Mortuary Practices in Early Bronze Age Canaan

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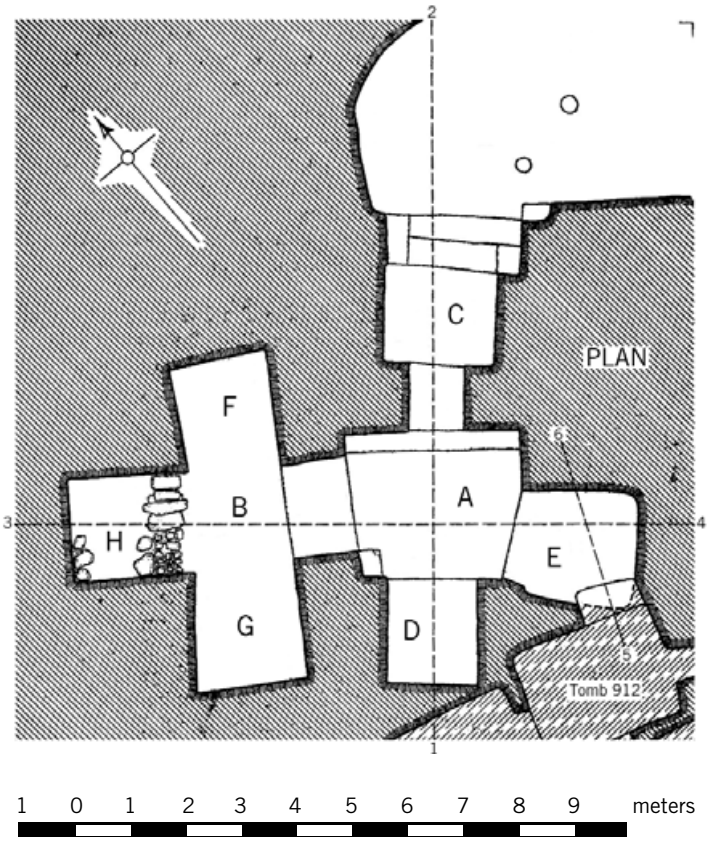
Map showing the distribution of Early Bronze Age cemeteries in Palestine. Triangles mark EB I cemeteries and circles mark EB II/III cemeteries.

> "The history of death is at least as complicated as the history of life"
> (Cannadine 1981: 242)

The Early Bronze Age (EB) lasted some 1200 years (circa 3500–2300 BCE), during which time social and political processes affected changes too complex for easy summary. Mortuary assemblages are crucial to diving and understanding these changes but the discussion of EP burial has been, until recently, mainly descriptive and intuitive.[1] What is required then, if we wish to understand more general cultural processes, is first to identify and categorize the main features of the burial data as they vary through space and time. For this, our starting point must be contextual, looking at individual burials as well as tombs and cemeteries (where they exist) as portions of more extended burial rites, which themselves are components of larger culture systems embedded with social structure, ideology and eschatology. Among the questions that will arise are why do some sites and some regions show extensive mortuary evidence and others virtually none?; why is there so little mortuary evidence for the EB II and EB III in most places when there is so much more for the EB I and Intermediate Bronze Age (EB IV)?; and, how can we explain the rich temporal and spatial variability displayed by funerary behavior?[2]

Mortuary Practices in the Early Bronze Age I

Something on the order of forty EB I rock-cut tomb cemeteries have been identified in the central, Mediterranean portion of the country, including the Jordan Valley. EB I people sometimes deposited their dead in natural limestone caves (e.g., Nahal Qana) or in modified natural caves, resulting in an irregular plan (e.g., Ai, Beit Sahur). The most frequent rock-cut tombs are those hollowed out of softer materials such as marl, travertine or consolidated alluvium (in the Jordan Valley), *kurkar* (a calcerous sandstone, on the coast) and chalk (particularly in the Eocene and Senonian layers of the central highlands, the Manasseh hills and the heights east of the Jordan Valley). These tend to be rounded or oval in plan, though they are often somewhat irregular. The tombs of Azor show a **bilobate [au: pls gloss]** plan not found elsewhere (Ben-Tor 1975: **00**). The entrances are frequently destroyed but there is more than a little variety, cylindrical shafts, square masoned openings, constructed stone frames and descending steps all being known (see Philip 2001 for the variety in tomb openings east of the Jordan). Perhaps the most elaborate carved tomb in the entire Early Bronze Age is Tomb 910 at Megiddo, with branched annexes and smoothed chalk walls (Loud 1938: 12–18).



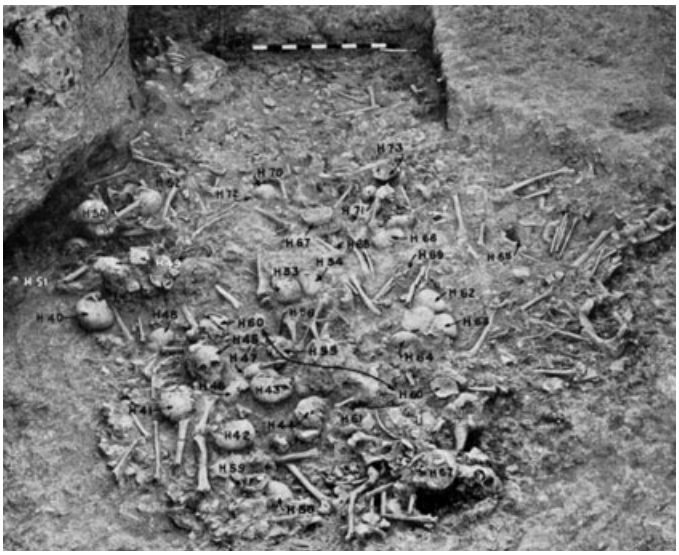
Megiddo Tomb 910 entrance (left) and plan (right). This huge, finely masoned tomb is probably the largest and most opulent ever found in Bronze Age Canaan. Though skeletal material, pottery and some objects were found, much of the original contents were probably removed in antiquity. *From Guy (1938: figs. 11, 14).*

In other parts of the country other burial structures were adopted. Dolmens, many covered by tumuli, predominated mainly on the east side of the Jordan Valley. Cist burials covered by tumuli were present in the Negev and in Transjordan. The cylindrical, above-ground *nawamis* structures (round stone burials) dominate the mortuary landscape of southern Sinai. It may also be significant that the EB IB charnel houses of Bab edh-Dhra are round; perhaps there is some connection with the *nawamis* phenomenon.

