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## **Redefining Societal Transformation in the Early Bronze Age of Jordan: Recent Discoveries and Chronological Modeling at KHirbat Iskandar**

### **Introduction**

This paper will re-evaluate the long-debated issue of the nature of the Early Bronze Age in the second half of the third millennium BC. That view traditionally held that there was a “collapse” at the end of the Early Bronze III (EB III) followed by what was thought to be a “dark age” in Early Bronze IV (EB IV). What has changed today? In the intervening period, excavation in Jordan has documented significant cultural continuity, particularly on the mounded sites in EB III–IV. The discovery of permanent, substantial, and multiphase EB IV settlement sites in the southern Levant has likewise raised serious questions about the so-called dark age. Also, the new dates for the EB IV in the higher chronology (2500–1950 cal BC) demand a reassessment of the myriad of theories concerning causes for collapse. Methodologically, this paper will

re-evaluate the question of “collapse” in the context of current theoretical constructs that trend toward viewing collapse/post-collapse trajectories as a process invariably leading to some sort of societal transformation. The paper will also contextualize a new radiometric and Bayesian modeled dataset of 7 stratified phases at the site of KHirbat Iskandar within the newer theoretical platform of societal transformation. Tentative results from the 2019 season posited a 7-phase continuously stratified profile from EB III through EB IV. The 2022 season tested the hypothesis of continuity over the EB III/IV transition and affirmed that continuity. The new dataset on the transition from urban to rural organizational strategies at the site may offer perspective on Jordan’s distinctive pattern for the southern Levant of EB III/IV mound occupation in the third millennium BC.

## Background

KHirbat Iskandar is a strategic site located in the central plateau area in Transjordan on the ancient “King’s Highway” just north of DHībān (FIG. 1). Situated on the northern bank of the Wādī Al Wālah and surrounded by arable lands today with farmlands, orchards, and horticultural strategies, this environment probably closely resembles that of the Early Bronze Age (FIG. 2). In fact, geomorphological study of the eco-environment of Iskandar affirms this inference, at least until the waning years of the third millennium BC (Cordova 2007; Cordova and Long 2010), when a drying stage and gradual erosion of the floodplain during the Early Bronze Age ultimately brought about the abandonment of the site. The site appears to have reached its urban peak in the EB III period, followed by a social transformation to a remarkable small town or regional center in the EB IV period. The latter—once considered a “dark age” due to early exploration in the twentieth century that exposed numerous cemeteries, seemingly iso-lated from settlements, as well as hundreds of temporary structures of pastoral nomads in the Negev *النقب*—is now viewed as a rural period of both permanent settlements and pastoral nomadic sites. Still today, however, there are two schools of thought concerning reconstructions of the last half of the third millennium BC. One stresses pastoral nomadism and a significant break from the preceding urban EB III period—the Intermediate Bronze Age (IBA)—while the other stresses more sedentism and more continuity with Early Bronze Age culture—the EB IV Period. Notably, as most scholars recognize a sedentary component as well as some degree of traditional links with the preceding Early Bronze Age tradition, there is

more common ground today than previously. Although at one time considered unique, KHirbat Iskandar is now more appropriately contextualized within a comparative landscape of similar sites, including those with fortifications (for a discussion of the sites, see Richard 2020).

## History of Excavation

The site of KHirbat Iskandar fielded its fourteenth season in 2022; it is that season as well as the 2019 excavations that specifically inform the topic of this article: the EB III/IV transition. Earlier excavations included full seasons in 1982 (Richard 1983; Richard and Boraas 1984), 1984 (Richard and Boraas 1988), 1987 (Richard 1990), 1997, 2000, 2004 (Richard and Long 2006), 2007 (Richard, Long, and Libby 2008), 2010, 2013 (Richard *et al.* 2013), and 2016 (Richard *et al.* 2018; D’Andrea, Long, and Richard 2022), as well as the 2019 (Richard, Long, D’Andrea in press a and b) and 2022 seasons mentioned above. There have been two pilot/study seasons: Phase 1 in 1981 (Richard 1982) and Phase 2 in 1994 (Richard and Long 1995), along with two seasons devoted solely to restoration: 1998 (Long and Libby 1999) and 2006, although restoration, preservation, and consolidation of walls is an integral component of each excavation season as the expedition looks to a future restored touristic site. The major archaeological periods investigated at KHirbat Iskandar thus far date to the EB III and EB IV, although an EB II stratum has been explored and an EB I stratum is surmised based on sherds discovered in later levels, but especially due to an EB IB burial excavated near the site.

