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## Questions of Nomadic Incursions at the End of the 3rd Millennium BC

Although current anthropological views on culture-change place greater emphasis on isolating internal mechanisms in order to explain processes of change, earlier scholarship tended to view abrupt change in terms of 'invasions of new peoples'. A case in point would be Kathleen Kenyon's explanation of culture change at the Early Bronze III/Early Bronze IV horizon, c. 2350 BC. She says, 'At the end of the Early Bronze Age [that is, EB III], there was a complete and absolute break in Palestinian civilization. The town dwellers of the earlier period were succeeded by semi-nomadic pastoralists who had no interest in walled towns' (1971). As she elaborates later, it is clear that the semi-nomadic pastoralists are somehow to be connected with movements of Amorites from Syria-Mesopotamia. Despite more recent evidence to the contrary, this portrayal of the Early Bronze IV period (her Intermediate Early Bronze-Middle Bronze) continues to pervade characterizations of the period.

Although first espoused by Albright in the 1920s, it was Kenyon who revitalized the 'Amorite Hypothesis' in the 1960s as a result of her excavations at Jericho. There she discovered 346 shaft tombs with varying traditions, which she presumed indicated several different incoming tribal groups. She connected these data with movements of 'Amorite' pastoral nomads who are documented in late third and early 2nd millennia Mesopotamian texts, and who eventually superseded the Sumero-Akkadian dynasts in the early 2nd millennium. In this view, then, the 'Amorites' swept into Palestine, destroyed the urban centers, and precipitated a period of nomadism (EB IV) in the area. The archaeological record appeared to confirm this view, since previously EB IV had been attested principally only by large isolated cemeteries and ephemeral settlements.

Thanks to a recently expanded data base of archaeological materials for the last quarter of the 3rd millennium, we can say unqualifyingly that Kenyon's view of the period is in serious need of revision. Given the state of our knowledge today, the above quote should be revised in the following manner: 'The transition between EB III and EB IV marks a period of culture change in the civilization of the [proto-]-Canaanite inhabitants of Palestine. Although not yet totally clear, certain

politico-economic and/or climatic mechanisms triggered the ultimate demise of widespread urbanization. There followed a subsistence and organizational shift by the indigenous peoples, characterized by a variety of adaptive strategies on a continuum from permanent agrarianism in small walled towns to pastoral nomadism in seasonal villages.'

If we are in a position to recast Kenyon's analysis, it is primarily because of excavation in Jordan over the past 10–15 years. During this period, the archaeological record has revealed a level of sedentism not hitherto even imagined for this 'dark age' in the history of Palestine. Moreover, though Kenyon disassociated the EB IV culture from the Early Bronze Age proper, sites like Bâb edh-Dhrâ', Iktanu, 'Arô'er and, in particular, Khirbet Iskander, graphically demonstrate strong continuities with the EB III, including urban traditions. We now know that our perspective on this elusive and enigmatic culture has in the past been distorted by the very nature of the excavated remains; namely, vast EB IV cemeteries primarily found in Western Palestine. Heretofore, the virtual non-existence of sedentary settlements categorically defined the people as nomads and the period as a nomadic interlude between the two great urban eras of the Early Bronze Age and the Middle Bronze Age. On the basis of excavations in Jordan, however, it is becoming increasingly clear that the EB IV is a period of urban regression, not a nomadic interlude (Richard 1980; 1987).

In defense of Kenyon's explanation for culture change, one must take into consideration her training in the classical-historical tradition. Such an orientation fostered 'migration-invasion' theories as the only credible explanation for change, whether great or small, in the archaeological record (see Adams, van Gerven and Levy 1978). Invariably, it was the distribution and change in pottery styles which appeared conclusive in denoting population movement. Of course, in the case of EB IV, the pottery changes accompanied seemingly dramatic sociocultural change as well: a shift from a complex urban economy with large city-states to a pastoral subsistence economy with ephemeral settlements.

Today, given a wealth of new evidence from Jordan, it is possible to demonstrate that (1) EB IV pottery derives primarily

from indigenous EB III antecedents, not extra-Palestinian sources (Dever 1973; Richard 1980; Dever 1980) and, more significantly, that (2) EB IV urban settlement, i.e., house plans, fortifications, and material culture generally, reflects EB III urban traditions. From such strong evidence for continuity, we may infer that sociocultural change following the demise of the urban city-states was not so dramatic as heretofore believed. We would argue, therefore, that there is no compelling evidence to posit 'nomadic incursions' at the end of the 3rd millennium, that 'Amorite nomads' neither destroyed urban culture nor precipitated a nomadic interlude. Indeed the growing evidence for sociocultural continuity between the EB III–IV periods supports our contention that the collapse of the city-state system and the subsequent adaptation to a less complex sociopolitical system (village and town) and to non-urban subsistence strategies was a result of gradual internal processes (Richard 1987).

