but perhaps underemphasized, theoretical approach of considering the perspective of the social group itself.

The concepts of intent and societal perspective have often been neglected in favor of the search for hidden meanings behind the material depositions in tombs. A criticism of Binford's approach by Barrett (1990) emphasized Binford's concern with mortuary artefacts as direct symbols of social organization, left for the archaeologist to read. Barrett suggested that this is insufficient, and that more attention should be paid to how monuments, including burial monuments, affected those who constructed them and lived with them, that is, the role of the monument within the society (Barrett 1990: 182–83). Barrett emphasized the fact that these imposing structures dominated the physical landscape of the social group, and therefore must have had influence on their cultural constructs as well.

A similar idea has been expressed by Thomas (1990: 168–69) who noted that although archaeologists often use aerial photographs and maps of a cemetery or cemeteries, reliance on these is misleading, since the people that built them did not view these structures from above, but rather were affected by their imposing size, as well as by their own spatial interactions with tombs and monuments in their real contexts. Parker Pearson (1982: 101) has suggested the sort of interaction that could have been intended — how building a monument to the dead is a method of giving the dead (specifically, one's own

ancestors) continued expression and participation in the lives of the living.

Such acknowledgment of intent and perspective is not only appropriate to tomb monuments and large scale cemeteries, but to smaller, portable mortuary artefacts as well. Both the tomb furnishings and the small cemeteries of the Southern Levant can be approached bearing in mind the intent of those who made the depositions. O'Shea (1984) has compiled some terminology which will assist in understanding this interpretation; he has employed categories specifically based on the intent behind depositions. Following the terms of Schiffer (1976: 27) and Clarke (1973: 16), O'Shea drew attention to "primary depositional pathways," referring to everything which was specifically placed in the tomb, and "post-depositional processes," referring to all later disturbances. He divided primary depositional pathways into three subgroups. The first he termed intentional depositions, which includes items deposited specifically for the burial, most often items of symbolic import. The second subgroup includes items in the grave by "coincidence," such as clothing remains. The third subgroup includes more arbitrary or accidental depositions, such as a weapon which caused death remaining in the body, and therefore in the tomb (O'Shea 1984: 23–25).

The first of these subgroups, intentional depositions, is the most interesting from the perspective of mortuary archaeology, since these items would have been selected specifically for placement in mortuary contexts and were not simply abandoned by happenstance. Intentional depositions include most of the portable, non-skeletal items found in tombs of the Southern Levant.

The intentions behind depositions of tomb artefacts have also been examined by Ucko (1969), from a more cautionary perspective. As part of an argument stating that burial furnishings do not automatically signify belief in an afterworld, he gave examples of known reasons for certain depositions. Citing the ethnographic work of Ratray (1932), Ucko explained that the Nankanse of Ghana placed objects belonging to a living person inside burials, to make sure that the living person's soul was not trapped in the tomb. Another example he cited is of a modern pet cemetery, where objects which belonged to the deceased pet were placed in the graves because the owners found it too emotionally difficult to either keep them or to throw them away (Ucko 1969: 265). While these are examples of specific intentions which could not be uncovered through archaeological means alone, the more general point is that the objects archaeologists find in tombs tell as much about the conscious intentions of the survivors as they do about the rank of the deceased or the social organization of the society as a whole.

These arguments can be applied in a comparatively straightforward manner to the evidence from the Southern Levant in the MBA. As an example of how the idea of intent can function, I will state one of the conclusions to be drawn from the data presented below, that tombs from the early part of the MBA, the MBIIA (ca. 2000–1750), contained a proportionally larger amount of weapons than tombs from later in the period, the MBIIIB and MBIIIC (together ca. 1750–1550). In the context of intent, the early abundance of weapons could represent the way in which individuals perceived important or elite members of their own groups, namely as

warriors. This perception existed in spite of the presence of only a few well fortified cities and the lack of historically known enemies in this period, facts which suggest that fighting was not a major part of daily life. The MBIIA battles that did exist were probably relatively minor, yet were endowed with enough significance to cause members of the society to perceive themselves as soldiers or warriors, and to represent themselves as such at death. The strength of this intent cannot be discounted.

It can therefore be said that in a sense tombs and their artefacts become an archaeological incarnation of a participant-informant, as they give clues about the social unit from the inside. To understand the social organization of the group, it is as important to recognize how its members wanted to be seen as it is to find hidden meanings behind artefacts. With this in mind, it is possible to argue that the society of the Southern Levant had self-perceptions which evolved during the course of the MBA. While these perceptions may not have reflected the actual role of the inhabitants of the Southern Levant in the eyes of their contemporary neighbors or their future chroniclers, they did represent the intentions of the society itself.

Tomb Types Found in the Southern Levant in the Middle Bronze Age and Their Functions

In order to discover these intentions, the tombs of the region need to be approached in appropriate ways. Mortuary archaeology has at its disposal several distinct sources of information, three of which are relevant to the study of burials in the Southern Levant. These are: elements of tomb construction; the spatial relationships of

burials to each other and to other archaeological remains; and burial contents. Each of these factors illuminates aspects of the MBA.

Constructed Tombs, Cut Tombs, and the Overlap Between Them

Because there are many variations in burial style during the MBA, the tombs are usually discussed in terms of pronounced diversity (Gonen 1992a: 151; Mazar 1990: 213–14). This has given rise to the inaccurate idea that there were many different sorts of burial structures. It is true that MBA tombs do not follow a rigid pattern, as they may contain one or more interments, may be either large or small, and are found both in cemeteries and within settlements. Furthermore, some tombs were cut immediately before burial, but others were cut in an earlier period and contain older remains pushed to the side, or covered over with a layer of earth.

In spite of this superficial diversity, when the details of MBA tombs are re-examined it becomes clear that only two basic types of tombs were in use, those in stone structures, to be called *constructed tombs*, and those in cut pits, to be called *cut tombs*. These types each have sub-categories which include overlapping elements (see Figures 1, 2 and 3). The constructed tombs include masonry structures within settlements and tumuli outside them. Constructed tombs have been found at 13 sites, nine of which are in the northern part of the area of study. This may signify a limited regional pattern. The cut tombs include chambers with shafts, simple pits, and caves. Cut tombs may be dug into rock or soil, either on the slopes of a tell or in burial fields at a distance from sites. The simple pits are found throughout the country, both within settlements and

outside them.

Sometimes, the sides of pits were lined with stones (e.g., many tombs at Megiddo: Loud 1948). Such stone-lined pits form a sub-category which bridges the two main groups of constructed and cut tombs, since the stone lining is an element of masonry construction, while the pit itself is a basic cut tomb. When pits were cut into soft marl or into debris, rather than into hard rock, their original shape was easily lost. Although sometimes pits were simple holes cut into the earth, more often they had shafts, much like the more firm shaft and chamber tombs known in abundance from sites including Gibeon, Tell el-Far'ah South, and Jericho (Pritchard 1963; Price-Williams 1977; Kenyon 1965). The tomb shaft itself is another feature that blurs the distinction between the two main categories of tombs since both chamber and masonry tombs often had shafts. In many cases the masonry construction included shafts built of stone, which led into rectangular stone built chambers, much the way stone cut shafts led into cut bilobate chambers in outlying cemeteries (see Figure 2; cf. also tomb 3095, among others, at Megiddo [Loud 1948: fig. 203] and tomb 498 at Kabri [Kempinski 1989: fig. 11]).

Since the corpus of tombs includes overlap features such as stones used to line pits and shafts in masonry structures, the suggested typology of two basic types with sub-categories is appropriate. Rather than underscoring differences, this emphasizes

Constructed Tombs	Cut Tombs
masonry tomb	shaft-and-chamber tomb
masonry lined pit	pit
tumulus	cave
	jar burial in pit

Table 1 Middle Bronze Age tomb types.

the predominating similarities among the tomb styles. The presence of only two main categories with overlap suggests integrated social patterns, rather than cultural diversity. The precise nature of these social patterns will be explored further below.

