

Critical Review

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Submission date: 26-Feb-2021 03:21AM (UTC+0000)

Submission ID: 145553722

File name: 25783_Kevin_Wayne_House_Critical_Review_326588_1279567329.pdf (140.97K)

Word count: 1716

Character count: 8170

Critical Review of “The Rise of a Complex Society: New Evidence from Tel Megiddo East in the Late Fourth Millennium”

This article was written by Matthew J. Adams, Jonathan David, Robert S. Homsher, and Margaret E. Cohen for *Near Eastern Archaeology*, a publication of the University of Chicago. The article has two purposes: 1) to give recognition to the Jezreel Valley Regional Project and their efforts in trying to give a total history of the Jezreel Valley through various approaches and 2) to illustrate how the sites of Tel Megiddo and Tel Megiddo East work together to give a more complete picture of the society that built these sites.¹

The article begins by giving an overall picture of urban development in the Early Bronze Age periods, referencing such sites as Bet Yerah, Arad, Hazor, Megiddo, and others.² This is good as it gives the reader some background information about the area and information about earlier excavations at the primary sites addressed in the article.³ It also shows the complexity of the societies during EB II – III by mentioning various structures as “palaces, temple complexes, storage facilities, and fortifications.”⁴

The authors then move on to the Great Temple of Megiddo and give some background information specifically for this site. In referencing earlier excavations, the authors describe in some detail the Great Temple and its construction.⁵ The temple dates back to EB Ib (ca. 3000 BC) and is the largest temple complex found in all EB sites measuring 1100 m² (which dwarfs the EB II temple at Ai, measuring only 360 m²).⁶ However, the most notable features of the Great Temple are the “craftsmanship, the scale of the labor involved, and the underlying

¹ Adams, et al., 2014, p. 32.

² Ibid, p. 33.

³ Ibid, pp. 32-34.

⁴ Ibid, p. 33.

⁵ Ibid, p. 35.

⁶ Ibid.

organization of the society responsible for it.”⁷ The builders of the temple used a “well-planned grid using a 52.5 cm standard unit of measurement (a cubit) arranged in modules of six cubits”⁸

Some notable features of the temple include the two wings equally measuring seven by seven modules, each wing having six pillars, six basalt tables, a corridor, an altar and entrance at the central axis, and the position of the altar is the geometric center of the entire temple.⁹ Other details are given in the resources needed to construct such a project, the labor involved, and the presence of an administrative entity of some sort to bring all these things together.¹⁰

From here the authors move to the Tel Megiddo East site. It is noted early that the two sites were close together (ca. 450 m apart) and they were made by the same people.¹¹ The article continues with a description of three buildings that have been uncovered and how the designs of the buildings changed from EB Ia to EB Ib.¹² The newer buildings show a clear construction plan in their design, using the cubit measurement and a grid-like pattern for the walls.¹³

From here the authors begin to draw their conclusions by comparing the construction methods of both sites and what would have been necessary to complete this construction.¹⁴ The authors point out that the Great Temple was more likely built first and then the construction techniques developed were used to build the later buildings of Tel Megiddo East.¹⁵ The people who built these sites must have been prosperous enough to do so, without having to worry about finding resources, providing food, and having enough people to construct everything.¹⁶

This is presented very clearly and succinctly. What I would like you to do here is to evaluate these arguments: do they hold water and stand up to scrutiny?

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid, pp. 35-36.

¹¹ Ibid, pp. 37-38.

¹² Ibid, p. 38.

¹³ Ibid, pp. 38-40.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 40

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

The article returns to the Jezreel Valley Regional Project and the group's desire to "contextualize the developments at Megiddo within its regional setting."¹⁷ Using data from previous surveys, the JVRP "suggests that what occurred at Megiddo was part of a valley-wide phenomenon" stating that over 45 settlements have been identified in the Jezreel Valley for EB Ib, suggesting a massive population growth.¹⁸ With just a general description of the sizes of the various sites, the impression given is that Megiddo was part of a vast, regional network in which it was the centerpiece due to the Great Temple.¹⁹ *Does the evidence presented support this analysis?*

The final part of the article deals with the fall of EB I Megiddo. Evidence suggests that as the area transitioned from EB I to EB II there was some sort of "crisis" that overtook the region.²⁰ Over half of the sites were abandoned and population levels of the remaining sites seemed to decrease significantly.²¹ Another feature that changed was the new development of walled cities,²² perhaps indicating a new wave of violence in the region and a desire for protection that was not needed before. This change in development from EB I to EB II is one of the questions the JVRP is hoping to answer as they continue to reconstruct the history of the Jezreel Valley.²³

Overall, this article did a fine job in reaching its objectives. The Jezreel Valley Regional Project was mentioned several times throughout the article, including statements on future research. Also, the goals of the JVRP were listed early in the article stating they are striving "for a total history of the region using the tools and theoretical approaches of such disciplines as archaeology, anthropology, geography, history, ethnography, and the natural sciences, within an

