

Patterns of Regionalism: The Plateau of Northern Jordan during the Early Bronze Age in Light of the Zayraqūn Survey

Introduction

The third millennium BC in Jordan is marked by a major historical event: the rise and decline of the first urban culture in the history of the country (for a critical discussion of the term 'urban' cf. Harrison 1997). Our knowledge about the process of urbanization and the character of urban culture has been considerably broadened by the results of the Khirbat az-Zayraqūn Regional Project.

The excavations of the third millennium settlement on Khirbat az-Zayraqūn are the core of the project (FIGS. 1-3; no. 20). They lasted from 1984 until 1994 and were directed jointly by Moawiah Ibrahim (Archaeological Institute of tYarmouk Universtiy, Irbid) and Siegfried Mittmann (University of Tübingen; cf. Ibrahim and Mittmann 1994; Mittmann 1994).

Excavations at Khirbat az-Zayraqūn uncovered 5000m² of a 7 ha large settlement which dates to the urban phase of the Early Bronze Age (EB II/III). Two areas have been dug: the "upper city" on the highest plateau of the site and the "lower city" where mainly domestic buildings were exposed. In contrast to the lower city, the plan of the "upper city" is dominated by public buildings: the city wall with a city gate, the palace which is only partly excavated and the temple area. With the uncovered architecture and the associated finds Khirbat az-Zayraqūn can be considered an exemplary model of an Early Bronze Age city.

The Zayraqūn Survey

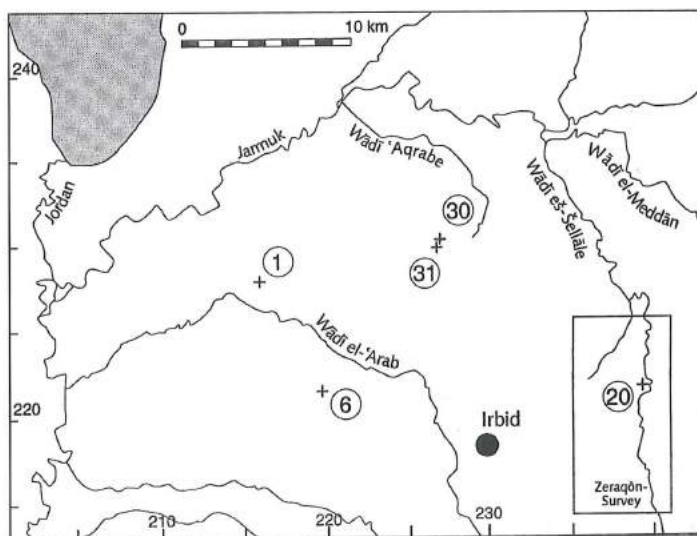
In order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of this Early Bronze Age city the local investigation of Khirbat az-Zayraqūn was completed by a regional study: the Zayraqūn Survey. Survey work was carried out during September and October 1989 and in several shorter site visits until 1994 (cf. Kamlah 1993; final publication: Kamlah in press a).

In northern Jordan, north and south of Wādī al-'Arab, four Early Bronze Age sites, which were already known through previous studies, were investigated in detail (FIG.