All of these burial types existed in the EB I, but the dating of a tomb's or cemetery's first use is usually a vexing problem. In many cases it appears likely that a given feature was used mainly in the EB II and even the Intermediate Bronze Age; the dolmen fields of the central Golan, next to the Leviah Enclosure being one example (Vinitsky 1992) and the tumuli fields of the Negev Highlands another (Haiman 1992). These have been attributed to the EB II, based mainly on their proximity to datable settlements. The chronological uncertainy means that we have no way of quantifying the cemeteries outside of the Mediterranean zone by period.

The term "cemetery" is perhaps a misnomer because in most cases we are talking about only one or two individual tombs, as for example, the cave tombs at Arad, Ophel in Jerusalem, Givatayim and Nahal Qana. At several sites—Azor, Ein Assawir, Ai and Tell en Nasbeh come to mind—between four and six tombs have been reported. The original numbers were certainly greater, but the plethora of cemeteries having small numbers of tombs seems to preclude attributing the pattern to the "coincidence of discovery." Moreover, most of the tombs contain only three to six interred cadavers.[3] These scattered, sparsely occupied tombs and cemeteries probably represent the fundamental, kin-based corporate groups, still highly fragmented, that Joffe sees as the building blocks of Levantine Bronze Age societies (1993: 48).

Some EB I cave-tomb cemeteries are large, Jericho and Bab edh-Dhra being the best known examples because they are well published. But there are others at Tell el Farah North (where seventeen tombs have been excavated, but there may have been hundreds),[4] Ein Hanatziv south of Beth Shean (where tens of tombs were recorded; Amiran et al. 1986 and Sebbane personal communication) and Megiddo (where ten or eleven EB I tombs were excavated; Guy 1938: 9–27). These are also the cemeteries with tombs containing large numbers of individuals—many tens and even hundreds. Bab edh-Dhra is the exception in this set; the EB I tombs generally contain



Megiddo Tomb 903, middle layer. This EB IB tomb contained hundreds of individuals in secondary deposition with no discernible order. The small number of burial goods suggests that many of the bones may have been collected from other tombs and deposited here by later inhabitants who wished to reuse existing tombs. *From Guy (1938: fig. 5)*

three to five individuals, though some, especially in the small EB IB sample, have as many as fifteen. With the possible exception of Megiddo (so far), it would seem that most, or even all, of the big cave- and shaft-tomb cemeteries are in the Jordan Valley, where much of the evidence is found for the origins of small-scale complexity in Canaan. Dolmen, tumulus and *nawamis* fields can also be quite large and number more than one hundred structures though, as noted above, it is notoriously difficult to date them to a particular phase. On the east bank of the Jordan, dolmens and other kinds of built tombs vastly outnumber rock-hewn tombs (Philip 2001: 200–202).

In cemeteries with large numbers of cave tombs the tombs are generally cut at fairly regular intervals, leaving a least several meters of space between them. Clearly, the hewers could identify existing tombs and tried to avoid damaging them, at least at first. It also appears that large burial grounds were divided into discrete cemeteries, either by design or by result. This is the case at Bab edh-Dhra, Jericho, Tell el-Farah North, Ein Hanatziv and Ein Assawir. The significance of this subdivision remains an open question; at Bab edh-Dhra, the excavators suggest that it reflects clan structure (e.g. Schaub and Rast 1989: 554–57).

The dearth of cemeteries in the southern coastal region, the heartland of Canaanite–Egyptian interaction, is provocative. A few tombs from Palmachim, Tel Aviv, Givatayim and Azor have been published, but there are virtually no tombs in the sites with lots of Egyptian or Egyptianized material. The single skeleton found in an enlarged cave at Nahal Tillah, devoid of burial goods, is the exception that proves the rule (Levy et al 1997: 14–16). While this subterranean structure exhibits an impressive, long corridor entry, I find it difficult to accept the proposal that it is a monumental, Egyptian-style tomb. My guess is that it was primarily a water storage facility—impressive enough in its own right. In any event, the lack of mortuary material from this region is real, and once again, no accident of discovery.

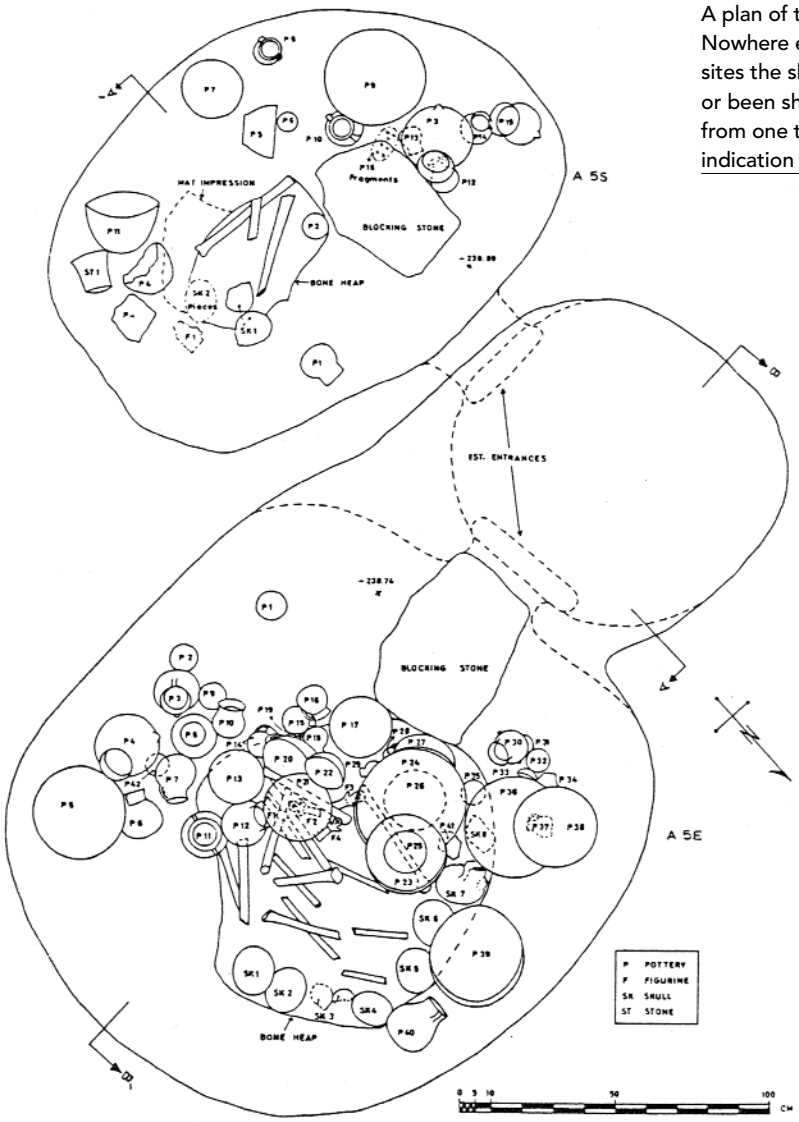
North of the Wadi Ara-Jezreel Valley latitude, EB I burials are rare and insubstantial. Only four cave tombs are known—at Gadot, Ashrat, Kinneret and Lebea in Lebanon[5]—but certainly no large cemeteries. A couple of practices seem confined to this region: Simple pit or cist burials containing articulated, flexed burials are reported from Megiddo and Kabri and jar burials of infants at Beth Yerah and at Tel Teo.[6] Non-articulated skeletal material was reported from an occupation level in limited salvage excavations at Horvat Usa (Ben Tor 1966: 2). These practices, perhaps confined to the EB IA, are a holdover from the Chalcolithic, and reminiscent of the numerous contemporaneous jar burials of Byblos (Dunand 1973: 260–65) and Sidon Dakerman (Saidah 1979: 42; figs. 14–15), hinting perhaps at a cultural koine of sorts, as Braun (1989: 15) has inferred with regard to other features. But on the whole, there is little more to say about burial in the north, except to note the extreme paucity of tombs and burials.