Over the seasons mentioned above, KHirbat Iskandar has revealed itself to be a remarkable site, whose occupation

appears to chronicle the “rise and collapse” of urbanism (EB I village, EBII–III urban site) and, most significantly, a steady continuation of occupation and reorganized societal transformation to a rural community in the EB IV period. As FIG. 3 shows, excavation has concentrated in three fields, A, B, and C, with intense excavation especially in Area B, where the site boasts multiple phases and rebuilds of the outer fortifications in the EB II–III periods, as well as a projected EB III/IV rebuild at the northwest corner (see Richard 2016). The latter defensive line, a “rubble wall” of slight construction in comparison to the earlier fortifications, has gained more credibility as a late rebuild in the light of excavations in Area C illuminating EB III–IV continuity of occupation.

The EB III period and its seemingly early destruction in Area B (end of EB IIIA?), and the non-correlation of the EB IV stratigraphy between Areas B and C, are subjects not extraneous to the Area C stratigraphy and subject of this paper. Indeed, these issues have engendered a new focus of excavations in Area C to search for clarification. The fact is, on such a relatively small mound (2.7 ha), it is somewhat anomalous to find differences between Areas B and C in the site’s occupational profile. The Area B stratigraphy has provoked such questions as why does KHirbat Iskandar seem to have been destroyed at the end of EB IIIA, where is EB IIIB at the site, and where is the earliest EB IV Phase 1 in Area B? It is these enigmatic issues that urged the team to return to Area C, the EB IV gateway, the final report of which was published previously (Richard *et al.* 2010). Some tantalizing evidence (EB IV reuse of EB III structures) in Area C hinted at a potentially clearer picture of the EB III/IV transition, especially in Squares C8/C6. As this article will

show, renewed excavations in Area C—at the center of much of the current focus of this paper on questions of collapse, recovery, and growth—go a long way toward shedding light on the above questions. Prior to discussing Area C, background on the stratification in Area B would be in order.

The relevant EB III stratum (C) in Area B comprises two phases, the later of which (C2) is a well-preserved grouping of features within the northwest corner tower/fortifications, denoting, it seems, a public area at the highest point on the mound (see Richard *et al.* 2013, 2018; Richard 2016; D’Andrea, Long, and Richard 2022). The major structure is a large east-west building with a large central pillar base and a well-preserved entryway with steps at the western end, undoubtedly connected somehow to the corner fortifications, although the relationship remains obscure. This structure included a wealth of storage jars with 5–6 varieties of botanical remains, pointing to its probable use as a storeroom. A wonderful collection of EB III pottery and objects came to light, as well as interesting features within the structure. Supporting the view that it was a public structure of some kind were the contiguous auxiliary buildings and courtyard. The courtyard included a wonderfully preserved stone-built basin, as well as other features such as mortars and stone tools. The best-preserved auxiliary structure, thought to be a potter’s kiln at one point, has all the markings of a workshop. Constructed of mud brick with stone pavement inside, it included two small stone platforms, on one of which sat a whole vessel. The range of stone objects within the mudbrick destruction contiguous to the structure included Egyptian or Egyptianizing stonework, a potter’s wheel, and numerous objects, some with partially ground

or just a center depression, all suggestive perhaps of different stages of manufacturing.

Phase C2 was well-preserved by the collapse materials covering the settlement. It is this destruction that provided a  $^{14}\text{C}$  date for the late EB IIIA period, along with a lack of late (that is, EB IIIB) pottery. This factor has been a real conundrum at the site because evidence for late EB III pottery is extant on the mound. The earlier and more limited exposure of Phase C1 revealed that below the central room was an apparent work area of hearths and a cooking installation with much burning and ash. It is this earlier phase whose surfaces link to the founding of the outer stone fortifications (Richard 2016). Of particular interest to the topic of this article is the considerable roof collapse and burning of upper Phase C2, since the EB IV occupants constructed their Phase B settlement on top of and often dug into the mudbrick destruction. The conundrum mentioned earlier in Area B is this superposition, it seems, of a later EB IV phase on top of an earlier EB III phase which, along with radiometric ( $^{14}\text{C}$ ) data suggested a gap in occupation at KHirbat Iskandar. The EB III destruction debris, above which was the collapsed material on the surface of Phase B (itself built upon and partially made up of the mudbrick destruction debris of the EB III below), rendered clear separation of layers sometimes difficult. Although there are walls that appear to predate EB IV B and could be remnants or vestiges of the “missing” earliest EB IV phase, they are difficult to associate with good surfaces. In 2016/2019, excavation at the southwest corner of Area B brought to light new and tantalizing phasing for EB IV and EB III, evidence that may offer perspective on the stratigraphy at the northwest corner (Richard *et al.* 2018;