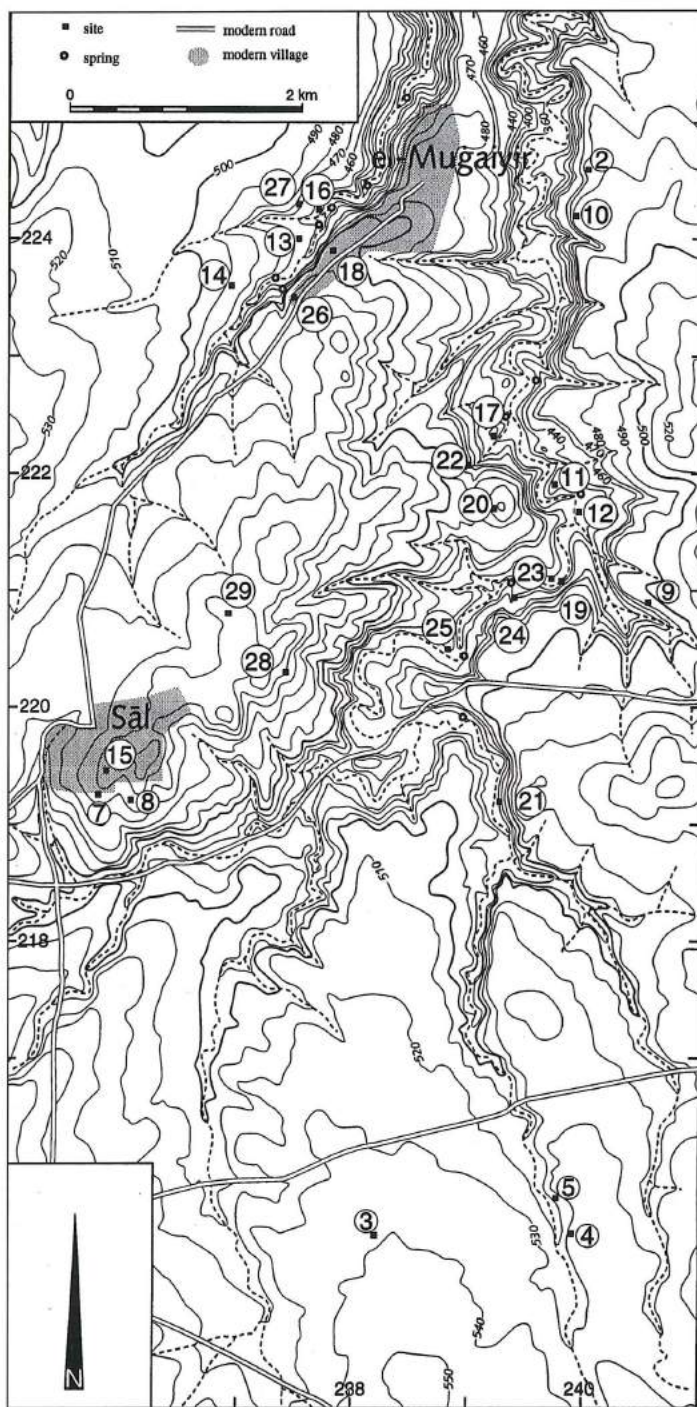
1): the twin cities of Khirbat al-Bayyāḍ and Rujm al-Qāḍi (no. 30-31; cf. Glueck 1951: 128-129, 441-442), the settlement of 'Arqūb az-Zahr where an Early Bronze Age cave had already been excavated (no. 1; cf. Parr 1956), and ath-Thanaḥa (no. 6; cf. Mittmann 1970:35 no. 77 "Rugm Sa'ab"), one of the largest Early Bronze Age sites in all of northern Jordan.

Apart from the examination of these four sites, the survey work concentrated on the immediate surroundings of Khirbat az-Zayraqūn. An area measuring 12 x 6 km was surveyed intensively (FIG. 2). The area is situated 5 km east of Irbid on both sides of Wādī ash-Shallāla. Its southern half covers part of the fertile plain of Irbid. While the southern part of the survey area offers settlement conditions which are typical for the lowlands, the situation in the northern part is quite different. Here Wādī ash-Shallāla and Wādī ar-Rāḥūb form deep canyons and the settlement conditions correspond to those of the hill country.

The main aim of the survey was to support the exploration of Khirbat az-Zayraqūn. Fourteen settlement



