

The Jordan Valley (East Bank) during the Middle Bronze Age in the Light of New Excavations

Our knowledge of the eastern Jordan Valley is derived mainly from the archaeological surveys carried out during the last forty years¹. During this time many sites have been carefully examined and a fair number have now been excavated. Thus although we now know much more about the occupational history of the eastern Jordan Valley during the Middle Bronze Age than we did forty years ago, the time still remains premature for writing the history of this period.

On the other hand the accumulation of material during the last forty years has reached such proportions that the time may be approaching when a synthesis will be possible. The aim of this paper is to try to draw synthetic conclusions about the occupational history and the settlement patterns in the eastern Jordan Valley during the Middle Bronze Age, based on evidence from individual sites.

Thanks to the excavations at such sites as Deir 'Alla², Ṭabaqat Faḥl (Pella)³ and Tell al-Ḥayyat⁴, several facts of settlement patterns, including intersite organization, can be examined. However, this paper will only consider the distribution of sites and intersite relationships during the Middle Bronze Age as well as the relationships of the Middle Bronze Age sites with the earlier (Early Bronze Age) and the later (Late Bronze Age) sites.

The author hesitates to touch the question of chronology. It is enough to say that the chronological framework of W. Dever⁵, placing the Middle Bronze Age in 2000/1950-

1550 B.C., is followed.

1. Geophysical Characteristics

The Jordan Valley extends from Central Syria in the north, between the two Lebanon mountain ranges, down the Jordan and along Wadi 'Arabah to the Gulf of Aqaba, a length of c. six hundred and fifty kilometres. The area discussed in this paper is restricted to the stretch between the Yarmouk river to the north and the northern edge of the Dead Sea to the south, a rift over 75km long. To the east run the hills of 'Ajlun and al-Balqa', their long level edge over a kilometre above the Jordan river, broken only by a few wadis.

Between the hills to the east and the river to the west, the valley varies in width from 5 to 13km. 40km south of Lake Ṭabariyah the width is no more than 5km. The valley expands to 8-9km in the plain of Deir 'Alla and Ghor Nimrin and reaches its maximum width of about 13km in the plain of Ghor al-Kafrein. What we have then, between the Yarmouk river and the Dead Sea, is a narrow valley expanding at Ghor al-Kafrein to the dimensions of a plain. A large part of this valley is of exuberant fertility, and the whole may be cultivated.

Down the valley a deeper narrower bed exists (the Zor). Its banks are mostly of white marl. The river itself is from 25-30m wide and varies from 0.9m depth at some fords to as much as 3.5m in maximum depth.

¹W.F. Albright, *The Jordan Valley in the Bronze Age*, *Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 6 (1926), pp. 13-74; N. Glueck, *Explorations in Eastern Palestine IV*, *Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 25-28 (1951), pp. 238-404; 'Some Biblical Sites in the Jordan Valley', *Hebrew University College Annual* 23 (1951), pp. 105-129; J. Mellaart, 'Preliminary Report of the Archaeological Survey in the Yarmouk and Jordan Valleys for the Point Four Irrigation Scheme', *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 6-7 (1962), pp. 126-157, Pls. 24-32; S. Mittmann, 'Die römische Strasse in der nordwestlichen Belka', *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 79 (1963), pp. 152-163, Fig. 11, Pl. 16; H. de Contenson, 'The 1953 Survey in the Yarmouk and Jordan Valleys', *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 8-9 (1964), pp. 30-46, Pls. 7-20; M. Ibrahim, J.A. Sauer and K.N. Yassine, 'The East Jordan Valley Survey, 1975', *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 222 (1976), pp. 41-66, Figs. 1-24; K. Yassine, J.A. Sauer and M. Ibrahim (Amman, 1988) 'The East Jordan Valley Survey, 1976', in K. Yassine, *Archaeology of Jordan: Essays and Reports*, (Amman, 1988), pp. 185-207.