Deposition and Treatment of Corporeal Remains

The quality and quantity of documentation concerning the human remains is woeful; the published anthropological reports can still be counted on two hands. Very little has been added since Smith's 1989 summary, though several more are apparently in the offing or in the Israel Antiquity Authority's data bank. One would like to hope that this will change as we are now at a juncture where the bones are more important than the pots. Although the prognosis is not good for adding to our data, several patterns are nonetheless worth pointing out.

A preponderance of the skeletal material in the EB I burial record shows evidence of being moved, i.e. the skeletons are not articulated. This does not necessarily mean that skeletons were brought from somewhere else and then deposited in tombs. In fact, primary inhumation, i.e. skeletons in full or partial articulation, occurs frequently enough (e.g., at Megiddo, Ein Hanatziv, Jericho and Bab edh-Dhra) to suggest that much of the transport of human bones took place within the tomb, following the decay of the flesh. Articulated skeletons then, most often represent the last or next-to-last burials.

How should we interpret multiple burials in which bones appear to be missing, such as in some tombs at Jericho and Bab edh-Dhra? Were the remains of primary burials tossed out of the tomb, as well as being pushed aside and rearranged? Or were they transported from elsewhere and arranged in the tomb as Schaub and Rast posit for Bab edh-Dhra (1989: 550–51)? Or both? In the recent past many researchers working in the Levant have expressed the belief that secondary burial is indicative of pastoral nomadism (e.g. Richard 1987: 25; Zohar 1992: 52–55). But it is common enough among sedentary agrarian societies. Since the pioneering ethnographic works of Hertz (1907) and van Gennep (1909), secondary burial has most often been understood as a means of affirming kinship ties and as a tool of social manipulation. Eschatological implications are more than



A plan of two-chambered shaft tomb A 5S from EB IA Bab edh-Dhra. Nowhere else have shaft tombs been so well preserved. At other sites the shaft or corridor entry and the ceiling have usually collapsed or been shaved off. The Bab edh-Dhra tombs can have anywhere from one to five chambers branching off from the shaft, perhaps an indication of kin relations. *From Schaub and Rast (1989: fig. 15).*

likely too, which need have little direct connection to subsistence strategy or social organization (e.g., Parker-Pearson 1999: 142–70). Thus the cemetery of EB IA Bab ed-Dhra may belong to a settlement located somewhere nearby, perhaps further downslope, buried by the alluvium of Wadi Kerak.[7]

Chesson has suggested that the ordering of skulls and long bones (at Bab edh-Dhra) was a structured tradition that served to commemorate and assert continuity with past generations (2001: 110). Such ordering is found in many tombs and it may have just as much to do with the human penchant for symmetry and creating order out of chaos. Death, after all, creates a gash in the fabric of society and an emotional chaos that demands redress.

Demographically, EB I tombs show men and women of various ages, children, and even some infants. Gender does not seem to be a selected factor. The few existing studies of EB burial patterns have concluded that tombs and cemeteries were organized by kinship ties (e.g., Bentley 1991; Chesson 1999: 155–62; Rast 1999: 171–73). We now need to elicit what kind of kin relations are reflected: descent groups, bilateral kindreds, lineages with clients, or something else. Bentley's study of the Bab edh-Dhra remains are a good start in this direction, having determined the genetic relations beween individuals in some tombs (1991). In the case of larger cemeteries it might help to identify the nature and borders of burial "tracts." Schaub and Rast have discerned different pottery types and tomb forms in separate but contemporaneous burial grounds at Bab edh-Dhra, where Area C has only single-chamber tombs (1989: 555–56). They forward the hypothesis of a dual social organization comprised of two "complementary" groups, which interact and intermarry, but only according to strict rules (what Levi-Strauss called "moietes"). This is a model that has potential for understanding EB I social organization in general.

Cremation is an aspect of EB I burial that is touched upon periodically but without much consensus. The charred bones at Gezer, Jericho, Givatayim, Azor and several tombs in Tel Aviv all appear intentional and controlled.[8] Callaway felt that it was an EB IA phenomenon (1962: 115–17), but this is not the case; cremation—often only partial, or selected cremation—continues into the EB IB, and apparently beyond,

EB IA shaft tomb A 69 at Bab edh-Dhra, Jordan. Note the neat separation of skulls, long bones and grave goods. *From Schaub and Rast (1989: fig. 61)*

into the EB II. In any event, this is another problem that requires further investigation. In fact, it may have a great deal to do with the lack of discernable burials that characterizes the following phases of the Early Bronze Age.