Tombs as Houses of the Dead

Aside from constructional overlap, the factor that best links the two types of tombs is their function. Besides the obvious use as burial receptacles, both tomb types may well have been built intentionally as houses of the dead, in order to parallel aspects of domestic life in

funerary contexts.

This intent can be seen in several ways, one of which is through the evolution of the tomb structures. The main element shared by both types of tomb is some form of structure. As the MBA progressed there was a shift away from plain pits dug into soil towards roomier chambered tombs cut into rock. This almost constant and growing presence of some form of structure around the interment implies a purposeful decision to house the dead.

Figure 3 demonstrates the relative proportions of sites within each subcategory of burial type in each phase of the MBA, out of a total of 55 sites with MBIIA burials, 89 sites with MBIIIB burials, and 25

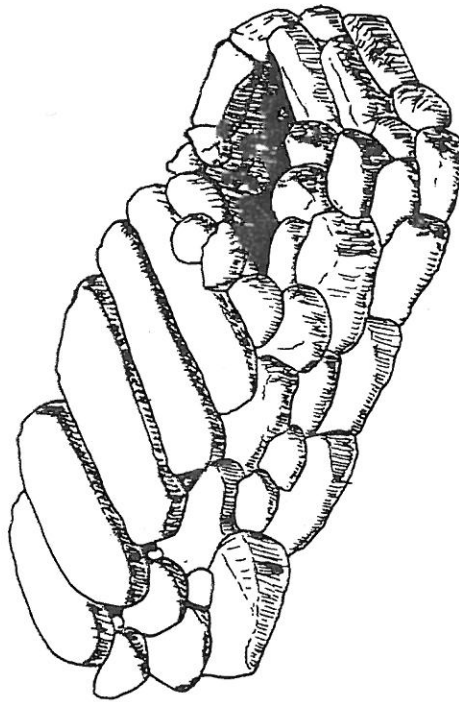


Figure 1 Schematic reconstruction of a constructed tomb.

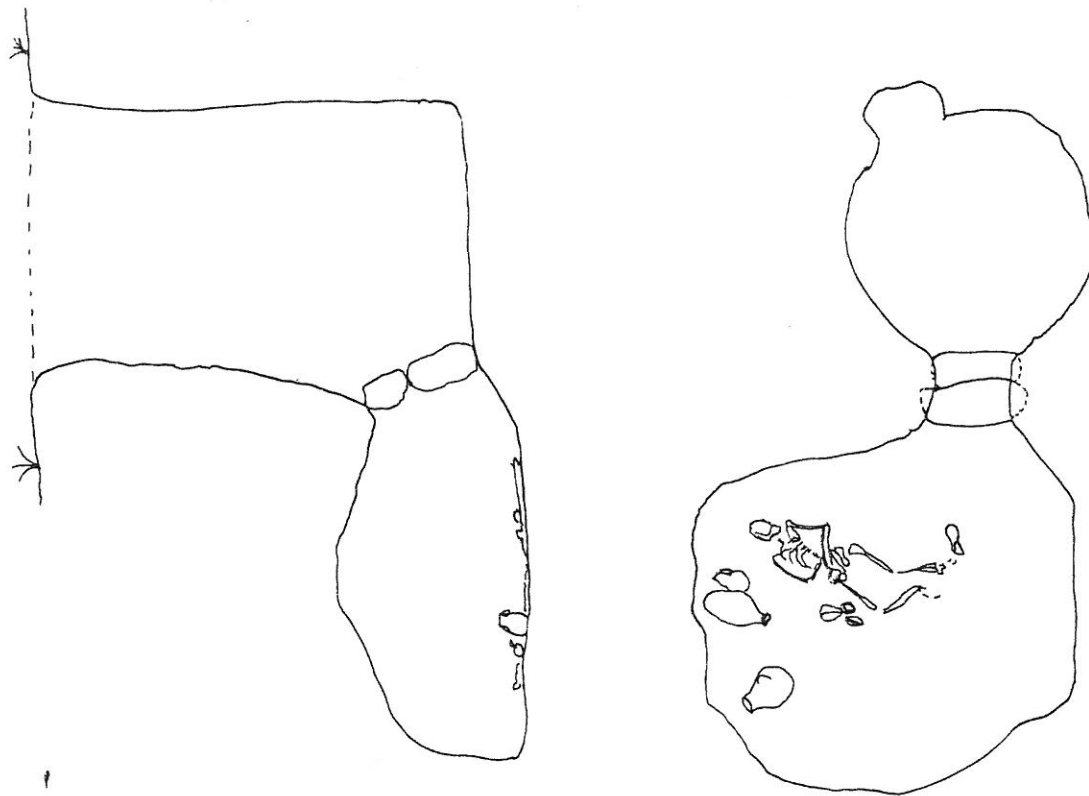


Figure 2 Schematic reconstruction of a cut tomb.

sites with MBIIC burials.¹ Masonry constructed tombs and shaft-and-chamber tombs — the types with the most obvious structures — are present at 58% of MBIIA sites, 67% of MBIIB sites, and 72% of MBIIC sites. This pattern shows a steady rise throughout the MBA. Burials in simple pits within and outside of settlements — the type most obviously lacking in structure — account for only 31% of burial sites in the MBIIA, 25% in the MBIIB, and 24% in the MBIIC. The use of pits apparently declines slightly, perhaps corresponding to the rise in use of chamber tombs. These numbers exemplify a concern with building and using distinct tomb structures.

This overarching attention given to structure leads to the possibility that the societal intent at work in the MBA had to do with housing the dead. There is a great deal of literature encompassing much of the ancient world which discusses tombs as houses for the dead. In fact, the association between the tomb and the house can be seen in the Levant since the Neolithic period (Watkins 1992: 68). Briefly exploring some examples from both distant and related cultures will help establish that tombs in the MBA Southern Levant can be accepted as the mortuary equivalent of dwellings, and that the Southern Levant in the MBA was only one of many areas where tombs had cultural significance as houses for the dead, or for the soul.

Ian Hodder's work on this issue clearly demonstrates the value of understanding the household patterns of the area whose tombs are being considered. Household activities are often mirrored in contexts outside the house, including mortuary ones (Hodder 1990: 69). Hodder distinguished patterns within European Neolithic tombs,

finding that houses and tombs had general correlations in shape, construction, orientation, position of entrance, decoration, and other salient features (Hodder 1984: 51–68). Because of these correlations, Hodder proceeded to analyze some societal functions of the houses in question, and suggested an association between aspects of male-female relationships and house form. Because of the extensive similarities between houses and tombs, he concluded that the tombs were symbols for houses, and that the male-female relationships understood through study of houses, households and gender-linked activities were visible, in the tombs as well. The social order of the community was reflected in the various aspects of burial (Hodder 1984: 60–64; for a more generalized discussion, see Hodder 1990: 72–79, 95–97). The patterns visible in the tombs of the MBA Southern Levant are less complex than these, but a similar approach can be applied based on this model.

Because Egypt is a close neighbor to the Southern Levant, patterns discernible from Egyptian mortuary practices are perhaps more easily perceived as analogous. Tombs in Egypt symbolically utilized constructional aspects of residences in a rather blatant manner. One section of an Egyptian tomb was meant to house the mummy and its necessities for the afterlife, while a second part was reserved for offerings brought by living visitors. Mummification was undertaken to help preserve the corpse so that it could continue to "live" within the tomb (Bourriau 1991; Wente 1982: 17–20). Egyptian tombs are also known for their architectural details, such as false doors, in imitation of the real doors of domestic, palatial and religious structures (Smith 1958:18; Aldred 1980: 64–66).