²H.J. Franken, 'The Other Side of the Jordan', *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 15 (1970), pp. 5-10; H.J. Franken and M. Ibrahim, 'Two Seasons of Excavations at Tell Deir 'Alla, 1976-1978', *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 22 (1977-1978), pp. 57-79; M. Ibrahim and G. van der Kooij, 'Excavations at Tell Deir 'Alla Season 1979', *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 23 (1979), pp. 41-50; 'Excavations at Tell Deir 'Alla Season

1982', *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 27 (1983), pp. 577-585; 'Excavations at Tell Deir 'Alla Season 1984', *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 30 (1986), pp. 131-144.

³R.H. Smith et al., 'Preliminary Report on the 1979 Season of the Sydney-Wooster Joint Expedition to Pella', *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 24 (1980), pp. 13-40; J.B. Hennessy et al., 'Preliminary Report on a Second Season of Excavations at Pella, Jordan', *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 25 (1981), pp. 267-309; J.B. Hennessy et al., 'Preliminary Report on the Fourth Season of Excavations at Pella, 1982', *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 27 (1983), pp. 325-361.

⁴S.E. Falconer, B. Magness-Gardiner and M.C. Metzger, 'The 1982 Excavations of the Tell el-Hayyat Project', *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 27 (1983), pp. 87-104; S.E. Falconer, 'Village Pottery Production and Exchange: A Jordan Valley Perspective', in A. Hadidi (ed), *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan III*, pp. 251-259.

⁵W.G. Dever, 'The EBIV-MBI Horizon in Transjordan and Southern Palestine', *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 210 (1973), pp. 37-63; 'New Vistas on the EBIV ("MBI") Horizon in Syria-Palestine', *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 237 (1980), pp. 35-64.

The climate is very hot. The temperature average in July is 40°C, it has been known to rise to 47°C in August.

Rainfall in the Jordan Valley may be violent in winter, but the great heat of summer dries everything up, except for areas within reach of permanent water sources.

2. History of Exploration

In "The Historical Geography of the Holy Land", first published in 1894, G.A. Smith gave a detailed description of the Jordan Valley, mentioning that:

"...on the eastern side of the valley was the large town of Livias or Julias, opposite Jericho, immediately north of that smaller towns, with the city of Adam perhaps at present Tell Damieh and Succoth at tell Deir Alla, but after these, till the Yarmouk is reached, nothing except some nameless villages, unless Pella, which lay on the first terrace above the Valley ... The number of mounds, some of which have been found to consist of sun-dried bricks, are probably remains not of cities, but of brick fields"⁶.

Why, then, have towns always been few in the valley? Smith said it was due to the high temperature, the presence of wild beasts and the frequency with which the Valley was over-run by "Arabs". Is this really true?

Forty years after Smith, W.F. Albright investigated the Jordan Valley from Tell Qaḍi in the north down to Wadi 'Arabah in the south. Albright mentioned 16 archaeological sites in the eastern Jordan Valley between the Yarmouk and the northern tip of the Dead Sea:

"The Jordan Valley was the first part of Palestine to be intensively developed, and in spite of its heat and mosquito-breeding swamps ... The Jordan Valley was almost the only part of the country suited to support a sedentary population"⁷.

According to the results of his survey, Albright divided Palestine into three sections:

1. The Jordan Valley and the Plain of Esdraelon, where "all the Bronze Age sites ... were already settled before the end of the third millennium, while most of them probably date back to the first half of this millennium, at least"⁸.
2. The towns of the hill country, where "the vast majority ... were not occupied until the Late Bronze or Early Iron"⁹.
3. The coastal plain, where "the Early Bronze deposits are generally thin, and do not suggest an intensive occupation before about 2500 B.C."¹⁰.

What is important for us here is Albright's statement

about a complete break of sedentary life starting from the end of the Early Bronze Age until the end of the Late Bronze Age. It is quite understandable due to the lack of information at that time. Of the 16 archaeological sites located by Albright, he stated that 9 belong to the Early Bronze Age and the other 7 belong to the Late Bronze Age. None belong to the Middle Bronze Age. This is not the real case in the Jordan Valley.