Burial Goods

Little evidence exists for status or wealth differentiation in EB I burials. There are no extremely rich tombs, only those with more buried individuals and thus more burial goods, especially at Jericho and Tell el Farah North. Special artifacts that may signify wealth appear here and there: a gold earring (at Ein Hanatziv and Azor for example) or the silver cup from Tell el Farah North (de Vaux 1951: 587, fig. 13 and pl. 27a). Chesson posits that individuals or groups buried with ground stone vessels and maceheads had preferential access to such prestige goods, as opposed to those with just pottery or beads (2001: 106–9). (I have my doubts on this account.) In any case, the objects that accompany the dead are, for the most part, standardized and modest—pottery (mostly jugs, juglets and bowls), beads and more infrequently, weapons (chiefly daggers and maceheads) and rather simple jewelry of metal and stone. One hesitates to infer high status individuals or lineages on the basis of so few prestige items. The maceheads and daggers gleaned from EB I mortuary contexts (e.g., at Azor, Megiddo, Ein Hanatziv, Bab edh-Dhra) mostly of limestone, may suggest warrior or leader status. But the gender associations are almost never clear. The same holds true for beads, which are the most common find together with pottery. But we must always remember that our sample is by no means representative of the entire EB I population and it is very possible that in some—even most—places, the very act of tomb interment was either the perogative of high status lineages or individuals, a means of asserting social boundaries of other kinds, or a practice adopted only by groups with particular religious beliefs.

Animal bones are not an intentional component in EB burial assemblages (this holds true for the EB II–III as well). Their introduction in the Intermediate Bronze Age probably represents a major change in the way that people perceived what was required for the liminal (transitional) stage between life and death, or for the afterworld (assuming such beliefs were part of EB society's worldview). Perhaps only deboned meat was left in the tomb, though the option of no meat at all seems preferable. The presence or absence of meat suggests another interesting direction for investigation.

Regional Characteristics

EB I burial practices show variability that is intrasite, regional and perhaps diachronic. To some extent regional entities can be deliniated, though, as one might expect, they overlap. The Galilee is one zone, perhaps more connected to Lebanon. The Jordan Valley between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea is another; it sends its tentacles up to the highlands on either side, especially in the EB IB. The similarity between the assemblages of Ai, Tell en-Nasbeh, Ophel and Beit Sahur to Jericho has long been recognized. The Negev tumuli are probably another group; the Sinai *nawamis* yet another; as are the dolmen fields of the plateaus and slopes east of the Jordan Valley. The southern coastal plain, with so little mortuary evidence even in the EB I, presages normal behavior in the EB II and III throughout Canaan.

Built tombs such as dolmens, *nawamis* and tumuli are most often associated with pastoral, nomadic populations, and indeed many are located in areas of marginal agricultural potential. However, many are found in areas with more potential for cultivation and chances are that in some parts of the southern Levant farmers buried their dead in such structures as well (Philip [2001] has summarized the evidence in Jordan).

Bab edh-Dhra, the best excavated and best published assemblage of them all, is in a class by itself. In his short account of the site, Schaub has written, "the cultural remains uncovered at Bab edh-Dhra reflect the full development of ancient Palestine's EB culture" (1997: 250). Chesson has adopted this attitude as well (2001: 101). My own sense is that the opposite is true. Some of the material culture resembles that of the rest of Canaan, but the full range of burial practices tells another story, especially from the EB IB on.

This regional aspect needs to be elucidated further and better explained using the tools of the social sciences. Sahlins' famous model of the integreted chiefdom, or conical clan, from his 1968 book Tribesmen might be a good place to start. Does the organization of cemeteries allow us to infer some form of tribal organization? Given proper study of physical anthropology and cemetery organization and distribution, we may be able to answer this particular challenge.

Mortuary Practices—and their Absence—in the Early Bronze Age II and III

In a recent paper entitled "Uniformity as Ideology in the Early Bronze Age II" Greenberg points out the monotonic nature of EB II burial practices (1999): Multiple successive interment is the rule and the burial goods show a consistent repertoire. The pottery vessels are the same as those found in non-mortuary contexts, except that there are more jugs and juglets in burials. Tombs are rock-hewn at Jericho and in all other known cases except for the unique charnel houses of Bab edh-Dhra. Baxevani, writing about Intermediate Bronze Age mortuary practices, has used the term "collectivism," the idea being to emphasize sameness and uniformity (1995: 94). Philip argues that the propagation of a "communal" burial ethos formed a key element in the long-term reproduction of the kinship-based corporate group as an effective organizational unit (2001: 199–200). Harrison suggests that "the symbolism embodied by these collective burials had the intended effect of masking internal conflicts, or the inherent social disparities, existent with the EB II–III population that resided at Bab edh-Dhra" (Harrison 2001: 227). As these scholars see it, sameness in death was an assertion of social leveling aimed at the living, in an EB II/III society that was stratified, even if the complexity was small in scale. (Stratification and social complexity is inferred from public works projects and orchestrated exchange systems for

example.) While standardized in composition, burial goods were still considered necessary. But is this the whole story?

The problem with the above analyses is that they are based mainly on two sites: Jericho and Bab edh-Dhra, which themselves differ from each other substantially.[9] Aside from these two, EB II–III tombs are thin on (or under) the ground. The lack of EB II–III mortuary material is not simply an accident of discovery. If it is true that uniformity, or collectivism, was the prevailing ideology, it was expressed by eliminating the physical accoutrements of burial. An equally signficant inference is eschatological: it was no longer percieved necessary for burial goods to accompany a corpse, at least not for long term deposit.

To illustrate the point we may peruse the population figures arrived at by Broshi and Gophna (1984). The number of known sites and tombs has increased since their survey, but the overall picture has not changed.[10] Broshi and Gophna concluded that Palestine west of the Jordan had a population of approximately 150,000 at the time of the EB II/III transition. Estimates such as these are theoretical exercises—the true figure may be half or double their estimate (a major factor is the assumption that all sites were inhabited concurrently). So, for the sake of argument, let us posit a population of 100,000. In preindustrial agrarian societies mortality is generally about forty-five deaths per one thousand individuals. In other words, around 4500 bodies a year would have been produced. If we multiply this coefficient by the length of the EB II/III continuum, i.e. by 800 years, we arrive at a figure of 3.6 million cadavers. Where are all those skeletons?

A dolmen on the Golan Heights, constructed of upright basalt slabs supporting a roof slab. It is likely that such structures were originally covered by mounds of stones and earth called tumuli (tumulus is the singular) or cairns. Dolmens are characteristic of the slopes and plateaus east of the Jordan river, though they do occur sporadically to the west.