D’Andrea, Richard, and Long 2020; D’Andrea, Long, and Richard 2022).

Finally, turning briefly to the EB IV layers in Area B, there are two major EB IV settlements, the earlier (Phase B) is the public complex phase, while the later Phase A settlement is a prosperous but more village-like occupation (see Richard *et al.* 2013). The public complex, constructed above and dug into the EB III destruction debris, was built against the fortifications on the north. Its location above the earlier EB III public structure is of interest as regards a possible continuation of the area for public rather than domestic activities. The major structure includes a central room with pillars and a plethora of stone features and activity areas, along with a bench room, which seems to have been a storage area. The central room, like the preceding EB III structure, was a storeroom, given the 185 whole or restored vessels found (more indicated from sherds, many of them storage jars) (Richard 2000). We have posited that this complex functioned not only as a storage facility but also as a sanctuary on the basis of architecture, features, and artifacts. The broadroom house included an entrance cut into the southern wall along with a three-step stairway, which proved to be on the same axis as a flat-topped pillar/offering table situated equidistant from both the entrance and a niche with bench built into the outer fortification. The niche included a stone-lined pit within which were ceramic offerings, as well as the hoof of a bovine and horn cores on the associated surface. This evident offering, when combined with a well-preserved stone-lined bin associated with miniature vessels, and nearby features such as a pit and a work slab, as well as a mortar, implies that the broadroom structure was a multi-functional public complex

of some sort. This précis of the Area B EB III/IV stratigraphy provides the backdrop to our discussion of the Area C excavations and of questions of collapse in EB III.

### **Theoretical Framework: Collapse Theory**

As a result of the 2019 and 2022 excavations in Area C, discoveries of multiple phases that span the EB III–EB IV raise questions about the nature of the so-called EB III “collapse.” The new phases cast doubt on the severity of the cultural break between EB III and EB IV, at least at KHirbat Iskandar and, perhaps, also in Transjordan generally. The subject of collapse (*i.e.*, catastrophe) of complex societies/states has been a topic intriguing scholars for years. How and why do such entities, states, or “civilizations” seemingly come to an end in abandonment and/or destruction, followed by a “dark age” or period of decentralized organization generally of a less complex and sophisticated type? That view of sudden and devastating collapse with a subsequent “dark age” has been a popular perspective in the field for some time, gaining more credibility from a body of theoretical work on collapse appearing toward the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Tainter 1988; Yoffee and Cowgill 1988; Weiss 1997; Diamond 2005). The Early Bronze Age of the southern Levant is just one of numerous regions said to have suffered such collapse, others being, *e.g.*, the Roman Empire, Mesopotamia, the Maya, *etc.* (and see especially Yoffee and Cowgill 1988).

In our area, there has been a plethora of scenarios by scholars offering plausible explanations for the “collapse” phenomenon in the southern Levant, thought to witness the complete destruction and/or abandonment of every

fortified tell or mounded site by the end of EB III, followed by an enigmatic pastoral-nomadic or “dark age.” Some of the most popular explanations for the end of EB III culture include Egyptian raids, climate change, nomadic infiltration, the ebb-and-flow of ruralism, the cessation of Egyptian trade, *etc.* (see Richard 1987, 2014, 2020). These explanations seemed apropos at the time for a myriad of reasons, not the least of which being the then-current chronology placing the EB III between 2500–2300 BC and the EB IV between 2300–2000 BC. Such a timeline resonated well with purported Egyptian raids into the country during the 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> dynasties, as well as with the 4.2 ka BP event (*ca.* 2200 BC) of drought and severe climate change (see Weiss 1997), as well as the recognized cessation of trade with Egypt at the end of EB III, and, of course, the connection with the Amorite nomads so well known from the Mesopotamian texts (Rowton 1967, 1974). For in-depth background on the history of these and other controversial issues concerning the Early Bronze Age, see, *e.g.*, Richard (1987, 1980, 2014, 2020), D’Andrea (2014); Dever (1980), Prag (2001, 2014), Philip (2001), Long (2003).