The statement of Albright was developed by N. Glueck. In Glueck's survey of the eastern Jordan Valley, more than 120 archaeological sites were located between the Yarmouk river and Wadi 'Aẓimeh at the northern tip of the Dead Sea. Among them 21 belong to the EBIV, 13 belong to the Middle Bronze Age and 15 to the LB periods. Despite this Glueck concluded that there was a break of sedentary life in the Jordan Valley and the entire area south of Wadi az-Zarqa during the Middle and Late Bronze Ages. This is not the case. As we will see later, some sites were missed by Glueck on the one hand, and on the other hand, the area between Wadi az-Zarqa and Wadi Nimrin was never heavily populated, even during such periods as the Early Bronze and the Roman, due to the lack of permanent water resources.

Six years later an additional number of archaeological sites was located (10 new sites, 7 belonging to EBI-III, one to Middle Bronze Age). Among the sites already visited by Glueck, it was found that four had EBIV sherds (Khirbet al-Ḥammeh, Tell al-Ḥayyat, Tell al-Ma'ajajeh and Tell 'Ammata). At Tell al-'Aqarib and Tell al-Mazar, Middle Bronze Age sherds were found.

During the East Jordan Valley survey of 1975-1976, all these sites were revisited and 129 new archaeological sites were located. Of these new sites, 40 belong to EBI-III, 24 to EBIV, 19 to MB and 12 to LB. So for now we have a total of 39 archaeological sites belonging to the Middle Bronze Age.

SITE LIST¹¹

1. Baqurah (north site)
2. Jisr al-Majami'
3. Tell ar-Rayy (North)
4. Tell ar-Rayy (South)
5. Kh. Ma'adh
6. Tell as-Sakhineh
7. Tell al-Qeṣeibeh
8. Tell al-Arba'in
9. Kh. ash-Sheikh Moḥammad
10. Kh. al-Marqa'ah
11. Tell ar-Refeif

⁶G.A. Smith, *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land*. (New York, 1966), p. 314.

⁷W.F. Albright, 'The Jordan Valley in the Bronze Age', *Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 6 (1926), p. 67.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 67.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 67.

¹¹The site numbers are those in Fig. 1 and do not refer to any specific survey.

12. Ṭabaqat Faḥl (Pella)
13. Tell Zaqqum (North)
14. Tell al-Ḥayyat
15. Tell Maqbarat Wadi al-Yabis al-Qadimah
16. Makhadat Abu as-Sus
17. Tell Heneideh (main site)
18. Maqbarat as-Sleikhat
19. Tell Zor al-Maqbarah
20. Tell Abu Ḥamid
21. Tell al-Fashush
22. Qaṭar Ghor al-Ḥamra
23. Tell as-Sa'idiyyeh
24. Sa'idiyyeh Village
25. Tell Seqaaḥ
26. Tell al-Mazar
27. Tell an-Nkheil (south)
28. Tell Deir 'Alla
29. Tell ar-Rkabi
30. Qaṭaret as-Samra I
31. Qaṭaret as-Samra II
32. Qaṭaret as-Samra IV
33. 'Ain al-Baṣṣah
34. Tell 'Alla (al-Ḥandaquq)
35. al-Msaṭṭarah
36. Damiyah aj-Jadidah
37. Qaṭar Kibid
38. aj-Jazair
39. Tell aṭ-Ṭaḥuneḥ

3. The Distribution of the Sites in Space and Time (Geographically and Historically) (FIG. 1)

A. Geographically

The region of the Jordan Valley under consideration can be roughly divided into three areas: 1. The section between the Yarmouk River and Wadi al-Yabis; 2. The section between Wadi al-Yabis and the Zarqa River; and 3. The section between the Zarqa River and the 'Aẓeimeh River.