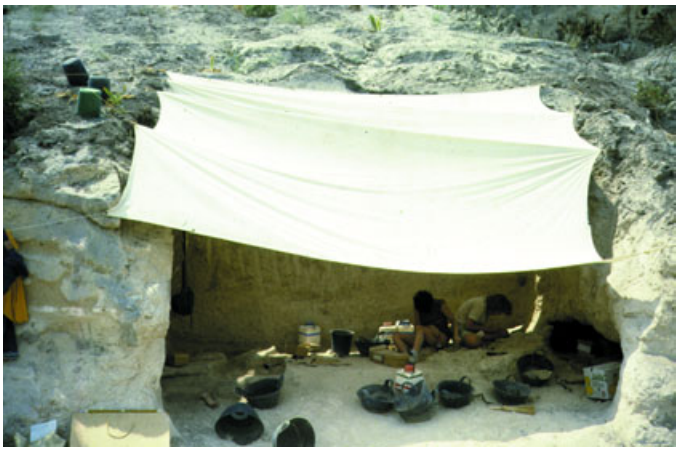
The total assemblage of burials in a given area will almost never be representative of a society's full social spectrum (see, e.g., Parker Pearson 1999: 5). Somebody will always be missing—suicides, infants, slaves, etc., depending on the place and time. But in some places and, in some periods, almost everyone is missing. And the EB II–III is one of those periods, Jericho and Bab edh-Dhra notwithstanding.

When we examine the isolated cases of EB II and EB III burial outside of Bab edh-Dhra and Jericho, we begin to find caveats. Among the few recorded EB III burials from the north are two from Affuleh. Both were individual pit graves, both produced Khirbet Kerak Ware, and in the case of Burial 15 contained animal bones (Sukenik 1948: 11), a practice that is not attested among the EB II–III burials from Jericho or Bab edh-Dhra, nor from any EB I funerary assemblage. In fact, Sukenik notes a number of Middle Bronze Age jar and pit burials at differing elevations in the same 6 by 7 meter excavation pit, not all of which contained visible accompanying offerings. And almost all of the EB III material is sherdage; one would expect more than one complete vessel from two different sets of burial offerings. It seems clear to me however, that the burials are intrusive MB interments that penetrated EB III occupation levels.[11]

Of the other mortuary assemblages dated to the EB II–III, some are doubtful as burial goods because they are found together with a jumble of EB I material. Another problem

The Retamim tumulus (or "cairn") field in the Negev. Tumuli (stone heaps) are circular at the base but the core usually contains subsurface rectalinear cist burials or above-surface chambers *Courtesy of M. Haiman*.

Nawamis in central Sinai. These round stone burial structures with entries facing east are found only in Sinai. They appear to be a fourth millennium BCE phenomenon.



An EB IB tomb in the Ein Hanatziv cemetery, carved into the Lisan marl of the Jordan Valley Ghor (upper terrace). The roof and entrance have collapsed. *Courtesy M. Sebbane*.

A sample of pottery from a fairly typical group of burial goods from the EB IB tomb at Ein Hanatziv, Israel. The vessels were highly fragmentary and their slip and burnish poorly preserved due to the poor quality of manufacture, perhaps combined with seasonal wetting and drying. *Courtesy M. Sebbane*.

Jewelry from the Ein Hanatziv tomb. The beads are made of carnelian, glazed composition (faience), rock crystal and limestone. The larger bracelets are of copper and smaller one is gold. *Courtesy M. Sebbane*.

encountered is that it is not always simple to differentiate EB II from EB IB pottery. The tombs at Ai are compromised by both these hardships. All told, we can count the definite EB II–III tombs outside of Jericho and Bab edh-Dhra on two hands—and these are almost all single tombs with very few interments: Gadot, Asherat, Ai (if they were used as tombs rather than say, storerooms, in this period), Lachish (though the cave assemblages are almost always mixed and it is difficult to know whether EB pottery goes with the living surface in a cave or with a burial, or if the burial is IBA or MB, etc.), and Kinneret, to name most of the known tombs.[12] The spotty persistance of EB I practices suggests anachronistic rather than normative behavior.

To understand this radical change in mortuary behavior, I was tempted to adopt Cannon's model of "expressive redundancy" (1989). This model suggests that funerals and burial practices are elaborated as a means of competitive display, but that once lower status individuals or groups participate in the competition, higher status people leave the arena and seek out other ways to express their exhalted positions. Eventually, competitive display loses its raison d'etre and goes into decline, or is banned. When mortuary display becomes redundant for high status groups such groups often do things like endow large churches (in Europe) or temples (in ancient Greece). The expressive redundancy model raises the possibility of a correlation between the lack of burials and the florescence of big EB temples such as those at Megiddo, Arad and Ai.

As we have seen, however, EB I burials are not very elaborate, and the repertoire of tomb form and grave goods is neither rich nor dramatically varied, except on a regional basis. In fact, within any given region they appear fairly standardized. Therefore, the jumping-off point for Cannon's model is missing.

Perhaps we should be thinking in terms of funerals rather than tombs. Maybe that is where the competitive display was. But the lack of final burial still implies major ideological changes relative to the EB I; eschatological ones too. How then, did people dispose of their dead in the EB II and EB III? Several explanations may account for the dearth. All are speculative since the evidence is mainly negative.

It is likely that most of the dead were buried without accompanying artifacts in shallow graves, tumuli and the like. Several hundred meters upslope from Tel Rosh Haniqra, near the sea, next to the border between Lebanon and Israel, an isolated pit burial was discovered by chance. It contained a large number of bones and pottery of the late EB III (Tadmor 1993: 1289). This pit burial may provide a hint as to what happened to the overwhelming majority of EB cadavers.

A second possible explanation for the dearth of EB II/III tombs is cremation, as suggested by the cave tomb at Kinneret, on the outskirts of Tel Beth Yerah (Mazar, Amiran and Haas 1973). It is the only EB tomb known from the vicinity, though Mazar mentioned reports of pottery in the lands of the modern settlement. Among the three burial phases identified, the

presence of EB I material is often forgotten (Mazar, Amiran and Haas 1973: fig. 4). The rest of the assemblage has been dated to the late EB II and includes fifty ceramic vessels, numerous sherds, hundreds of beads of gold, silver, semiprecious stones, shell and terra cotta, and a limestone macehead. Only two skeletons were reported, though this may only be a minimum number. It is interesting to note that one is a mature male 35 to 40 years old and the other an adult female 24 to 30 years old. If these were really the only two individuals present then we have, for once, a better idea of the kinds and numbers of burial goods that accompanied individual deceased adults.

The bones in the Kinneret tomb show indications of cremation, a phenomenon that was fairly widespread in the EB I, as we learned above, but known only from the charnel houses at Bab edh-Dhra in the EB III.[13] Perhaps a great many cadavers were cremated in the EB II and EB III, without offerings, and in the open, where burned remains would disappear. If there is any truth to this scenario, cremation would have hastened the pace of deforestation tremendously, much like what is happening in India today. In this context it is intriguing that the paleodendrological data (still scanty) show a sharp decline in Aleppo pine—virtually absent in the archaeological record of the southern Levant from the mid third millennium and after (e.g., Liphschitz 2000: Table 17.1).