With regard to (1) above, it can now be shown that the basic red-slipped and burnished EB III repertoire of platters, bowls, jugs, jars, etc. exists in EB IV, although in degenerate form now and showing decorative motifs (rilled exterior) adopted from a type of decoration in vogue in Syria at that time. The influence, probably derived from trade and cultural contact between the two areas, is restricted to decoration, a few new forms, and—in the later buff well-fired pottery—technological advances current in Syria (Dever 1973; Richard 1980; Mazzoni 1985). The 'new look' to the pottery merely reflects concurrent ceramic changes in Syria; however, since in Palestine these ceramic innovations coincide with sociocultural change, their 'uniqueness' has in the past been overstressed.

The discovery of sedentary sites in Jordan has over the past 15 years or so revolutionized our thinking concerning EB IV society. With regard to (2) above, it is now clear that permanent settlements manifesting urban traditions, though not the level of complexity characterizing the EB III city-states, existed in the EB IV period. The extent of sedentism in Jordan and the westward diffusion of burial and ceramic traditions into Western Palestine (Dever 1973; 1980), imply that Jordan played a pivotal role in the EB IV period, but for reasons as yet not entirely clear.

Although *tell* occupation, e.g., Jericho, Hazor, Megiddo, is attested in Western Palestine and surveys likewise suggest that there is more EB IV settlement inhabitation than formerly thought, the evidence for sedentism is known primarily from excavations east of the Jordan River. Excavations at Bâb edh-Dhrâ' (Schaub and Rast 1984), 'Arô'er (Olavarri 1969); Iktanu (Prag 1974); Khirbet Iskander (Parr 1960; Richard 1986); Ader (Cleveland 1960), Tell el-Hayyat (Falconer and Magness-Gardiner 1984); Tell Um Hammad (Helms 1986), and Tell el-Umeiri (Geraty *et al.* 1986) have revealed various levels of permanent settlement, from small agricultural villages to small towns with strong urban traditions. Survey has uncovered dozens of other EB IV settlement sites in Jordan, which in future will undoubtedly fill out the picture already emerging

of a greater level of social complexity than hitherto conjectured for this period.

A brief look at the site of Khirbet Iskander (FIG. 1) will suffice to demonstrate our new perspective on the EB IV society. The site is perhaps the most dramatic example of sedentary adaptation in the period, since it appears to have been the home for a permanent agricultural community where continuity with Early Bronze urban traditions, particularly town planning, is evident (Richard and Boraas 1984; 1987; Richard 1986). The primary objectives of this expedition have been (1) to illuminate sedentary strategies in the EB IV period, and (2) to identify evidences of change at the EB III/IV transition,