Integral to the topic of “collapse theory” is the now widely accepted higher chronology for the Early Bronze Age of the southern Levant (Regev *et al.* 2012; Regev, de Miroschedji, and Boaretto 2012; Höflmayer 2014; for a critique, however, see Nigro *et al.* 2018), and see comparative chronologies across the Near East in ARCANE (Lebeau 2014). The recent radiometric (<sup>14</sup>C)/Bayesian modeling strategies (the so-called second radiometric revolution) have shifted traditional dates by some 250 years for the southern Levant: EB III dates are currently thought to date to 2800/2750–2500 cal (not 2500–2300) BC. Even

more significant, the EB IV—now a 500-year period—dates to 2500–1950 cal (not 2300–2000) BC. The ramifications of the new periodization are consequential for our topic, as the EB III/IV transition is now pegged to 2500 cal BC as indicated from Abū An Niāj (Fall, Falconer, and Höflmayer 2021), KHirbat Al ‘Alyā (Lev *et al.* 2020), and recently confirmed by new radiocarbon dating from seven phases in Area C at KHirbat Iskandar (Fall *et al.* 2022). The new periodization also has ramifications concerning correlations between the southern Levant *vis-à-vis* Egypt and Syria, although this is not the venue to discuss those matters (and see Richard 2020; Höflmayer 2017; Sowada 2020), except to point out that all previous explanations for collapse at the end of EB III in the southern Levant are now virtually moot. The new chronology now places those events/causes (climate, Egyptian raids, nomads, *etc.*) at least 200–250 years after the end of the EB III period. The new periodization not only impacts these traditional causative factors of collapse in the southern Levant, but it also dovetails closely, we believe, with new trends in collapse theory, which inevitably raise questions about an Early Bronze Age collapse in the southern Levant.

Based on a growing body of evidence from post-collapse complex societies demonstrating continuation of occupation in one form or another, scholars have reconsidered and formulated new theoretical frameworks to address such recovery, as the following titles indicate: *After Collapse* (Schwartz and Nichols 2006), *Questioning Collapse* (McAnany and Yoffee 2010), *Beyond Collapse* (Faulseit 2016a), and *Understanding Collapse* (Middleton 2017). In general, given the difficulty in attempting to discern the elusive causes of a collapse,

the focus has switched to the period in the “aftermath of collapse.” Notably, in 2006, a volume was published that raised these very issues (Schwartz and Nichols 2006). For example, the latter volume included studies of a variety of cultural areas whose post-collapse period led to the regeneration of urban complex societies, *e.g.*, the regeneration of Middle Bronze Age urbanism in the northern Levant (Schwartz and Nichols 2006; McAnany and Yoffee 2010; and see Höflmayer 2017). The evidence for a post-collapse period at KHirbat Iskandar, though not an urban regeneration, is nevertheless a societal transformation, agreeing with Faulseit (2016b: 18) who argues that current theory can comprehend the post-collapse period no matter what the outcomes.

In *la longue durée* view, collapse/post-collapse periods appear to be a part of a cyclical pattern (Middleton 2017: 42), both components of which are part of the same process, a process invariably leading to a period of transformation, particularly when continuity, recovery, and growth (resilience) can be observed. As Eisenstadt notes, collapse is all about being a process of reorganization and boundary reconstruction (1988: 242). These new views, along with the evidence for continuity at KHirbat Iskandar, militate against a catastrophic collapse (and perhaps for Transjordan as well, if not the entire southern Levant). Also militating against a catastrophic collapse is the lengthiness of the abandonment/destruction of sites, which began as early as EB II (Dever 1980). Tainter (1988: 4–5) has argued that a lengthy demise (as in the southern Levant) raises serious questions about using the term collapse in such a situation. For a complete range of views on collapse, see McAnany and Yoffee (2010), Faulseit (2016a, 2016b: 3–26),

Tainter (1999, 2016: 27–39), Middleton (2017: 1–50), and Greenberg who argues against collapse in the southern Levant (2017).