A third scenario requires us to remember that various regions, generally beyond the Mediterranean settlement core, appear to have maintained the traditional burial forms of the Chalcolithic and EB I: tumuli and cists in the Negev and in central and southern Jordan, and dolmens, mainly east of the Jordan River, on the plateaus and their western flanks. Indeed, they seem to make up the vast majority of tombs in the EB II–III of the southern Levant. Isolated finds of dolmens and tumuli occur in the highlands west of the Jordan: a tumulus field in the Carmel range (Greenberg 1992), dolmen fields in the eastern upper Galilee, singles dolmens near Lachish, Yatta and several in the Jerusalem area (Zohar 1993: 54–57 and references there). These suggest another possibility: that megalithic mortuary structures were once much more frequent in this region too, but were dismantled by later inhabitants for reasons unknown—ideologies antagonistic to such features and their religious associations, fear of manes that were thought to inhabit them or even because they were a convenient source of building materials.

One might suggest further, more far-fetched explanations for the lack of EB II–III burials in the Mediterranean zone, but there is little point. If archaeologically visible burial remains are the exception (at least in the Mediterranean zone), what do these exceptions imply? For one thing, they imply social boundaries, in which the retention, or return to, old practices fortified a traditionalist identity and a link to the past. The overall picture is one of divergent ideologies that coexist, even within fairly small, circumscribed regions. Mavericks, heretics or fundamentalists made a stand and a statement against the predominant pattern of accepted burial patterns.

This being the case, the rich and highly varied mortuary material from the Bab edh-Dhra charnel houses stands on its own. The charnel house contents are not as standardized and limited in repertoire as are the burial good assemblages of EB I and EB II/III tombs in the rest of the region. It has been suggested that some of this variability reflects ranking or status differences (e.g., Chesson 1999; Harrison 2001: 227). Thirteen charnel houses and a pit burial or two are documented for the entire EB II–III. No more than a few hundred individuals were interred in these ancestral repositories. Of course, there were more tombs and cadavers; but how many more? The Bab edh-Dhra assemblage is unique so far and not representative of the southern Levant as a whole.

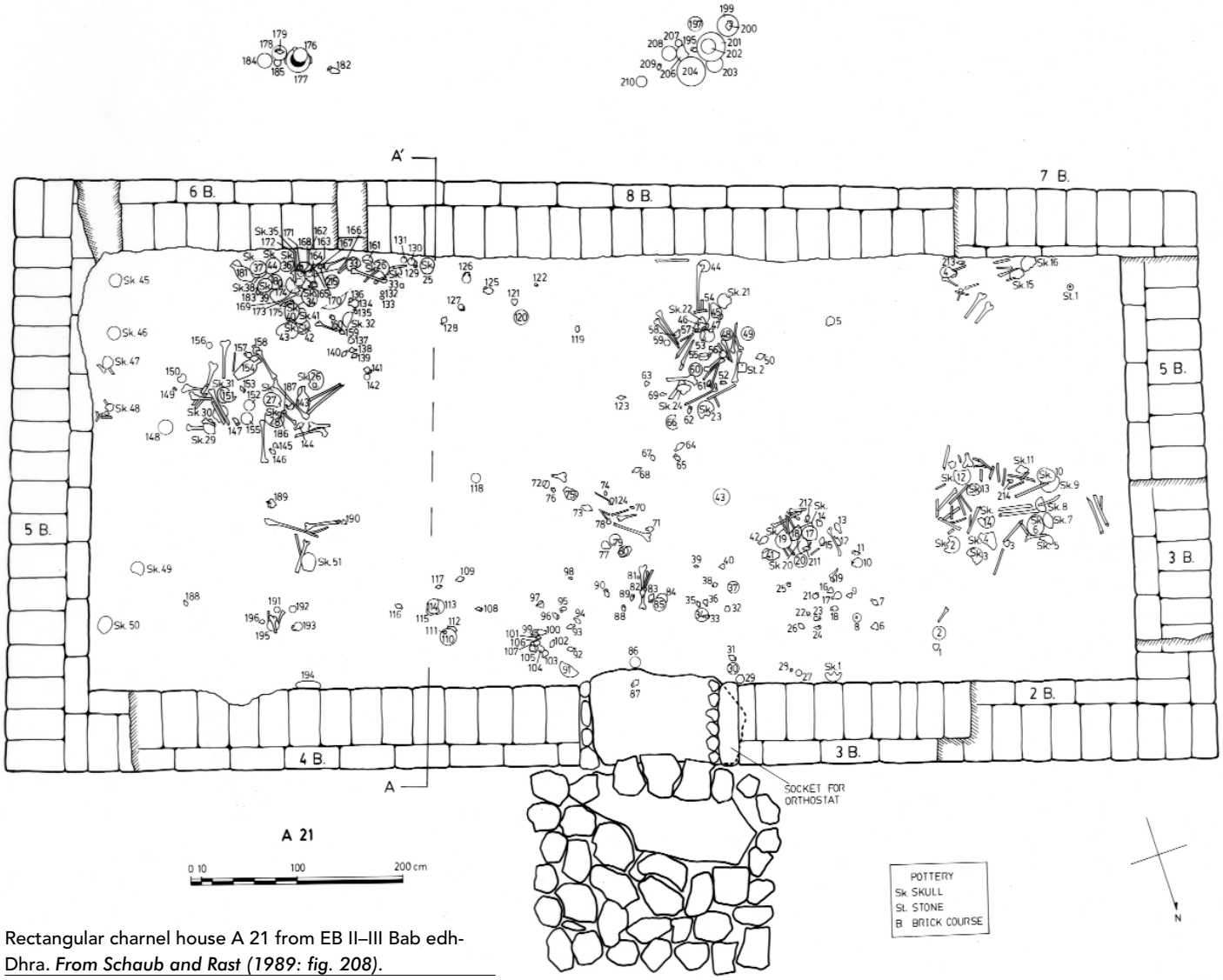
At the same time, it should be said that the scholars who have endeavoured to interpret the Bab edh-Dhra material have done some of the most systematic and anthropologically informed work on mortuary assemblages in the ancient Levant. While, for example, one may not be convinced that the data support Chesson's reconstruction of greater and lesser "Houses" or status groups in the formal sense, her approach is definitely needed. Her graphic reconstruction of a charnel house and her construction of an archaeological narrative of mortuary behavior are evocative and useful tools for filling in the gaps in our knowledge with hypotheses suggested by ethnography.