1. Northern Jordan and the Zayraqūn Survey.

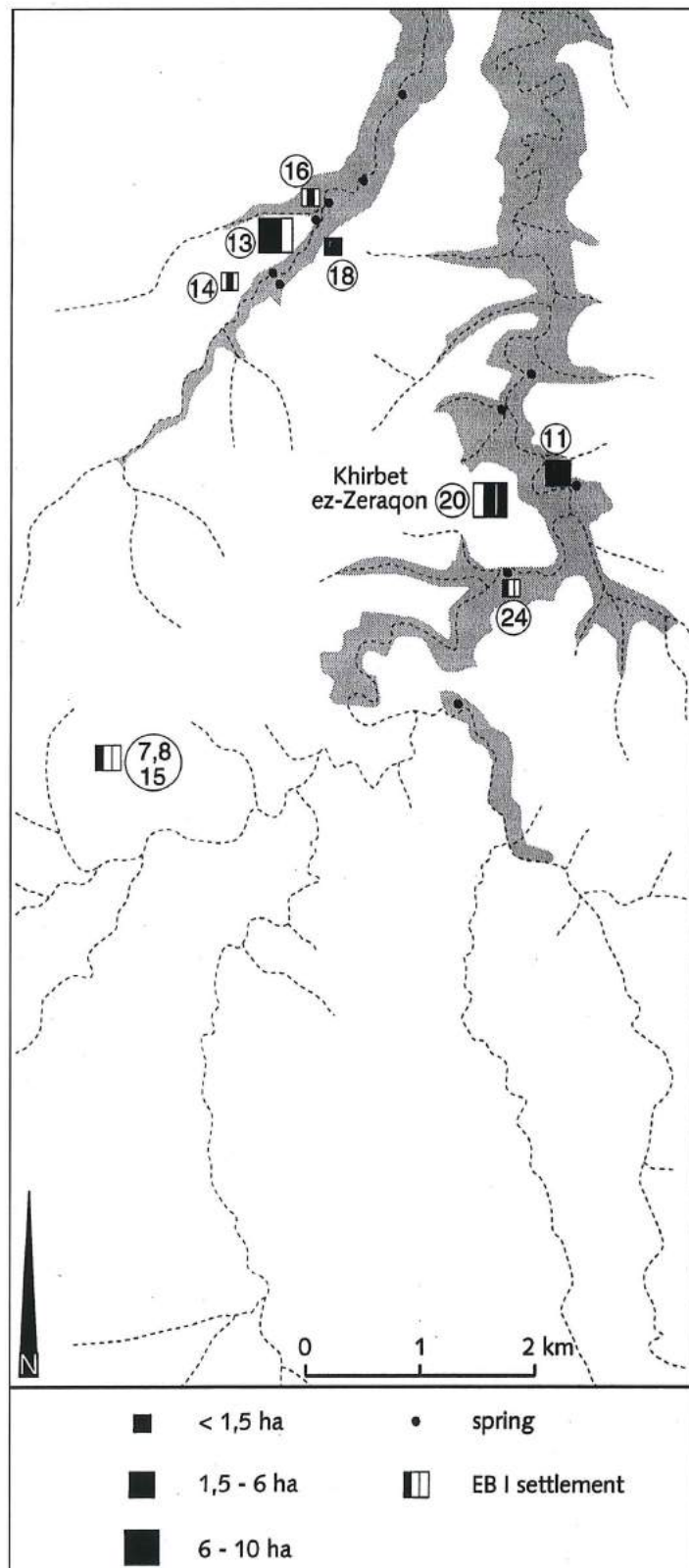


2. Ancient sites in the area of the Zayraqun Survey.

sites in the area were surveyed. They extend from the Neolithic to the Ottoman period. The survey map includes three additional excavation sites which are being investigated by other independent projects, such as Yaşilah (no. 21; cf. Muheisen 1994) and Tall al-Fukhâr (no. 11; cf. Ottosson 1993; Strange 1997; McGovern 1997).

Results of the Zayraqun Survey Concerning the Early Bronze Age

In the following a summary of the most important survey



3. Early Bronze Age sites in the area of the Zayraqun Survey.

results concerning the Early Bronze Age are given:

1. Inside the survey area, eight sites were settled during the Early Bronze Age (FIG. 3). During the Early Bronze Age the settlement activity in the area reached