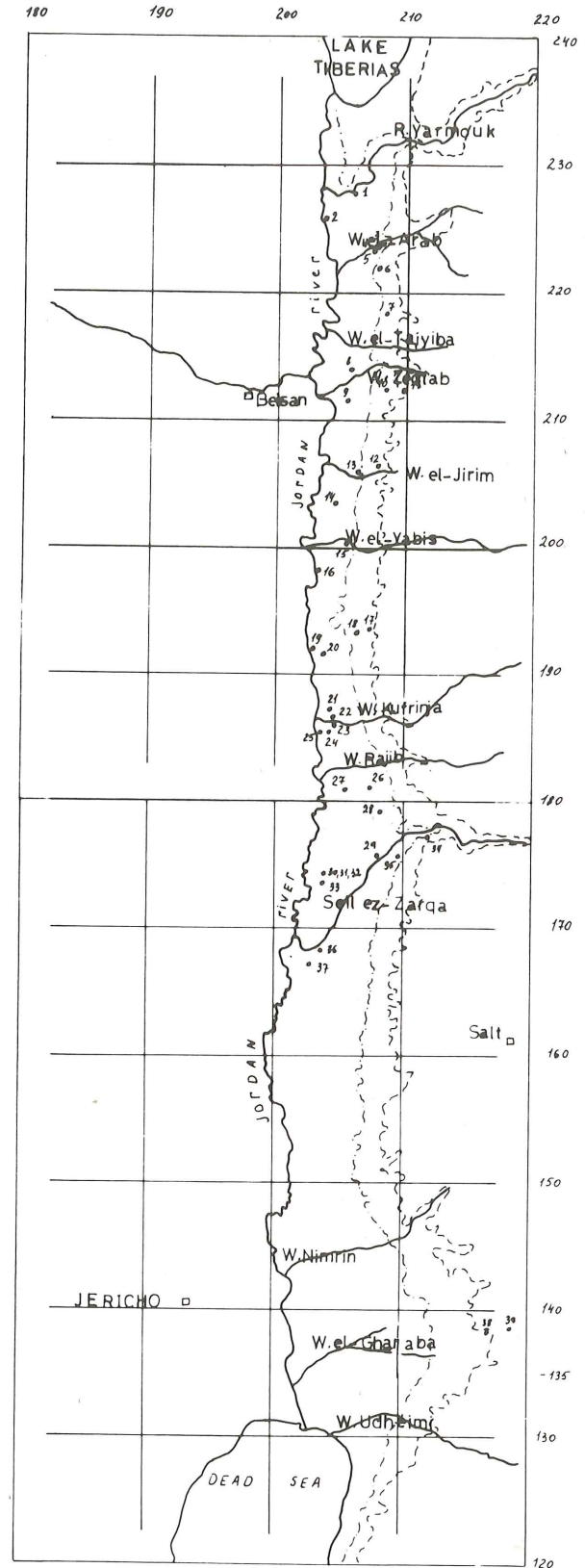
In the first section, the northern Ghor, there are 14 sites (FIG. 2a):

1. Baqurah; 2. Jisr al-Majami'; 3. Tell ar-Rayy (North); 4. Tell ar-Rayy (South); 5. Kh. Ma'adh; 6. Tell as-Sakhineh; 7. Tell al-Qeṣeibeh; 8. Tell al-Arba'in; 9. Kh. ash-Sheikh Moḥammad; 10. Kh. al-Marqa'ah; 11. Tell ar-Refeif; 12. Ṭabaqat Faḥl (Pella); 13. Tell Zaqqum (North); 14. Tell al-Ḥayyat.

All of these sites are located in the Jordan Valley bed except for Pella and Tell ar-Refeif, which are at the foot of the eastern hills.

In the second section, the central Ghor, there are 17 sites (FIG. 2b):

15. Tell Maqbarat Wadi al-Yabis al-Qadimah; 16. Makhadat Abu as-Sus; 17. Tell Heneideh (main site); 18. Maqbarat as-Sleikhat; 19. Tell Zor al-Maqbarah; 20. Tell Abu Ḥamid; 21. Tell al-Fashush; 22. Qaṭar Ghor al-Ḥamra; 23. Tell as-Sa'idiyyeh; 24. Sa'idiyyeh Village;



1. Location map.

25. Tell Seqāah; 26. Tell al-Mazar; 27. Tell an-Nkheil (south); 28. Tell Deir 'Alla; 29. Tell ar-Rkabi; 30. Qaṭaret as-Samra I; 31. Qaṭaret as-Samra II; 32. Qaṭaret as-Samra IV; 33. 'Ain al-Baṣṣah.

The heaviest concentration of sites seems to be in this area, where rich and extensive fields are combined with plentiful water.

In the third (southern) section, there are 6 sites (FIG. 2c):

34. Tell 'Alla (al-Ḥandaquq); 35. al-Msaṭṭarah; 36. Damiyah aj-Jadidah; 37. Qaṭar Kibid; 38. aj-Jazair; 39. Tell aṭ-Ṭaḥuneh.