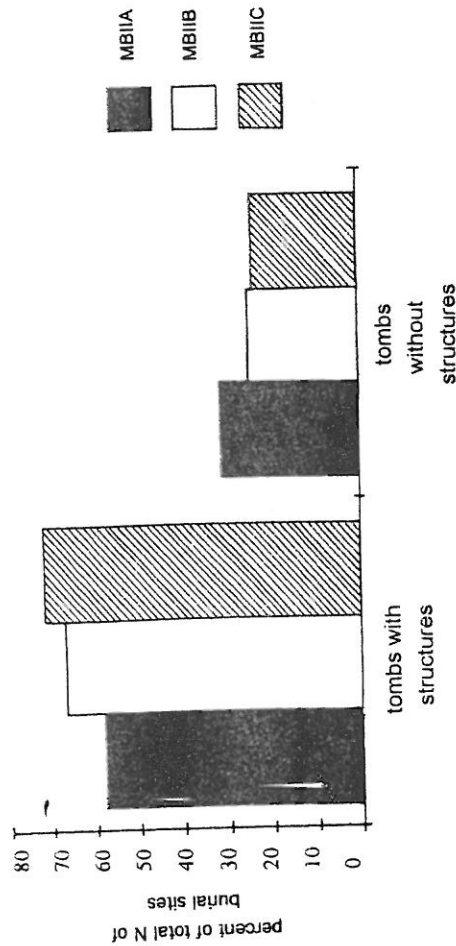


Figure 3 Distribution of burial types by period.

The surviving tombs of Egypt are mainly of kings or court officials, and the domestic structures they reflect would have been royal or elite residences. However, the concept of tomb as house was not only an elite concept, but also applies to the simpler burials of the Southern Levant. A study by Dever of tombs of the EBIV/MBI period has already demonstrated this. Dever (1987: 15–16) focused on the architectural character of the EBIV/MBI tombs, and suggested that they, like the settlements and domestic structures of the time, reflected the nomadic lifestyle of the populace, and may be considered "camps of the dead." Similar arguments have been suggested for earlier tombs of the Southern Levant (Rast 1981), and can now be made for the MBA.

The tombs of the MBA Southern Levant were constructed with techniques and layouts common in domestic structures.

Houses at this time were rather small structures, probably used by an extended family, and often built around an open courtyard (Kaplan 1971: 295–96; Oren 1992: 105–120; Maier 1988–89: 65–67). The utilitarian simplicity of such houses was reflected in the tombs. The tombs were also small and simple, and often contained two or three individuals, probably members of an extended family rather than a nuclear one, as will be seen shortly. The spatial arrangements of tombs translated into entryways, storage areas, and "living quarters," where the body lay. In some of the larger bilobate tombs, the shaft led into a small opening, or "courtyard," which in turn opened into the burial chambers themselves. This mimics the courtyard structure of contemporary dwellings. Placing the dead in such a structure fulfilled the intent of the living to give shelter to their ancestors, just as they

themselves required shelter. The conscious intentions of the tomb builders are visible in the tomb-as-house analogy.

Such an analogy also helps to explain the presence of the ubiquitous infant jar burials, found at sites throughout the country. The practice of burying infants and young children in ceramic jars under floors of houses occurs with great frequency in the MBA, although earlier examples exist, not only in the Levant but in Mesopotamia as well (Pollock 1991: 177). The practice gradually increases in popularity. Only 20% of MBIIA sites have infant jar burials, compared with 32% of MBIIIC sites, making up 46% of all MBIIIC tombs found. Infants continue to be buried in jars into the Late Bronze Age (LBA) and Iron I period (Gonen 1992b: 20; Bloch-Smith 1992: 29–33).

In a somewhat different discussion of burial practices, Ilan (in press) has suggested that tombs may sometimes represent the womb, and that interment in tombs represents a return to the womb and rebirth. Although Ilan applies this idea to all tomb types, the idea of tomb as womb fits MBA infant jar burials particularly well. The storage jars generally used for these burials are small, tightly fitting containers for the bodies, with narrow openings. These may represent the womb, the 'house' of the infant before birth.

Placement of Burial

Orientation and Position of Body

Just as there was no single structural tomb form utilized in the MBA, but rather two basic forms with a fair degree of overlap, there was similarly no single pattern for the orientation of tombs or skeletons, only occasional patterns within particular sites. It may be extrapolated from this that no

religious or cultural group maintained specific individual customs relating to orientation of body at death. Because burial evidence for such group distinctions is so rare, it is possible that only one dominant cultural tradition was present in the MBA. However, Arensburg (1973: 72), based on a sample of six skulls, concluded that there were two physical types present in the MBA. The conclusions presented here do not contradict this; rather, it is asserted that a large degree of cultural, rather than physical, integration and assimilation had taken place. If various groups of people coexisted, they may have become homogeneous to the point of abandoning their original burial practices and perhaps other religious practices as well.

Although a particular city would occasionally orient its dead in a particular direction (e.g. Lachish and Aphek [Tufnell 1958; Kochavi 1975]), the majority of sites demonstrate a haphazardness of orientation (e.g. Tell el-Ajjul [Stewart 1974; Tufnell 1962; see also Hallore 1994: 226–40]). This suggests that there was no one holy place in the country, nor one cardinal direction of significance for the dead in the eyes of the living (cf. many Muslim burials facing towards Mecca, or ancient Egyptian burials facing westward, towards the side of the Nile associated with the netherworld [Wente 1982: 24]).

While there is practically no consistency in orientation, slight attention was paid to the position of the body (see Hallore 1994: 226–40). Skeletons are commonly found in one of two positions. They are either contracted or partially contracted and lying on their sides, or they are extended and placed on their backs. The contracted posture is found with some degree of regularity, but variations and combinations

are also common, such as placement on the back, but with the knees contracted to one side (cf. some burials at Megiddo [Loud 1948: fig. 322]). None of these positions appear to form a regional pattern; in fact, cemeteries sometimes contain a mix of the two positions. Neither position is reserved for members of an age or gender group and neither is identified with a particular tomb type, or with a greater or lesser degree of wealth.

Primary Burial, Sedentariness and the Role of the Physical Body

One constant among tombs throughout the country is the prevalent use of primary burial in the MBA. This is most noticeable when contrasted with examples from other periods, such as the Bab edh-Dhra' materials from the EBI and EBIV/MBI (see Bentley 1987). In the MBA, only six tombs might contain secondary interments, and even these are questionable.² The relationship between transhumance and secondary burial has been the topic of numerous discussions (Rast 1981:8; Dever 1987: 11–12; Bentley 1987: 6–39; Khazanov 1984). While secondary burial can sometimes be associated with semi-nomadic pastoralists, primary burial may often be utilized by sedentary populations with no need to move their dead.

The consistency of primary interment confirms not only that the bulk of the MBA populace was sedentary, but further implies that the population did not wish to disturb its dead, except to push aside older interments in a tomb to make room for the next burial (see below). It is likely that there was a belief in the continued importance of the body after death, which limited *post mortem* disturbances. The well-known beliefs and practices of Egypt provide a contemporary parallel. In Egypt,

great attention was paid to preserving the body, so that it could be used again by the soul (cf. Altenmüller 1986; Aldred 1980: 53–54, 68; Wente 1982: 23). While burial in the Southern Levant was significantly simpler than in Egypt, inhumation was consistently used rather than cremation (for which there is no evidence from the MBA). This demonstrates at least some concern with physical preservation.

Yet at the same time, burials at some sites have bones of earlier inhumations pushed aside in an almost careless manner, as mentioned. This suggests a minor conflict between belief and practice which can be seen as analogous to the belief/action duality outlined by Parker Pearson (1982; 1984: 61). In such instances the ideology of a social group always requires one basic structure, yet simultaneously a constant modification of actions takes place, due to practical circumstances. In the MBA examples, while in theory the body was to be preserved, in actuality it could be moved or even occasionally disassembled in order to make the interment of descendants more convenient. Bloch and Parry have described such dismantling as representing the predominance of the group over the individual (Bloch and Parry 1982: 34). In the case of the MBA Southern Levant, making room for other interments of members of the extended clan took precedence over the ideology of individual undisturbed preservation.