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

organizational framework provided by landscape archaeology.”²⁴ This gives the reader an understanding of why the current archaeological work is important and provides context for the sites of Tel Megiddo and Tel Megiddo East. The authors also explained both sites well, giving much detail about the sizes of buildings and construction of various buildings. The key comparison was how the two sites were interconnected and how similar building techniques, such as design, planning, measurement, and scale were utilized at both sites.²⁵

Another important feature of the article was its readability. The authors did a fantastic job in using terms that everyone could understand and, when using terms that would be considered unfamiliar to an average reader, they were quick to provide context and explanation that would assist the reader in understanding what was being said. An example of this would be the use of hectares, a metric measurement that some may not be familiar with, and then providing the acreage in parenthesis behind the measurement²⁶ to make sure the reader can understand the size of the site without having to research what a hectare is.

This is not to say there were not any problems found in the text. On page 37, there is a text box dealing with Climate and Environment at EB I Megiddo that goes into some detail about the terrain of the region during that period.²⁷ While this is mentioned in the main body of the text as a supplement to better understand why Tel Megiddo East was constructed in the chosen location²⁸, it makes for an unnatural break in the reading, forcing one to either break thought and context to read the text box or wait until the end of the section and go back. Either way one would most likely have to reread the prior paragraph to remember what was being said in the

²⁴ Ibid, p. 32.

²⁵ Ibid, pp. 39-40.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 36.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 37.

²⁸ Ibid.

main body or remember the purpose of the text box itself. While it is important to address the issues raised about the reasoning for selecting the site on which to build, it seems that this was added in as a filler and should have waited to be in a separate article of its own. This would provide more room for detail and give the reader a better understanding of this area of concern.

Another problem with the text box is it appears to be written very differently than the main body of the text. The authors tend to use terminology that is specifically geared towards those who may be more acquainted with archaeology and geology here, while in the main body of the text they offer a more simplified style that seems to relate to laypeople. For instance, geomorphology and cave speleothems are used without giving the reader any type of definition or explanation of what is meant by these terms.²⁹ While one reading an archaeology magazine should have some knowledge of specific terms, the authors cannot assume that the casual reader or layperson will understand what is meant. This again raises the problem with putting this information in a small text box within an article that does not cover this content (the size of the box is ridiculously small, covering about a fourth of the page, due to a large picture taking up the top half; if this information was so necessary to include, then why not leave more space available for it in order to give more explanation of the content?).

Even with the small problems addressed, the article provides much information that can be used to further my research of the area, especially the Great Temple. By providing context with the surrounding area, the importance of the temple can be better understood as it may have played an important part within the entire Jezreel Valley and not just for the people of Megiddo. Also, the architectural precision in design and construction, as mentioned earlier, adds value to the society overall as these techniques were utilized within the city closest to the temple (Tel

²⁹ Ibid.

Megiddo East).³⁰ The article also has piqued my interest in following the JVRP to see how the area was interconnected and the possible reasons for the population decline at the end of EB I.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 40.

it would be better to frame this review against some more reading around the subject

References

- Adams, M.J., David, J., Homsher, R.S., Cohen, M.E. (2014) 'The Rise of a Complex Society: New Evidence from Tel Megiddo East in the Late Fourth Millennium', *Near Eastern Archaeology*, 77(1), pp. 32-43. DOI: 10.5615/neareastarch.77.1.0032

Critical Review

GRADEMARK REPORT

FINAL GRADE

64/100

GENERAL COMMENTS

Instructor

Overall this is a very clearly written and well presented critical review of an article. It would be good in the introduction to indicate why you have chosen this specific article to review (although you do address this later in the review).

The structure of your review is easy to follow and it is well written. There are a few places - indicated in the text - where I think you could develop a bit more of a critique (for example on the issue of social complexity).

You do provide a good overall summation of the strengths and weaknesses of the article towards the end of the review, but there are places where it would be helpful to draw out a bit of a critique in the presentation of the article's contents. Also it would be good to situate this article against a wider understanding of work at Mediggo and the Jezreel valley (read more widely!).

Oterh than that a good piece of work.

PAGE 1



Comment 1

perhaps unpack this a bit - what do you understand by social complexity? What do archaeologists tend to mean by social complexity? How is this evident in EB II-III S. Levant?



Comment 2

how are these buildings identified as such?



Comment 3

no apostrophe



Comment 4

what are the implications? (e.g. mathematics, geometry, architectural skills). These are all part of Childe's definition of urban/state communities

Text Comment. This is presented very clearly and succinctly. What I would like you to do here is to evaluate these arguments: do they hold water and stand up to scrutiny?

Text Comment. Does the evidence presented support this analysis?

Text Comment. it would be better to frame this review against some more reading around the subject