The relatively small number of sites in this area has no connection with Glueck's theory of depopulation during the Middle and Late Bronze Ages. This area simply lacks one of the most important components characterizing the typical Bronze Age (and later period) settlements: the abundance of water sources.

Concluding Remarks

- If one were to judge from surface finds alone (the conclusions drawn from which should always be treated carefully), it would seem necessary to conclude that settlement was less heavy and less extensive in the Middle Bronze Age than during the Early Bronze Age.

- Traditional scholarship, based on Glueck's surveys, holds that during the Middle and Late Bronze Ages much of Transjordan, including the Jordan Valley, was unsettled. Such a view does not agree with analysis of the archaeological data.

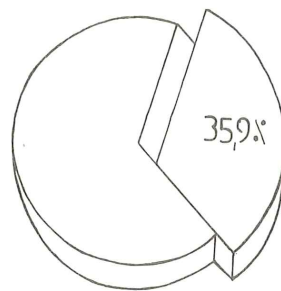
- The concentration of Middle Bronze Age sites is in the northern and central parts of the Jordan Valley (84.6%), between the Yarmouk and Zarqa rivers.

- Studies of the locations of the sites inhabited during the Middle Bronze Age have shown that they are characterized by the following factors: 1. desirable agricultural land; 2. available perennial major wadis; and 3. accessible transportation and communication routes.

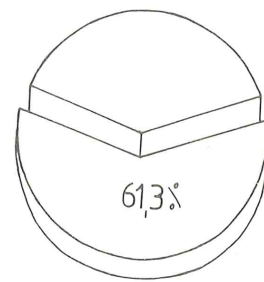
It is important to mention in this connection that among the nine sites founded in the Middle Bronze Age, two (Makhadet Abu as-Sus and Tell Zor al-Maqbarah) are located on the Jordan River itself which lies too deep to be used for irrigation purposes. It seems that the location of these sites is determined mainly by transportation and communication routes.

- A striking factor characterizing the locations of Middle Bronze Age sites is the close proximity of many of them. The conclusion about intersite relationships thus seems obvious.

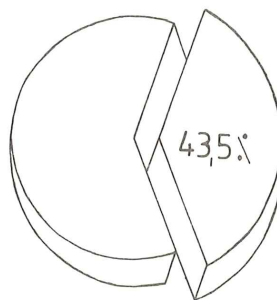
Concerning the studies of exchange patterns, emphasis has to be given to the study of the region or the site as a socio-cultural and economic system, because the history of the region or the site is not the history of its destruction and rebuilding. Only this approach will provide a framework for understanding the interrelations between different sites.



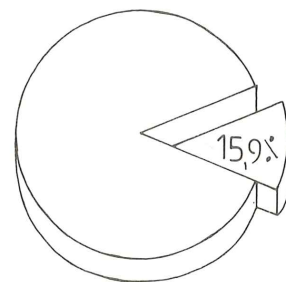
2a. The area between the Yarmouk River and wadi al-Yabis.



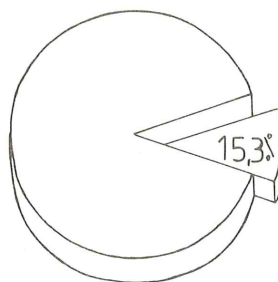
2d. EBI-III sites reused in the Middle Bronze Age.



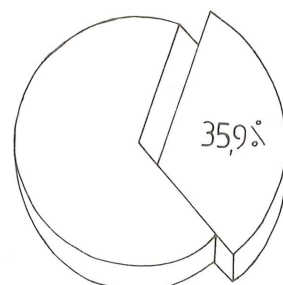
2b. The area between Wadi al-Yabis and the Zarqa River.



2e. EBIV sites reused in the Middle Bronze Age.



2c. The area between the Zarqa River and Wadi 'Aẓimeh.



2f. Middle Bronze Age sites reused in the Late Bronze Age.

2. Distribution of the Middle Bronze Age sites in the eastern Jordan Valley geographically and historically.

B. Historically

Relationships of the sites with the former and later periods.