Options for Tomb Location

The one factor that truly distinguishes some burials from others is not tomb construction, body orientation or position, or even tomb contents (which will be examined below), but tomb location — specifically, whether tombs were placed (a) within settlements, under the floors of

individual houses, (b) outside of settlements, near or on the slopes of tells, or (c) farther away in separate cemeteries slightly removed from the closest site (see Hallote 1994: 226–39 for specific sites in each category). The choice of placement seems to have depended on factors such as the rank of the deceased within the community, the importance of ancestor worship to the populace, and the significance of territorial marking for the community.

Burial areas associated with sites (including types (a) and (b)), the intramural tombs and those on or near the slopes of tells seem to be used with the same frequency as burial areas placed farther away from sites in separate cemeteries (type (c)). Those associated with sites make up 49% of all tombs sites examined, while those distant from sites make up 51%. As we will see, the former two groups can be associated with ancestor worship and the latter with territorial marking.

The interments in each of the three burial locations included a cross-section of the population — that is, both adults and children, males and females. Since selection for burial was not generally determined by age, gender or any other visible criterion, it is likely that this cross-section was selected for reasons of elevated social rank.

The MBA Southern Levant is not the only place where selection for burial was determined by status. One recently studied example of a single site with status as the criterion for burial is the pre/Early-Dynastic cemetery at Minshat Abu Omar in Egypt's Nile Delta. Kroeper (1992) determined that this cemetery contained a cross-section of the population in terms of age and gender. Her analysis of the materials led her to conclude that the individuals interred at the site were

selected according to social status determined by hereditary rules (Kroeper 1992: 140). This dynamic seems to be at work throughout the Southern Levant. The methods of disposal used for the rest of the populace of the Southern Levant are lost to the archaeologist, although the occasional tomb with no offerings or with very poor ones could imply lesser status.

The use of status as the criterion for selection for burial in the Southern Levant does not necessarily suggest a lack of more subtle distinctions. There was certainly an internal hierarchy visible among the high status individuals who were buried, apparent through the amounts and types of offerings left. Yet even the richest tomb assemblages are found with skeletons representing a cross-section of gender and age groups. No tomb varies enough from the rest to be called a royal burial. This certainly does not mean that cities were without rulers, only that rulers were purposefully buried in a manner indistinguishable from other members of the elite groups. It is also possible that royal tombs have simply not yet been excavated, or recognized as such. The argument could be made that the two large constructed tombs Schumacher uncovered in Megiddo's Mittelburg were royal tombs (Schumacher 1906: pl. 5). These tombs, however, are poorly published and understood. Until a comparable tomb is carefully excavated and recorded, there is no satisfactory method for distinguishing royal tombs from elite tombs.

The relative lack of differential treatment is well demonstrated by the extensive burial assemblages at Megiddo and Jericho (Loud 1948; Guy and Engberg 1938; Kenyon 1960; 1965). Burials at both these sites included many rather elaborately furnished tombs as well as many simpler,

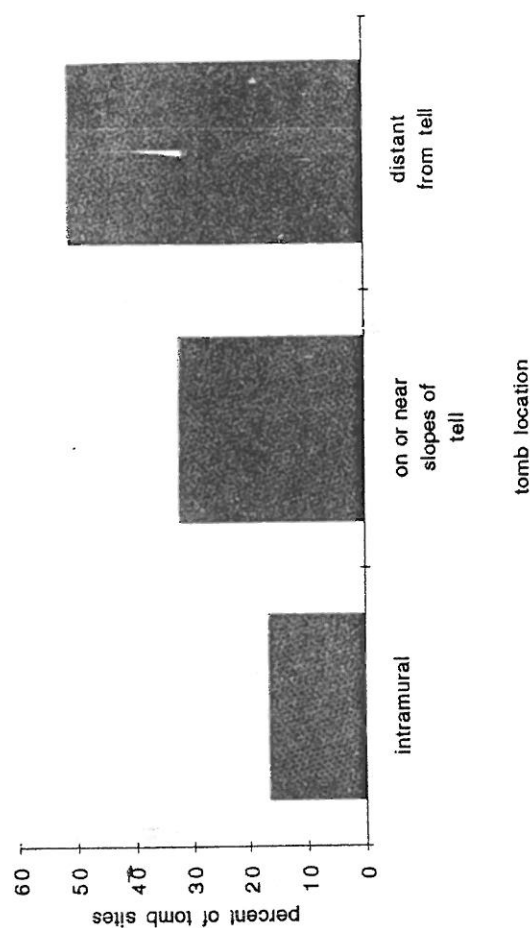


Figure 4 Frequency of tombs in each location.

plainer ones. Excluding Schumacher's tombs, neither site has any one tomb that is recognizably the most elaborate, nor any that obviously belonged to individuals of a lower rank (see Binford 1971: 18, 21–23 on differential treatment of the dead according to status).

Tomb Placement and Ancestor Worship

The selection of one of the three burial locations described above is the only factor that distinguishes among the burials of the selected elite. Each of the three options demonstrates a clear intention. These intentions can be partially understood through the means of historical knowledge extracted from textual sources as well as through anthropological studies of tomb monuments as territorial markers. The first two options, intramural burial (used at 17% of all burial sites) and burial on or near the slopes of a tell (at 32% of all burial sites), imply a concern with family-oriented

traditions (see Figure 4).

In her study of burial practices of the Iron Age, Bloch-Smith (1992) gathered together the many biblical references to burials and burial practices. Based on these, as well as on Ugaritic references to death and mourning (Parker 1987; Margalit 1980; De Moor 1990; Astour 1980), it becomes apparent that burial in the ancient Levant was historically tied to family and ancestral traditions. Not only is the practice of interring family members in the same tomb known from these textual sources, but the use of ancestral tombs as territorial markers is also evident (Bloch-Smith 1992: 110–18, 131). Elements of these well-known traditions may well have crystallized in the MBA.

The relationship between tomb placement and ancestor reverence is visible in several ways. First, the cemeteries on and near the slopes of tells are reminiscent of the biblical tradition of burial at or in one's own city. Secondly, the practice of intra-

mural burial indicates that the dead were sometimes interred within the family home itself. A great many settlement sites in the Southern Levant have pit tombs or masonry tombs placed under the floors or courtyards of domestic structures. These burials were within the actual living quarters of an extended family unit. This particular practice emphasizes the importance of kinship ties, including ties to direct ancestors.

A third, non-biblical, correlation between burial location and ancestor worship concerns the tomb category referred to above as cut tombs, which dominate on slopes of tells and in removed cemeteries. Often these tombs were originally cut in the EBIV/MBI period, and were reused in the MBA. When an individual was placed in an already extant tomb, a considered decision was being made. The individual was being interred purposely in the tomb of his ancestors, in a family, clan or tribal plot. An examination of the percentages of MBA burials that were placed in older tombs will help establish that some form of ancestor worship was actively practiced in the MBA.

Out of 144 sites with cut tombs, at least 26 of them, or 18%, included tombs originally constructed in the EBIV/MBI period. This number suggests that in spite of the significant cultural changes at the beginning of the MBA, the population of the Southern Levant continued clan and family practices which actually predated the process of re-urbanization, albeit in a limited manner. This placement also demonstrated the continued claims on land through the presence of ancestors, especially when the land in question was not used for habitation (see below).

Nearly 10% of MBA tombs were later

reused in the LBA, showing the same limited continuity of tradition. The connection between ancestors and land claims in the Southern Levant is evident at least as early as the EBA. Bentley (1987: 251-58) noted similar associations in her study of the Bab edh-Dhra' cemetery, where kinship bonds were evident even as the society became more stratified, a comparable situation to the MBA.

It is important to note that there is another possible reason for choice of tomb location besides concern with ancestral claims. Instead, tombs may have been reused by coincidence—that is, an already extant tomb might have been selected merely because of its convenience and availability. This criterion probably was used on occasion, but it is doubtful that the burial, an extremely important and visible death ritual, would have been left to happenstance.