- its first peak. Prior to the Hellenistic Period exclusively during the Iron Age, occupation and land use were of similar intensity.
2. All Early Bronze Age settlement sites are situated in the northern part of the survey area. In the southern part—the fringe of the plain of Irbid—no settlements were founded. Direct access to the water springs was obviously of great importance during the Early Bronze Age. A favorable topography was likewise important for protecting the settlement with a defensive wall. Suitable sites for such needs can be found only in the northern part of the survey area.
 3. In the course of the settlement process during the Early Bronze Age the number of settlements decreased. At its end, during the Early Bronze Age III only three settlements existed (cf. FIG. 3). At the same time the building density inside the walled city of Khirbat az-Zayraqūn increased, as the excavations have shown. These data reflect a major characteristic of Early Bronze Age urbanism in the research area: an increasing tendency toward centralization in the course of the settlement process.
 4. The Early Bronze Age settlements can be classified according to their size. It is necessary to distinguish between sites which are smaller than 5 ha and sites which are larger than this. Khirbat az-Zayraqūn was the only city in the area because it was larger than 5 ha and was fortified. The smaller, probably unfortified settlements can be classified as villages. Therefore, in the survey area a settlement system can be traced which consisted of a city and associated villages.
 5. The limited survey area does not reveal the full range of the Early Bronze Age settlement system in northern Jordan. A site like ath-Thanaba (FIG. 1; no. 6), which measured 19 ha during the Early Bronze Age II-III, demonstrates that the system included a third stage: the central cities. In the larger system Khirbat az-Zayraqūn belonged to the middle group of settlements. It was a city with associated villages and was itself linked to a nearby central city, most probably Tall Irbid.

Early Bronze Age Regionalism

While analyzing the material from the survey, special attention was paid to the question of regionalism. In order to trace regionalism, first of all typical pottery forms from the survey were determined. In the second step, all other sites in Palestine where these pottery forms had been found were registered and mapped. This approach yields certain patterns of regionalism, and it appears that these patterns change from period to period.

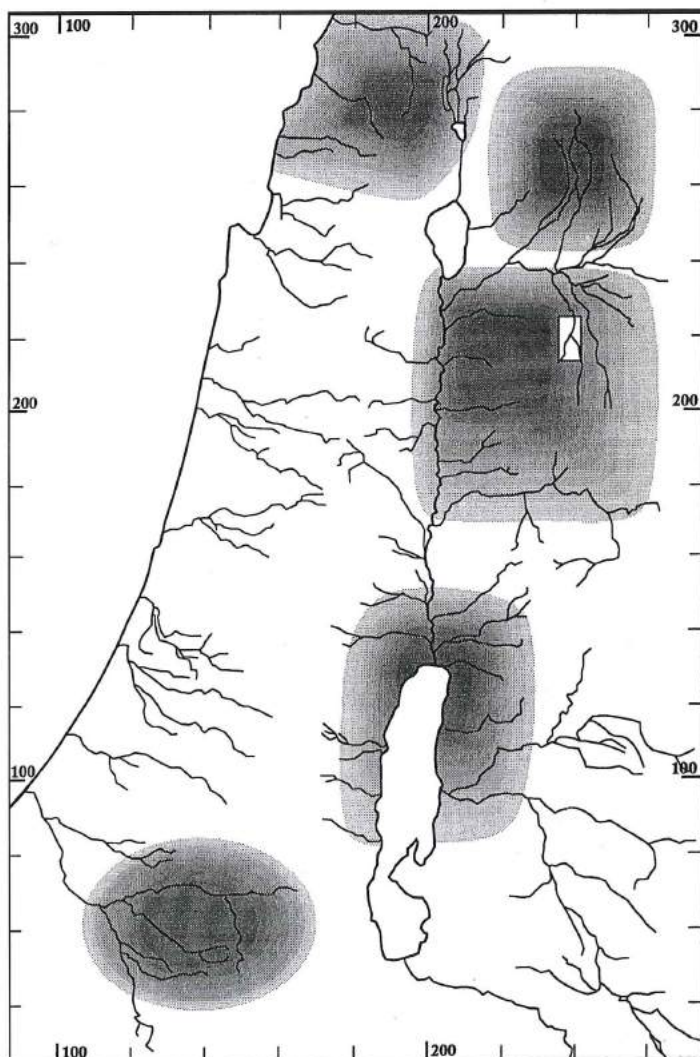
To understand regionalism during the Early Bronze Age, the previous and the following period have to be taken into consideration. The Chalcolithic period in Palestine is marked by several small pottery regions (FIG.