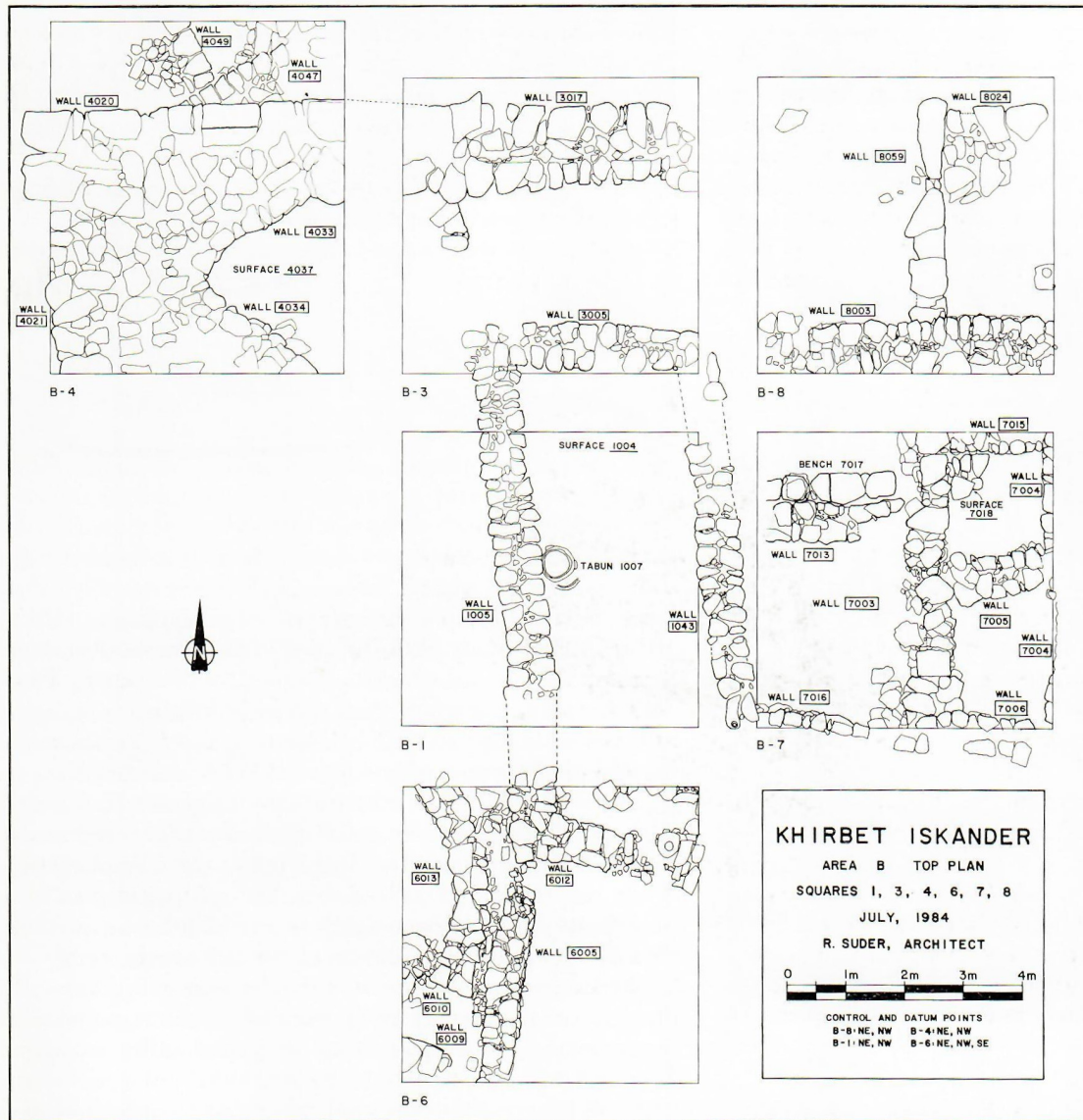
1. Khirbet Iskander: view from the south. (Photograph by James D'Angelo)



2. The 2.5 m wide stone perimeter wall found at the northern edge of the site. (Photograph by Kevin Kline)



3. Overall plan of the outer fortifications and multi-phased domestic complex in Area B at the northwest corner of the mound.



in order ultimately to explain the processes underlying the shift from urban to non-urban (village) adaptive strategies.

Khirbet Iskander, located some 56 km south of Amman, is a 7.5 acre site surrounded by a 2.5 m wide perimeter wall with reinforced corners that appear as square towers (FIGS 2-4). At the southeastern corner of the site a two-chambered bench-lined gate has come to light (FIG. 5). The fortifications at Iskander are the first and, thus far, the only such defenses known in the EB IV period. A wide exposure just within the northwestern fortifications has revealed a series of interconnected broadroom houses (one with bench) grouped around a courtyard. Tabuns, huge saddle querns, mortars, grinders, flint sickle blades, and storage areas all underscore the agricultural basis of the community.

Tentatively, it appears that there are five major phases to this domestic complex. In one level some 50 whole or restorable vessels (the largest corpus of intact domestic vessels found at an EB IV sedentary site) were recovered in a storeroom of pottery (FIG. 6). Some vessels contained the remains of carbonized grain, and one included the complete skeleton of a mouse! Two large cemeteries in the vicinity complete the picture of a well-defended, permanently established agricultural community. Additional excavation is necessary to determine whether or not there is a separation of domestic and public buildings, and if the site includes a sacred area. That some regional centers included a sacred precinct is now attested by the recent discovery of a cultic structure at Bâb edh-Dhrâ' (Schaub and Rast 1984). In light of this latter discovery, it

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4. Northern face of wall 4020, the northwest corner tower, still standing to a height of *c.* 3.0 m. (Photograph by Edyth Skinner)



5. The eastern room of the gateway structure looking to the south. (Photograph by Edyth Skinner)



6. Large storage jar in bench-lined 'storeroom' in Area B domestic complex. (Photograph by Edyth Skinner)



is no longer inconceivable that the temple discovered at Ader dates to the EB IV period. Although Albright originally called it the 'Moabite Temple,' he later termed it 'Canaanite' (1924; 1934). A close study of the reports, in fact, shows the temple to be in association with EB IV pottery, with a nearby EB IV domestic area, and with a large menhir similar to those found at Khirbet Iskander and Bâb edh-Dhrâ'. It should also be noted that the sacred area at Megiddo (str. 15–14), dated by Kenyon to the EB IV (1969), but more recently shown to be founded in the EB III (Dunayevsky and Kempinsky 1973), appears at least to have been reused in the EB IV (str. 14; Temple 4040). While we do not yet have a complete settlement plan of a permanent site, sufficient data are available to support the view that EB III urban traditions continued into the EB IV.