The EB I Period—A Summary

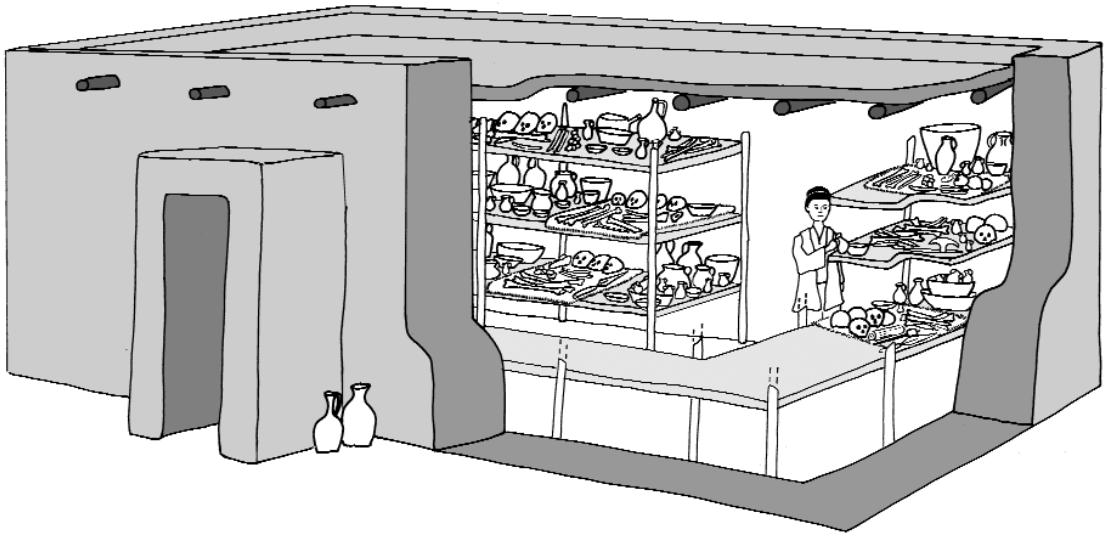
For most people in the Early Bronze Age, burial may have been a simple affair that left no remains for archaeologists to find, and this is probably true for most periods. Nevertheless, in the early part of the period, the EB I, a number of tombs and cemeteries or burial grounds have been found that display a variety of tomb types and burial practices. Since much of the variability is regional, we might infer that it reflects cultural divisions as well: *nawamis* in the Sinai, tumuli in the Negev and east of the Jordan, dolmens and cists east of the Jordan, particularly north of the Dead Sea, and cave interments and rock-cut tombs in the Mediterranean zone (these burial types also overlap or intrude into neighboring zones to some extent). Cremation was practiced, though its prevalence remains in question; it may have been extremely common but rarely detected. Burial appears to be organized by kin group and includes males, females, adults and children. Burial monuments, i.e. those that are prominent in the landscape, very likely were markers of tribal territories. This is less certain with regard to cave tombs, which were not prominent, and were perhaps even designed to be inconspicuous. The overall picture is one of segmented societies comprised of small corporate groups that interacted, perhaps even intermarried, but were not characterized by, or at least did not express, great differences of status or wealth. Finally, if ethnography and later textual material is any indication, the burial goods and treatment of the bones appears to suggest a belief in some sort of post-mortem existence—an afterlife or a netherworld.

The EB II–III Period—A Summary

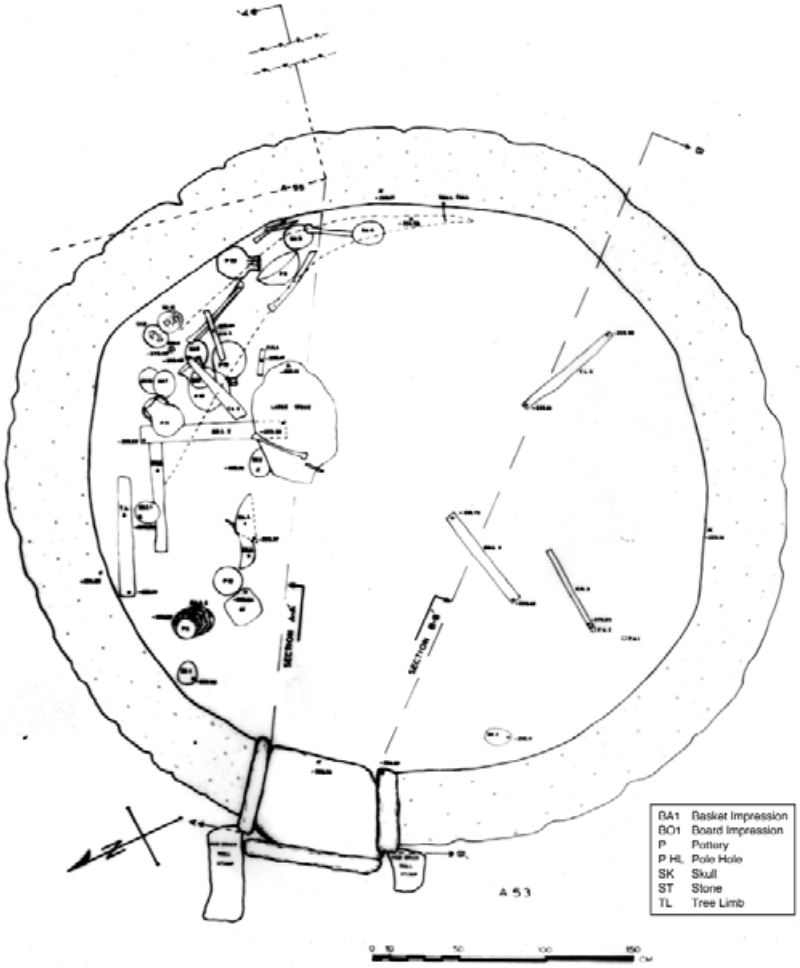
The picture changes in the EB II–III—at least in the Mediterranean zone and in the highly idiosyncratic (so far) site of Bab edh-Dhra. In this zone, burial remains become



Rectangular charnel house A 21 from EB II–III Bab edh-Dhra. *From Schaub and Rast (1989: fig. 208).*



Reconstruction of an EBII–III charnel house from Bab edh-Dhra. *(Reproduced from Chesson 1999: fig 5 with permission from the author.)*



Circular charnel house A 53 from EB II Bab edh-Dhra. This is one of the few EB II burial structures known in the southern Levant, and unique to Bab edh-Dhra. *From Schaub and Rast (1989: fig. 142).*

exceptional—fewer than ten cemeteries (mostly individual tombs) have been documented unequivocally. Clearly, the normal mode of cadaver disposal was intended not to leave permanent material remains. I have proposed that these practices comprised burial without burial goods or cremation, both in the open rather than in caves. The tombs that have been found with EB II–III remains represent behavioral anachronisms and deviations from the norm. Bab edh-Dhra shows a dynamic all its own, with the progression from shaft tombs in the EB I to above-surface charnel houses in EB II–III and back to shaft tombs in the Intermediate Bronze Age. In contrast, the plateau and slopes east of the Jordan, the Negev Highlands and, with less confidence, Sinai, seem to maintain their previous mortuary behaviours into the Intermediate Bronze Age. In the Mediterranean zone, rock cut tombs became normal once again in the Intermediate Bronze Age. Surely these changing patterns over time correspond to shifts in both social complexity and ideology.