- 4). The finds from the Zayraqūn Survey show that the plateau of northern Jordan was closely related to the central Jordan valley while it was clearly distinguished from the Golan region.

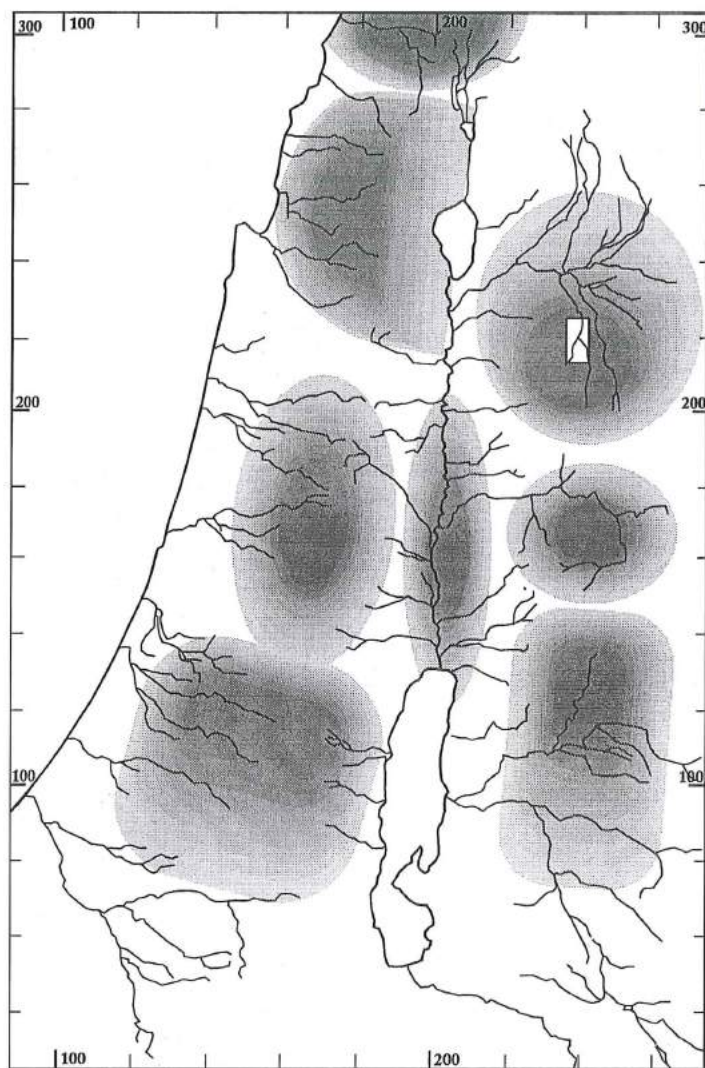
Much more research has been done on the pottery regionalism of the Intermediate Bronze Age (EB IV) in Palestine (FIG. 5). Several pottery families were recognized by William Dever (1980), as well as by Gaetano Palumbo and Glenn Peterman (1993). The finds of the Zayraqūn Project make it possible to classify the pottery of northern Jordan in this regional pattern: it is necessary to define it as a new family because it differs from the neighbouring groups (for details cf. Kamlah in press a).

However, it is important to notice that the general pattern of pottery regionalism during the Intermediate Bronze Age (EB IV) resembles that of the Chalcolithic period. Palestine is subdivided in several small pottery regions.

The regional pattern during the Early Bronze Age was totally different (FIG. 6). Various distinctive pottery fea-