These newer views on collapse theory, including the term “societal transformation”, have much to commend them for the EB III/IV interface. Indeed, as has been suggested (Faulstich 2016b: 6) a better identifier for the collapse/post-collapse recovery is the term “societal transformation.” Such a concept, implicit in which is the collapse-post-collapse process, effectively realigns scholarly attention to the recovery period, inherent in which are clues to the previous society (and mechanisms of change). This realignment of interest thus looks to a host of theoretical constructs germane to the topic, such as concepts of resilience, agency, transformation/metamorphosis, to comprehend the nature of the transformation that has occurred. This article intends to utilize some of these concepts as vehicles to understanding and interpreting the stratified profile of KHirbat Iskandar. In this author’s opinion, the multiple EB III/IV occupational phases in Area C self-evidently argues for resistance, recovery, and societal transformation into a period of “rural complexity” (and see Richard 2020; in press). Indeed, as the following discussion of the Area C stratigraphic profile implies, it is questionable whether a collapse occurred at KHirbat Iskandar at the end of EB III.

### Area C Excavations

In Area C, three phases of substantial, even monumental architecture witness to the growth and transformation of society in the EB IV period (Richard *et al.* 2010; FIG. 4). The earliest (Phase 1) occupation displays domestic architecture and EB III/IV pottery. The Phase 2 settlement above,

in contrast, comprises a well-made stone/mudbrick broadroom house with contiguous courtyard, a lithic workshop, and classic EB IV fossil types derived from Syrian ceramic tradition. Phase 3 is the multi-phase gateway (Long 2010). A quantitative ceramic study affirmed the phasing (Richard 2010; Holdorf 2010). In 2016, the expedition returned to Area C to investigate a new and hopefully more transparent stratified profile of the EB III/IV transition away from the destructions near the fortifications in the northwest. As mentioned above, previous indications of EB III/IV phasing in Area C had prompted these renewed investigations. In 2016, work in both Squares C6 and C8 attempted to reach the EB III/IV transitional layers, although it was only in Square C6 where that level was reached since the Square C8 excavations (at a higher level) exposed more complete architectural units of the upper gate area (see Richard *et al.* 2018; Long, D’Andrea, and Richard 2018 for details). By end of season, work in Square C6 had discovered a line of mudbricks immediately below an EB IV Phase 1 surface, hinting at an EB III wall. This discussion concentrates on the Square C6 profile, although some correlating data from C8 and C3 also came to light.

### Square C6

In 2019, the team returned to Squares C6 and C8. Work on the upper levels in C8 once again proved to affirm certain phasing inferences made and published in the final report in 2010: in particular, the discovery that the EB IV Phase 1–2 walls in C6 continued and cornered to the east in C8 (Richard, Long, and D’Andrea in press a and b ), among other interesting factors, which again, however, limited the time for exploration of earlier levels. Square C6,

in contrast, proved to be exceptional in its earlier phasing. Planning to disturb the reconstructed Phase 3 Gateway as little as possible, the decision was made to concentrate work in a north-south sondage in the center of Square C6. The area was originally restored to highlight the three EB IV phases in Area C: a Phase 3 worktable and stone benches in the north, the superimposed Phases 1–3 walls at a lower level in the south (see FIG. 5). For the purposes of later restoring the gate back to its original outline, the worktable and benches were set aside for later reconstruction.

Excavation at the higher level where mudbrick was noted in 2019 brought to light the corner of a mudbrick wall opening to the west. The structure (about 30 cm in width), cornered and almost certainly continued into the north balk and Square C8 (FIG. 6). Associated with the structure was a surface that appeared metaled, with occupational debris, some charcoal, for example, but most importantly, the surface pottery appeared to be late EB III. As mentioned above, in Area B, a later EB IV settlement overlay a significant destruction layer dated to end of EB IIIA. The truly remarkable aspect of this stratigraphy was the absence of any apparent destruction layer. This was our first indication of clear stratified remains of the transition at KHirbat Iskandar from the urban EB III to the rural EB IV. Unprepared for this new discovery, the team decided to temporarily identify the new level as EB III Pre-Phase 1a, since it immediately underlay the EB IV Phase 1 surface.