Considerations for Future Research

Some factors have not been discussed here for reasons of economy. They do merit further consideration. For one thing, we are relatively long on tombs and short on every other aspect of the transition from the state of living to the state of death. We have yet to find discernible evidence for funerals, or anything leading up to the final interment. Some evidence for commemorative rites may exist in the Azor tombs where bones are found at the lowest levels and only artifact offerings at the upper levels (Ben Tor 1975: 25). A large dolmen containing undisturbed burials and offerings at Tell el Umeri was entered via a distinct plaster surface outside the chamber (Herr et al. 1997: 153), which perhaps was the locale of regular visitation in connection with the dead.

Another element has been touched upon only in passing: religion or eschatology. This is not because it was not important, but only because we know so little. The archaeological investigation of religious beliefs associated with burial customs has gone out of fashion—the preponderance of inquiry is oriented toward social structure. This is not a salubrious development. Doesn't the rich iconography of Chalcolithic mortuary assemblages evoke religious belief as a primary factor to be considered? No one would seriously argue that religion and social structure are not intertwined, particularly in pre-industrial societies. There may have been an ideology of uniformity at work in the Early Bronze Age, but it had religious underpinnings. We shouldn't despair of discovering these as well.

In every culture death is a rent in the fabric of family and society that elicits, in varying degrees, sorrow, anger and pain.[14] Emotion is a part of mortuary behavior; if we look for it we may just find it.

Notes

1. A survey of the various textbooks is instructive. Kenyon's perspective was always highly colored by Jericho, and she described its EB funerary remains as representative of Palestine as a whole (1979: 84–100, 122–23), although failing to note how few EB II–III cemeteries were really known. Aharoni noted the lack of burials and asked whether it was accidental, or related to the cemeteries' distance from settlements, leaving the matter at that (1982: 51–54). Richard's treatment is brief and gives the unwarranted impression of complete continuity in burial practices between the EB I and the EB IV (1987: 38). Mazar's textbook contains several paragraphs on EB I funerary material and two short ones on EB II–III customs in which he concludes by asking: "Can we assume that people from cities such as Arad and Yarmuth were buried far from their homes in sacred cemeteries, as the cemetery at Bab deh-Dhra may have been?" (1990: 98–100, 139). Ben-Tor's summary of EB I practices is succinct but does not expand on the problematic nature of mortuary data in EB II–III at all (1992: 88). Finally, in an edited volume with "Social Archaeology" in the title, Gophna utters nary a word about mortuary remains (1995). Lacking evenly distributed data, scholars writing

syntheses have tended to avoid or shortchange the topic of mortuary practices. The single exception to date is Philip's recent account of the Early Bronze Age in Jordan (2001: 197–202). The recent research of Rast (1999), Schaub (1981) and Chesson (1999, 2001) on the Bab edh-Dhra material is moving us in more interesting directions.

2. This article will discuss, in sequence, the EB I and the EB II–III, the latter as a single temporal unit. I will forego the EB IV (called by many of us the Intermediate Bronze Age) as it is a large topic requiring a separate treatment. The most recent synthetic treatments are those of Baxevani (1995), Dever (1995), Greenhut (1995) and Palumbo (2001).

3. Important exceptions are two tombs at Azor excavated by Ben Tor, probably interred with more than sixty individuals each (Ben Tor 1975: 8), and Assawir with a minimum numer of thirty-eight individuals (Dothan 1993: 428)

4. In the 1960s and 1970s the local antiquities market was flooded with Tell el-Farah North-type pottery vessels plundered from the necropolis excavated by de Vaux's team (Chambon 1993: 434).

5. Published respectively by Greenberg (2001), Smithline (2001), Mazar, Amiran and Haas (1973).

6. Megiddo Tombs 1126 and 1127 (Guy 1938: 12–14); Kabri (Peilstocker and Scheftelowitz 1991: *3–*4); Beth Yerah (Maisler et al 1952: 19); Tel Teo (Eisenberg, Gopher and Greenberg 2001: 39).

7. Schaub and Rast have identified a seasonal village of the EB IA (Stratum V) that corresponds to the early tomb assemblages (2000: 74, 88). This does not necessarily contradict the proposal offered here.

8. Gezer (Callaway 1962), Givatayim (Kaplan 1993a: 521), Azor (Ben Tor 1975: 10), Tel Aviv (Kaplan 1993b: 1451–53).

9. Jericho has nine tombs of the EB II–III and Bab edh-Dhra has thirteen (Harrison 2001: 217).

10. Joffe includes more up-to-date data, including those from east of the Jordan, but does not include the EB III (1993).

11. The putative EB III pit burials at Afula have recently been cited by Philip (1999) to highlight social boundries and possible ideological differences between northern and southern groups, the latter represented by cemeteries with multiple successive burials in the southern Jordan Valley. While the attribution is mistaken, Philip's point is well taken. Removing the Afula burials from the EB corpus only buttresses the conclusion that Jericho and Bab edh Dhra are the exceptions to a mortuary environment that was lacking in grave-goods for the most part.

12. Gadot (Greenberg 2001), Asherat (Smithline 2001), Ai (Callaway 1963), Lachish (Tufnell 1958), Kinneret (Mazar, Amiran and Haas 1973).

13. It is not at all certain that the burnt bones at Bab edh-Dhra are cremations; the excavators prefer to explain the burning as being wrought by malevolent enemies (Schaub and Rast 1989: 396).

14. Emotion has made a comeback in anthropolicial and archaeological mortuary research of recent years. Examples are Metcalf and Huntington (1991), Rosaldo (1984) and Tarlow (1999).

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