The association between ancestors and burial location is strengthened by evidence for re-use of older tombs within the phases of the MBA. For instance, in the shaft-tomb cemetery at Jericho, not only were at least 63% of the tombs first cut and used in the EBIV/MBI period, but 56% of them were reused several times during the course of the MBA (Hallote 1994: 210-11). Kenyon termed each of the MBA re-uses a subphase, and generally divided tombs into as many as six of these (Kenyon 1960: 263-71; 1979: 172-75). Often she claimed to be able to tell which vessels were placed with each set of burials, yet there is not enough internal consistency in the layout of the tombs, or in the placement of individuals within tombs, to be able to make that sort of statement with certainty for any but the final burials. Even when relatively clear phasing existed, the intervals between interments was generally short. However

the EBIV/MBI burial phases can often be recognized easily, as they are separated from the MBA burials by a layer of earth. No such divisions exist between MBA subphases.

Kenyon was probably correct in her suggestion that these burials represent family groups. On average, twenty individuals were buried in each of the tombs used for multiple successive burial, about four in each subphase. This number is only slightly higher than the two or three concurrent interments found at most smaller southern Levantine sites. Single interment was also common throughout the country.³ At many sites, including Jericho, children were interred together with adults (e.g., Jericho tombs P23, J14, A46, P17, G73, H18, H22 [Kenyon 1960; 1965]; Megiddo tomb 3093 [Loud 1948: fig. 293]; Kabri tomb 902 [Kempinski 1989]). Yet clearly, each burial group in a subphase was not comprised of a nuclear family. More likely, because re-opening and preparing a shaft-tomb was fairly labor-intensive and generally would not be done for just a single individual, members of some larger social unit, such as extended family or clan, would be interred together. This is in keeping with the social structure evident from domestic units, since extended families also probably resided together. As members of an extended family probably would share houses, it is fitting that they would also share graves.

Tomb Placement and Territorial Marking

Another important aspect of burial location is that some tombs in the MBA Levant were placed in particular areas as territorial markers. The idea that a society will express territorial claims by erecting monuments in particular areas has long been part of the anthropological literature

(Renfrew 1984). Renfrew suggested that territorial monuments can be associated with an implicit aspect of the culture at hand, including treatment of the dead. His explanation of why a particular society might utilize territorial markers associated with the dead, rather than with another cultural aspect, is that burials lend added significance to their location. When kinship is particularly emphasized within the structure of a society, kinship relationships would be used for marking territory, and thus ancestors, immovable representatives of the kin group, often would be buried in special places as territorial markers (Renfrew 1984: 176, 178-80).

Ethnographic studies have illustrated occurrences of this around the world. In his studies of the Mbeere of Kenya, Glazier (1984: 44) found that graves linked territory with ancestors. The Mbeere claim to land was based on this link, because they were the living descendants of those ancestors. Bloch's work (1971; 1981) on the Merina demonstrated the same association.

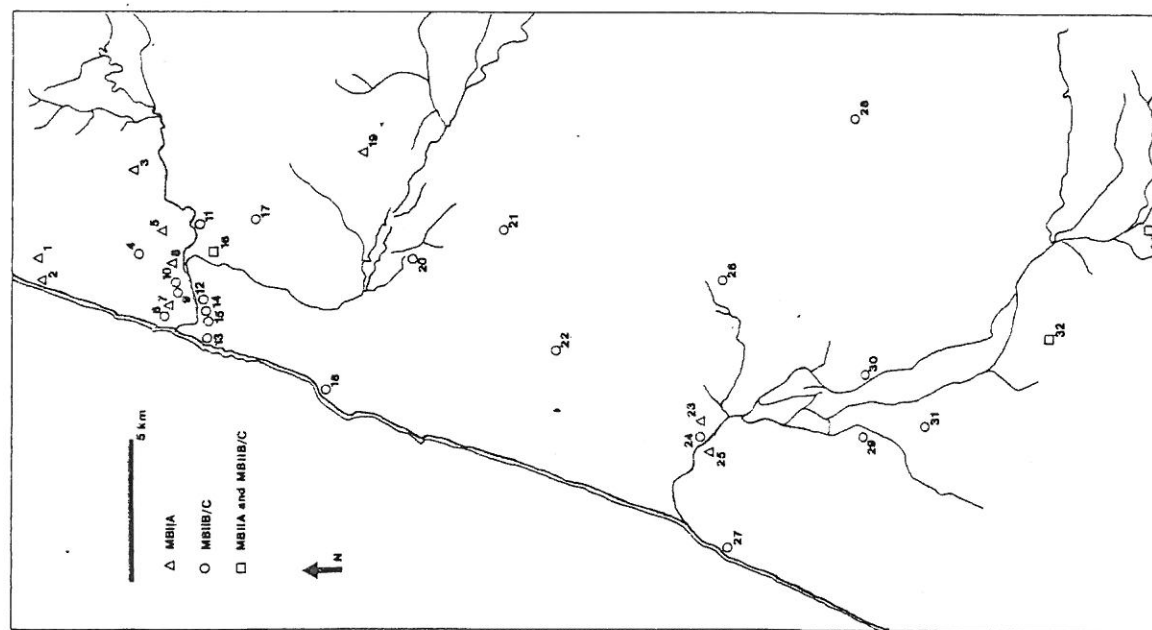
This very relationship between burials and land claims generated Saxe's much discussed "Hypothesis 8." Simply put, this hypothesis stated that a group's access to and claims on resources is legitimized through its ancestral ties; therefore the group will inter its ancestors in a special area reserved for burial (Saxe 1970: 119). Goldstein (1981: 61) modified this concept by acknowledging that having a burial area for ancestors is only one way that a society may try to claim resources. In the case of the Southern Levant in the MBA, the resource in question was the land itself. Tombs were probably used to mark territory at least since the EBIV/MBI period, and therefore an MBA claim to territory was strengthened by the burial of clan members on the very same land

claimed by one's ancestors.

Territorial claim is a likely explanation for the placement of some cemeteries at slight distances from settlements, although there are other possible reasons for the use of these locations, including the burial of nomads, and an association between burials and as yet undiscovered small settlements. In spite of this, tombs as territorial markers is the most likely explanation for these outlying cemeteries.

This relationship between tombs and territory can be demonstrated by various regional patterns throughout the country. Often large MBA sites are rather distant from each other, yet each is proximal to several burial areas. Three clear examples

of this are in the region of Tel Aviv. Each area is centered on a river; the Yarkon, the Ayalon and the Soreq (see Figure 5). The large number of both habitation sites and tombs in the region can be explained by the reliable supply of fresh water coupled with the maritime trade system. While many small sites were present in the entire region (especially in the MBIIA), there were very few large tells (Yadin 1978; Kochavi *et al.* 1979; Broshi and Gophna 1986; Gophna 1984; Gophna and Ayalon 1980; Gophna and Beck 1981; Gophna and Portugali 1988). These few tells claimed the territories of the areas in their immediate vicinities, and one way of asserting those claims was by placing burials on the land.



* settlement sites as well as burial sites.

1. Michal, (east of)
2. Tel Aviv, Country Club Junction
3. Tel Aviv, Ramat HeHayal
4. Tel Aviv, Rishpon Street
5. Tel Aviv, Hadar Josef
6. Tel Aviv, Shichun Ha'ammami
7. Tel Aviv, near Sde Dov airport.
8. Tel Aviv, Exhibition Gardens
9. Tell Qasile*
10. Tel Aviv, Museum Ha'aretz
11. B'nai Brak
12. Tel Aviv, Shimon Hataarsi Street
13. Tel Aviv Harbour
14. Tel Aviv, Hirkanus and Yishayahu Streets
15. Tell Aviv Hill Square
16. Tel Gerisa*
17. Tel Aviv, Ramat Gan

18. Tell Jaffa*
19. Tell Hashomer
20. Azor
21. Tel Aviv, Beit Dagan Vulcani Institute
22. Rishon L'Zion
23. el-Jisr
24. Dhaharat el Humraiya
25. Nebi Rubin
26. Nes Ziona
27. Yavneh-Yam*
28. Na'an
29. Yavneh, Shikun Holot
30. Yavneh-Rehovot Road
31. Yavneh (south of)/Beth Gamliel
32. Gedera
33. Revadim quarry

Key to site numbers in Figure 5 (opposite).