Two sites represent the reuse of Neolithic/Chalcolithic sites:

15. Tell Maqbaret Wadi al-Yabis al-Qadimeh; 20. Tell Abu Ḥamid.

Twenty four sites represent the re-occupation of EBI-III sites, which were not reused during the EBIV (FIG. 2d).

1. Baqurah; 2. Jisr al-Majami'; 4. Tell ar-Rayy (South); 5. Kh. Ma'adh; 6. Tell as-Sakhineh; 7. Tell

al-Qeşibeh; 8. Tell al-Arba'in; 9. Kh. ash-Sheikh Moḥammad; 10. Kh. al-Marqa'ah; 11. Tell ar-Refeif; 12. Pella; 13. Tell Zaqqum (North); 17. Tell Heneideh (main site); 23. Tell as-Sa'idiyyeh; 25. Tell Seqaah; 28. Tell Deir 'Alla; 29. Tell ar-Rkabi; 30. Qaṭaret as-Samra I; 31. Qaṭaret as-Samra II; 33. 'Ain al-Başşah; 39. Tell aṭ-Ṭaḥuneh.

Three sites represent the continuation of the occupational history beginning from the Early Bronze Age until the Middle Bronze Age (including the EBIV).

3. Tell ar-Rayy (north); 18. Maqbarat as-Sleikhat; 34. Tell 'Alla (al-Ḥandaquq).

Four sites represent the re-occupation of EBIV sites, which were founded during the EBIV (FIG. 2e).

14. Tell al-Ḥayyat, 24. Sa'idiyyeh village; 27. Tell an-Nkheil (south); 35. al-Msaṭṭarah.

Nine sites were founded during the Middle Bronze Age:

16. Makhadet Abu as-Sus; 19. Tell Zor al-Maqbarah; 21. Tell al-Fashush; 22. Qaṭar Ghor al-Ḥamra; 26. Tell al-Mazar; 32. Qaṭaret as-Samra IV; 36. Damiyah aj-Jadidah; 37. Qaṭar Kibid; 38. aj-Jazair.

Fourteen sites represent the continuation between the Middle Bronze Age and the Late Bronze Age (FIG. 2f).

6. Tell as-Sakhineh; 11. Tell ar-Refeif; 12. Pella; 17. Tell Heneideh (main site); 18. Maqbarat as-Sleikhat; 20. Tell Abu Ḥamid; 21. Tell al-Fashush; 26. Tell al-Mazar; 27. Tell an-Nkheil; 28. Tell Deir 'Alla; 30. Qaṭaret as-Samra I; 33. 'Ain al-Başşah; 38. aj-Jazair; 39. Tell aṭ-Ṭaḥuneh.

Concluding Remarks

- The Middle Bronze Age represents the beginning of a

return to "classic" settlement patterns throughout the Early Bronze Age, abandoned during the EBIV, including the re-occupation of the major tells, which had been inhabited during the Early Bronze Age. Among the 39 Middle Bronze Age sites, 21 represent the reuse of the Early Bronze Age sites. Meanwhile the Middle Bronze Age represents the continuation of the former period (EBIV). Seven sites of this period had been reused in the Middle Bronze Age. Among the 39 sites, nine were established in the Middle Bronze Age.

- Middle Bronze Age sites had been reused in the Late Bronze Age. Of the 39 Middle Bronze Age sites, 14 continue into the Late Bronze Age. With this number of sites, Glueck's statement of a break in sedentary life in Jordan during the Middle Bronze Age and the Late Bronze Age negates archaeological evidence.

In this connection it is not superfluous to mention two sites, no. 12 Pella and no. 18 Maqbarat as-Sleikhat, which represent the continuation of a very long occupational history from the Neolithic/Chalcolithic up to the Late Bronze Age, going through the Early Bronze Age, EBIV and the Middle Bronze Age (in the case of the Pella area well into the Islamic periods). Of course, one site or even ten sites do not make history. However, I believe that the publication of the material at hand, new analyses, and over all the forthcoming excavations in Jordan at multi-phase sites will undoubtedly fill out the "gaps" which are, in my opinion, gaps in our knowledge rather than gaps in the history of Jordan. They will also provide more accurate ideas about the "grey areas" in the occupational history and settlement patterns during the Middle Bronze Age.