4. Pottery regionalism during the Chalcolithic period.



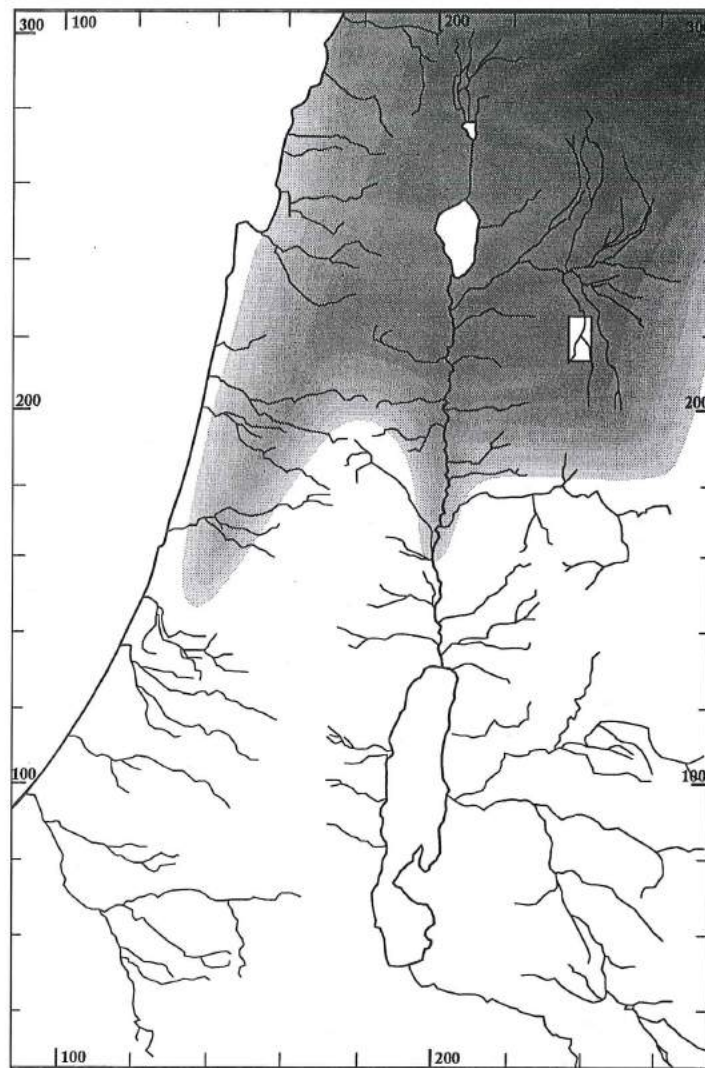
5. Pottery regionalism during the Intermediate Bronze Age (EB IV).

tures are clear evidence for the existence of a homogeneous northern pottery region in Palestine. The most important examples are:

- Gray-Burnished Ware;
- Grain-Wash Decoration;
- Metallic Ware;
- storage vessels with cylinder seal impressions;
- "Khirbet Kerak" Ware;
- vats with loop handles;
- jars with loop handles;
- pithoi without clay application around the body.

The northern region is bordered in the south by Wādī al-Farah and Wādī az-Zarqā'. It extends a little farther south in the coastal plain and in the Jordan Valley. Northern Jordan can be definitely linked to this region. In the north, the material culture east and west of the Jordan River was almost identical.

Aside from the north-south-division and the east-west-unity, there is a third aspect of special interest: the re-



6. Pottery regionalism during the Early Bronze Age.

gional pattern remains constant during the entire Early Bronze Age. This can be seen from the list of examples for northern pottery above. All of these examples have a distribution pattern which corresponds more or less to the area marked on FIG. 6. The earliest example is the Gray-Burnished Ware which marks the beginning of the Early Bronze Age. The next group is the Grain-Wash decorated pottery which extended into the Early Bronze Age II/III (Kamlah in press b). Metallic Ware (Greenberg and Porat 1996) and storage vessels with cylinder seal impressions are examples of northern pottery traditions during the early part of the urban phase, the Early Bronze Age II. For the Early Bronze Age III, Hermann Genz (in press) has defined the characteristic types of the north in his work on the pottery of Khirbat az-Zayraqūn (vats with loop handles; jars with loop handles; pithoi without application around the body). Just as Gray-Burnished Ware stands at the beginning of the Early Bronze Age, Khirbet Kerak Ware marks its end. These two pottery groups illustrate

the stability of the regionalism during the entire period.

The research on pottery regionalism has just begun, but its importance was demonstrated by a special workshop at the Seventh Conference on the History and Archaeology of Jordan. Discovery of regional patterns can shed new light on the history of the Southern Levant. The data of the Zayraqūn Project show that during the Early Bronze Age the regional pattern was relatively constant. This regional stability should be seen as one of the conditions lending itself to the rise of urbanization during the third millennium BC in Jordan.

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