Figure 5 MBA burial sites in the Tel Aviv area.

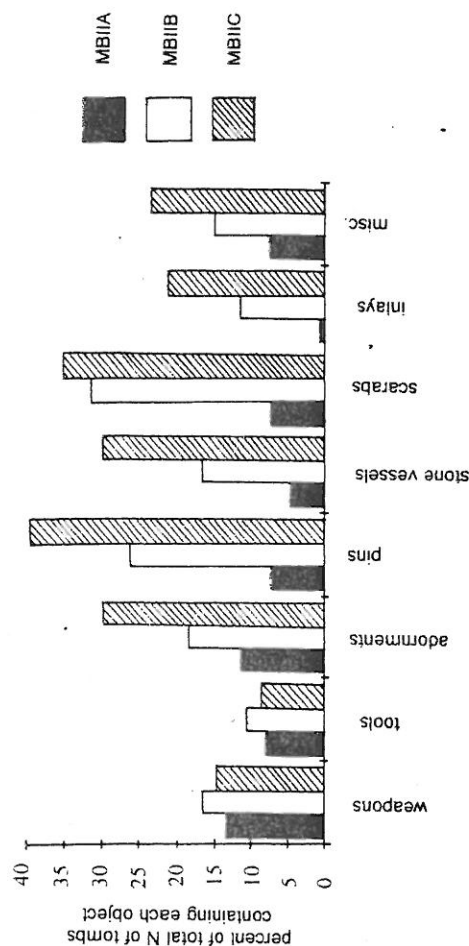


Figure 6 Frequency of tombs containing objects.

One of the large tells is Tel Gerisa, strategically located near the intersection of the Yarkon with the Ayalon (Geva 1982; Herzog 1993). It is likely that the many tombs located along both banks of the Yarkon were associated with the city. Since most of the tombs date to the MBIIIB period, it is plausible that during the MBIIIB Tel Gerisa claimed the land on both banks of the Yarkon and used burials to legitimize this claim. The second tell site in the region is Tel Jaffa, on the coast south of the Yarkon. Although the MBA levels at Tel Jaffa have not yet been excavated, an MBIIIB fortification is visible there (Kaplan and Ritter-Kaplan 1993).

Several MBA tombs have been found along the nearby section of the Ayalon and along its tributaries, which run immediately east of the tell. It is probable that the relationship between these tombs and Jaffa was similar to that of Gerisa and

the Yarkon area, even though the tombs of the Jaffa region are spread along a slightly wider area. The third tell site demonstrating the territorial interdependence of an urban center and its tombs is located a few kilometers to the south, along the Soreq river. The coastal enclosure of Yavneh-Yam is situated near the point where the Soreq empties into the Mediterranean. It was used as a fortress in the MBIIA and MBIIIB periods (Kaplan 1993), and tombs from these periods are located along many branches of the Soreq. It is likely that the populace of Yavneh-Yam used the Soreq river as a resource, and protected it, and that the tombs represent the association between the site and the land around the river.

Even when there was only one city in a region, the surrounding hinterlands of that city would probably have served as necessary farmland. Burials could be situated

between land plots, so that even when the land was out of use, it would be indisputably linked to the city.

Changes in the Contents of Tombs During the Course of the MBA

Tomb Object Assemblages Reflecting Shifting Societal Priorities

The selection of burial location clearly depended on many factors, all planned by the populace, and representative of their intentions. An even clearer representation of the relationship between societal intent and burial practices can be seen through the contents of the tombs.

The contents of the MBA tombs demonstrate a certain uniformity of culture, or at least of practice, throughout the Southern Levant, just as the tomb structures did. While there are no obvious regional

distinctions in tomb content, there is strikingly clear increase in wealth of burials during the course of the MBA. More burials have been found from the MBII than from the MBIIA, but this fact alone might simply demonstrate a proportional increase in population. However, a much greater percentage of the MBIIIB burials contained luxury objects as well as pottery when compared to MBIIA burials. The percentage of MBIIIC burials with such objects is usually even higher, even though fewer MBIIIC burials have been recorded (Figure 6). The later the tomb is in the MBA, the greater the probability that an individual will have been interred with objects of importance, as well as with food.⁴ These shifts in tomb contents reflect the changing priorities of the populace during the course of the MBA. During the MBIIA period, the most obvious concern were with defense and subsistence, but

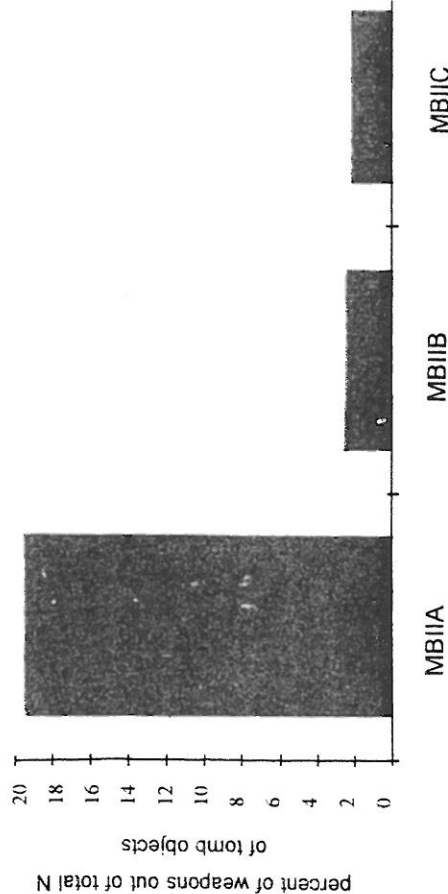


Figure 7 Weapon assemblages by period.

the MBIIB, this was apparently no longer the case.

Objects placed in tombs were probably endowed with ritual significance, which most likely reflected the objects' use in life. Therefore, an object with particular significance to an individual in life might be placed with his body in death; a warrior with a sword, an attractive woman with adornments, etc. A fighter would not be buried with a piece of farming equipment if the intent was to reflect his role in life, especially if fighting was considered important in the societal code. There is a shift in emphasis away from certain tomb objects and towards others during the course of the MBA. This shift might mean that certain activities had become less important, and therefore objects which ritually functioned as their symbolic representations became scarcer in tombs. Simultaneously, other activities, and therefore other symbolic objects, became more important.

A good example of this can be seen through the percentage of weapons in tombs, which decreases markedly from the MBIIA to the MBIC (Figure 7). Weapons were the most common objects found in tombs in the MBIIA. They were present in 13% of the tombs found, and accounted for nearly 20% of all tomb objects in the MBIIA. During the MBIIB and MBIC, weapons were present in approximately 15% of tombs, but only made up 2% of the assemblages. These numbers are substantiated by Philip's studies (1989; in press) of weapons and warrior burials, which present very little material from the Southern Levant after the MBIIA and very early MBIIB periods. One of Philip's conclusions, that weapons may have been symbolic of social position rather than actual occupation, is in line with the

current discussion of the ritual significance of tomb objects (1989: 146-47, 151).

Initially the decrease of weapons in tomb assemblages seems surprising, since fortifications of cities had become huge and standardized by the MBIIB and MBIC periods, and have generally been assumed to reflect an increasing need for defense (Yadin 1978; Kochavi *et al.* 1979; Gregori 1986). It is intriguing that such an apparent need for large scale defenses in the later part of the period does not extend to the continued consideration of weapons as important possessions, and therefore as ubiquitous burial items in the MBIIB-C. In fact the opposite appears true.