The significance of Khirbet Iskander is that it graphically illustrates the sedentary component of the EB IV population that must have been equally as important as the nomadic. The data from Khirbet Iskander and other EB IV sedentary sites call into question the applicability of the model of pastoral-nomadism, a model thought to characterize the level of EB IV economic subsistence and social organization of the people (Dever 1973; 1980). The model clearly does not comprehend the totality of the archaeological remains from the period. The adaptive strategies of the EB IV peoples were not everywhere as simple as this model would suggest. It is now clear that this model has explanatory value when applied regionally, that is, primarily to the seasonal sites of the Negev and Sinai (Dever 1985).

Thus, our perspective on the EB IV has changed radically in light of the growing number of agricultural villages and towns. These sites and their material culture illuminate a new component to the EB IV social context: sedentism. They likewise illustrate sociocultural continuity with the EB III period, and as a consequence support the contention that culture change was less abrupt than hitherto believed. Small towns

and villages, agriculture as well as pastoralism are elements found in indigenous subsistence strategies. Sociocultural change at the EB III/IV horizon (in this case greater pastoralism and village-life as opposed to urban settlement) is better understood as a change in emphasis of production and organization in response to irreversible stresses on the urban system, rather than as an abrupt shift to a new sociocultural phenomenon (see Salzman 1978). In this view, then, there is no need to posit foreign migrations from Syria (Prag 1985). Given the growing body of evidence underscoring continuity with the EB III, the question of nomadic invaders becomes an irrelevant issue.

The most telling evidence for this new view on sociocultural change lies in the EB IV archaeological record itself, where the actual transitions and continuities from EB III are manifest. The list of continuities with the local EB III has been expanded greatly: not only do we have pottery, lithics, metals, shaft tombs, chamber tombs, but also broadroom houses with benches, fortifications with towers, a gateway, sanctuaries, clear evidence for permanent storage facilities, significant pottery production, multiple continuous occupation, and a great deal of food production equipment, saddle querns, mortars, grinders, etc. In light of these new data, it would seem a good move methodologically to approach EB IV settlement sites with a new perspective, one which seeks to determine the degree of sedentism practised rather than one which views all the evidence in terms of pastoralism. This approach will help us to understand the part that sedentism played in the social matrix of the period and should provide insights concerning sociocultural variations from the preceding EB III period.

In this brief article, I have endeavored to build a case, based on Khirbet Iskander but corroborated by other sites, for a not inconsiderable level of sedentism in the EB IV period. The new data suggest the utilization of more complex adaptive strategies by at least a component of the population. The sedentary agrarian populations in the EB IV merit more consideration than has been given them in the past. What is needed now are new models which more accurately depict the socio-political organization of the EB IV population in its entirety. One approach is to view the entire Early Bronze Age (EB I–EB IV), 3400–2000 BC, from the perspective of the process of urbanization, including its ‘rise’ and its ‘collapse’. Whereas the EB II–III periods epitomize the high level of cultural complexity coincident with the rise of the urban centers, the EB I and EB IV periods display all the characteristics of the preformative and postformative stages of the urban process. In socio-political terms, it appears that the ‘Chiefdom model’ aptly describes the level of complexity in the Late Chalcolithic period (Levy 1986) and the EB I and EB IV periods (Richard 1987). As working hypotheses, the utilization of the ‘Chiefdom model’ and the new perception of the EB IV as a period of ‘urban regression’ rather than as a ‘nomadic interlude,’ will serve to cast off the presuppositions of the past and to suggest newer avenues of research in attempting to understand the dynamics of cultural evolution, both continuity and change.

So, do I think that nomadic invaders toppled the EB III urban centers and initiated a period of semi-nomadism at the end of the 3rd millennium BC? In a word, no! Rather than as a semi-nomadic interlude, we should view this period as one of indigenous Early Bronze Age urban regression, where the subsequent adaptation to village subsistence strategies was a result of gradual internal processes, not nomadic incursions as earlier scholarship presupposed. In conclusion, I am reminded of G. Ernest Wright’s perceptive assessment of the EB IV period. He called it ‘the dying gasp of the last remnant of Early Bronze tradition’ (1965: 106). One could hardly say it better.

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