This contradiction can be explained when a slightly different perspective on the fortifications of the MBA is taken into account. It has been suggested that the fortifications of the MBIIB-C were established partially for propagandistic and symbolic purposes, rather than solely as defensive structures (Finkelstein 1992; also see Bunimovitz 1992; Herzog 1989). This argument emphasizes how MBA fortifications were meant not only as defenses, but also as fills, supports, revetments and podia (Finkelstein 1992: 206).

In addition to these physical uses, fortifications functioned as symbols of military strength, and more importantly, as symbols of control and organization. As Finkelstein (1992: 209-212) has discussed, the manpower necessary to erect such large structures would have been procured from the hinterlands of each city. This implies that the city rulers had a certain degree of control over extensive amounts of land, as well as a great deal of organizational ability.

This argument cannot be applied to all MBA cities. Some fortifications were certainly built solely for defensive, non-symbolic reasons. Destruction levels at

various sites throughout the Southern Levant suggest attacks against cities, which in turn imply a need for defensive structures. However, these destruction levels mainly appear at the end of MBIIC and the end of the LBIA periods, not during the MBA proper (Weinstein 1981: 1-5). This suggests that warfare and defense may only have become real concerns at the end of the MBA, not during its main phases, when many of the fortifications were erected. Thus, their symbolic import, together with their defensive capacities, explain the presence of these huge ramparts and walls.

The additional symbolic functions of MBA fortifications described here suggest an explanation for the change visible in tomb contents. The smaller percentages of MBIIB-C weapons in tombs indicate that the intent of the populace of the Southern Levant was no longer to portray itself as

military. The image that the populace intended to portray in the MBIIB and MBIC was of ruling, not fighting. Prestigious items, the symbols of the wealth and prosperity of a ruling class, began to predominate over weapons and subsistence items. This occurred at the same time a exaggerated fortification systems were being built as symbols of strength and organizational control. The contents of tombs and the monumental fortification were both physical expressions of this control.

The items most commonly found in tombs of the MBIIB and MBIC period were scarabs and toggle pins for clothing. Scarabs were found in 30% of MBIIB tombs and 35% of MBIC tombs, when they had appeared in only 7% of MBIIA tombs. Pins appeared in 25% and 37% of MBIIB and MBIC tombs respectively, up from 7% in the MBIIA (Figures 8 and 9)

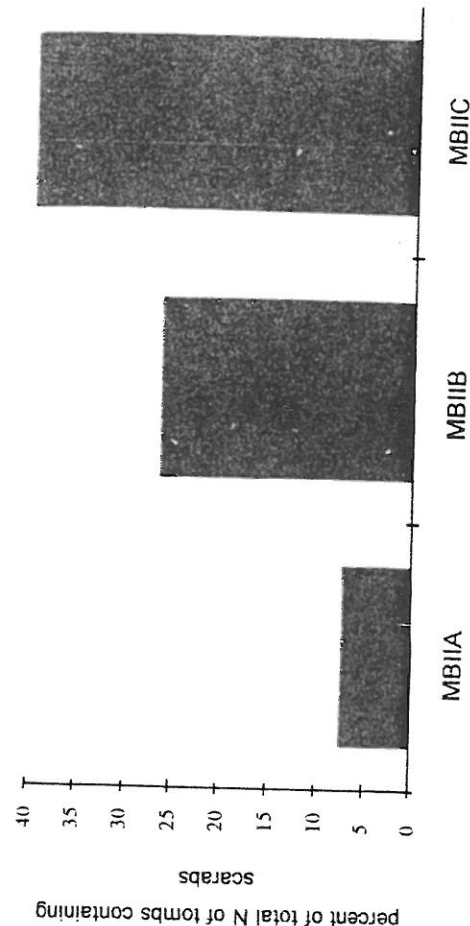


Figure 8 Scarab assemblages by period.

Decorative items besides pins, such as bead necklaces, rings and decorative bone and ivory inlays from wooden boxes, were also quite common as burial items (Figure 10). These were the new symbols of social status, which rose in proportion to the decline of weapons as tomb items. While in MBIIA the society had intended to be perceived as militarily oriented, in the MBIIIB and MBIIIC periods the elite image was civilian and power-oriented, and was associated with items such as jewelry, other adornments and scarabs, an attribute of status borrowed from Egypt.

Tomb Ceramic Assemblages Reflecting Shifting Societal Priorities

Evidence for this new non-military, power and prestige-oriented elite is visible in the ceramic assemblages from the MBIIIB tombs as well as through the objects. Just as objects in MBIIA tombs seem to empha-

size survival activities such as defense, the MBIIA ceramics emphasize another basic activity — subsistence. Even the MBIIA burials with the sparsest remains contained food provisions. The ubiquitous large open bowls probably contained meats and grains. The carinated bowls were also for food. Jars and jugs contained essential liquids, such as water, beer or wine. Often dipper juglets, used as serving utensils, have been found still in the mouths of *pitchoi*.

In contrast to these numbers, in the MBIIIB and MBIIIC periods the percentage of ceramics that contained subsistence items declined. For instance, open bowls went from being 20% of the MBIIA assemblage to 10% of the MBIIIB and C assemblages, and jars went from 25% to 17% (Figure 11). More significantly, the relative percentages of ceramics associated with luxury items increased. Many more

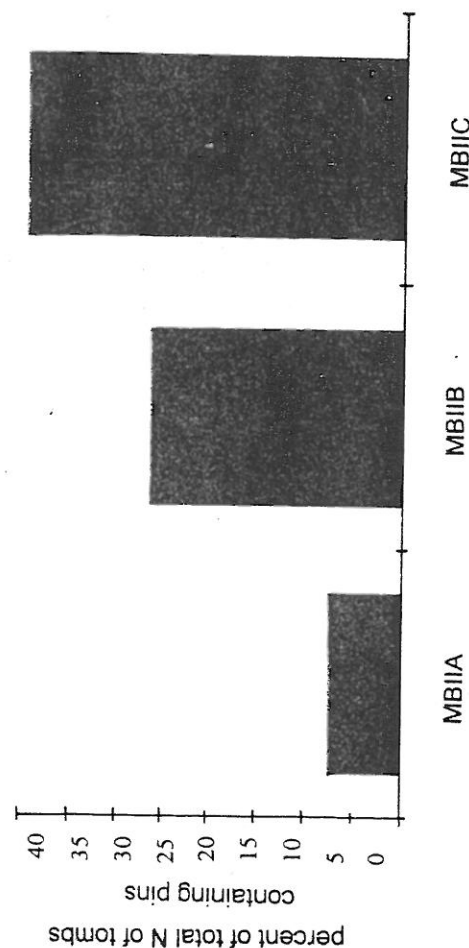


Figure 9 Pin assemblages by period.

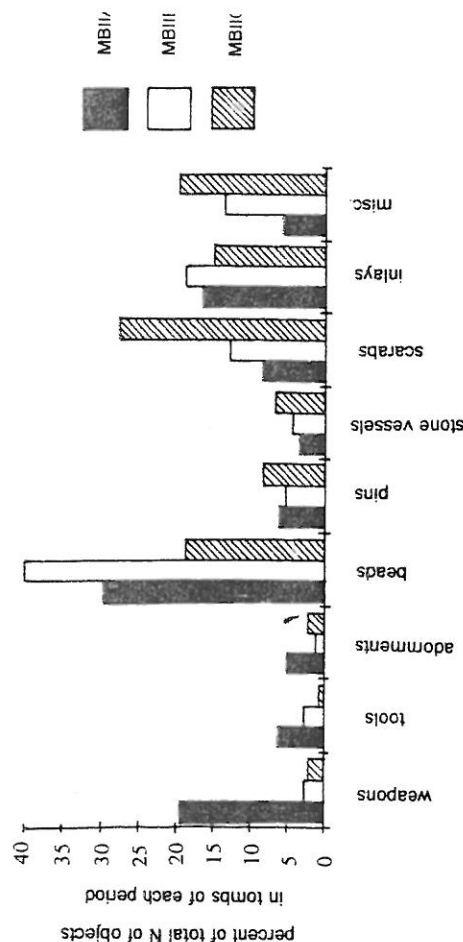


Figure 10 Tomb items present in each period.

piriform and cylindrical juglets were found in MBIIIB and MBIIIC tombs, together making up over 23% of the assemblage (Figures 11 and 12). These juglets probably contained non-essentials such as perfumes, oils, and ointments.

The apparent shift from defense and subsistence items in MBIIA tombs, to luxury and status items in MBIIIB and MBIIIC tombs, coupled with the general increase in tombs containing offerings, leads to two observations about the inhabitants of the MBA Southern Levant. First an increase of affluence is apparent. More expendable wealth was available in the MBIIIB and MBIIIC periods than in MBIIA, and this was mirrored in funerary offerings. Not only were more individuals interred, but more were given lavish burials. Secondly, it suggests that security and subsistence were no longer primary concerns worthy of portrayal in death. If

the parallelism we have seen between tombs and houses, dead and living, holds true, we can infer that the populace has become wealthier and therefore less concerned with subsistence activities later in the period. In the later MBA the segment of the society represented by the burials paid significant attention to wealth as a symbol of power and status.

Summary and Conclusions

Archaeologists are traditionally hesitant about discussing the perspectives and intentions of the individuals of any ancient society, because to a large extent this involves conjectures which can never be proven satisfactorily. It is easier and more comfortable to analyze the general organization and overall development of a social group through its material remains. However, when the material remains in

question were deposited intentionally, not as a result of mere happenstance, the best approach is one which specifically acknowledges the possible purposes and perspectives. Approaches to the burial remains of the Southern Levant which are not intent-oriented are stymied by insufficient data and therefore yield insufficient, or even contradictory, results. For the MBA material, we would be left without any useful conclusions, only data with few significant patterns: similarly constructed tombs situated in three separate locations relative to occupational sites, with no discernible orientation or placement patterns, and no distinctions based upon age, gender, or relative wealth. With such a dearth of data it is no wonder that techniques of analysis developed for mortuary remains elsewhere have not been applied successfully to the Southern Levant, since the goal of most methods is to uncover the

internal hierarchies and specific kinship structures (see Hallote 1994: 18–26). When the reasons behind building, placing and filling tombs are considered, albeit with room for error, what becomes apparent is that the populace of the MBA Southern Levant probably included only one main cultural group with a uniform material culture, who purposely housed their dead as they housed themselves. At death, individuals still had a role within the societal structure, the role of linking the living to ancestors and kin groups. The presence of these dead ancestors interred in specific areas factored strongly enough in the societal code to establish territorial claims.

Furthermore, the items which members of the society placed in the tombs of their relatives represented their own priorities, functioning as symbols of ideologies, and demonstrating how these priorities and

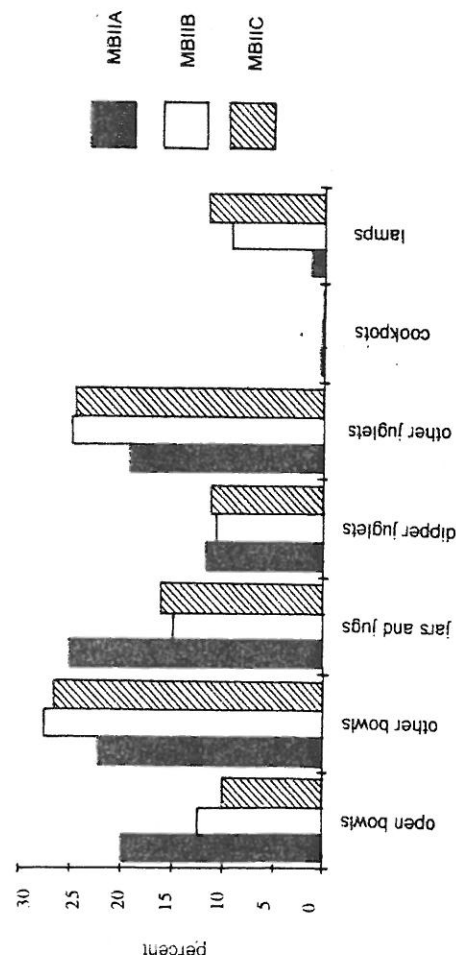


Figure 11 Ceramic forms present in MBA tombs.

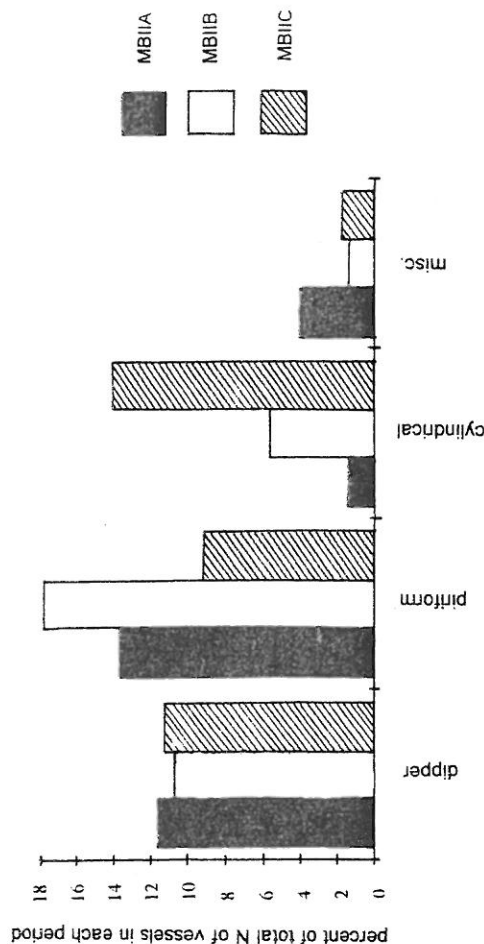


Figure 12 Juglet forms present in each period.

ideologies evolved over time. Subsistence and defense ceased to be significant societal priorities by the end of the MBA and were replaced by a concentrated emphasis on wealth and status as ends in themselves.

Without this attention to societal intents, an approach that could be called subjective, these insights into the society of the Southern Levant in the MBA would be lost. More objective discussions cannot look beyond the basic characteristics of tombs as simple structures which do not demonstrate many particular patterns. Tombs seen in that light cannot suggest anything more about the society and culture of the Southern Levant in the MBA than settlement remains. However, tombs illuminated by the intentions of their builders suggest more intriguing possibilities about those builders, if not about the buried individuals themselves.

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Notes

1. An additional 48 sites had burials which can be dated to the MBA, but not to a more specific subphase. The percentages presented here may not add up to 100, since more than one type of burial is found at many sites, and sites were in use for more than one period. For a complete listing of these sites see Hallote 1994: 178-239.
2. These are at Kfar Seld (Epstein 1974); Akko (Dothan and Conrad 1977; 1979); Tell Aviv Rishon (Kaplan 1977); Munhara (Lankes 1975); Tell Nagilah (Amiran and Eitan 1964; 1965); En Neshev (Zori 1962; 174); and Efrat (Gonen 1981: 124-26; Amit 1990). However, even these may have been disturbed primary burials.
3. Mass burial is sometimes the interpretation suggested for the Jericho material (see, most

recently, Yasur-Landau 1992), although the evidence does not support this. Occasionally multiple burials are found at sites which generally have only one or two interments together, such as Megiddo T. 2129 (Loud 1948: 126).

4. The database used here derives from the ceramic contents of tombs of the following sites: Tell el-'Ajjul, Aphek, Beth Shemesh, Bethany, Tell Dan, Dhaharat el-Humra, Tell el-Far'ah (south), Gibeon, Hazor, Jericho, several sites in the Jordan valley, Lachish, Megiddo, and Tell el-Far'ah (north). These sites were chosen because they each contained a significant number of published tombs. There are a total of 551 tombs published from these sites for the MBIIA, MBIB and MBIBC periods. The data used here are recorded in full in Hallote 1994: 240-54.

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