Continuing to excavate the sondage, it was discovered that below the mudbrick wall was a stone wall, partially aligned with the mudbrick wall (FIG. 7). Investigating the interior area to the south, the team encountered a layer comprising a great deal of ash and burning that, at the

time, was assumed to be the parallel EB IIIA destruction noted in Area B. However, further investigation determined that the ashy remains had built up on a surface upon which two badly preserved cooking installations were discovered, in one of which was an EB III bulbous rim cookpot (FIG. 8). A possible parallel is to be noted in an EB III mudbrick cooking installation with platform attached, discovered in Area B (see D'Andrea, Long, and Richard 2022, fig. 9). This new layer was identified as EB III Pre-Phase 1b. It should be mentioned that in a later season, further excavation suggested that part of the stone wall of this phase may have been reused as a base for the mudbrick wall above.

Leaving the later walls in place and continuing the sondage to the south, the team excavated through the “cooking installation” surface only to reveal stone wall and door socket features. The limited area of exposure indicated that the door-socket wall was an earlier phase (the wall ran under the EB III Pre-Phase 1b wall), although again reuse of the door socket was certainly a possibility (FIG. 9). Exploration of the wall to the west was impossible due to a secondary balk left from the restoration. This new level was termed EB III Pre-Phase 1c. As the team began tracing the associated surface to the south, ash from an earlier level began to appear at the southern end. Thus, excavation ended for the season with the supposition that the ash may foreshadow the destruction level contemporary with that in Area B. Anticipating the new layer, we identified it with the term, EB III Pre-Phase 1d.

#### *Season 2022*

In 2022, the team returned to pursue investigations in the sondage in Square C6. Removing the surface associated with the door socket/wall phase,

a layer of what appeared to be mudbrick makeup (EB III Pre-phase 1d) was found to overlie the anticipated destruction layer (EB III Pre-phase 1e), which consisted of multiple levels of loose soil, burning, and ash. Although comparative analysis with Area B is needed to affirm the connection with the EB IIIA destruction, the posited correlation seems promising. Rounding out the wealth of tantalizing new data on the history of KHirbat Iskandar from the sondage, clearance of the destruction debris revealed a new settlement below, presumably the destroyed EB IIIA settlement. We called it EB III Pre-Phase 1f. In the somewhat restricted area at the southern end of the sondage, a corner of a stone wall came to light. On the interior surface lay multiple stone tools, such as a quern and mortars, suggesting a work area of some sort (FIG. 10). Work in the sondage ended at this point. Thus, by the end of the 2022 season, a vastly different picture of this third-millennium BC site had emerged. Rather than abandonment in EB IIIA (as appeared to be the case in Area B), a continuous stratified profile documented continuity over 9 phases of EB III/IV occupation. Prior to situating this new dataset into context let us turn briefly to some corroborative evidence discovered from excavations in contiguous squares: C3, but especially C8.

#### Square C8

There was complementary phasing found in Squares C8 and C3. The two-week 2022 season with limited staff did not allow time to investigate the complete profile as found in C6; however, there was significant evidence from C8 to correlate with the C6 mudbrick wall phase/surface immediately below EB IV Phase 1, as well as multiple EB III surfaces. Work on the multiphase wall near the west balk finally unraveled an upper

fragment, EB IV Ph2, built above an EB IV Ph1 wall, which overlay an EB III wall, with associated surfaces (FIG. 11); further excavation brought to light what appeared to be phases parallel to Square C6 down to the destruction level. Also, in 2022, the team sought to uncover evidence for the transition in Square C8N as well as in contiguous C3. However, those areas were still at the EB IV Phase 3 gateway stage and careful excavation of three EB IV phases was time consuming. Even so, by end of season the team was able to reach the Phase 1 surface overlying mudbrick below, presumed to correlate with the mudbrick wall phase found in Square C6. Likewise, in Square C3, a probe was successful in reaching a Phase 1 surface and mudbrick below as well. The evidence is tentative but suggestive of the profile of the EB III/IV transition uncovered in Square C6.

In summary, there are now 9 EB III–IV phases in the Square C6 stratigraphic profile. From the bottom, Pre-Phase 1f is the earliest uncovered thus far. It tentatively appears to match the EB IIIA settlement in Area B that was destroyed (Pre-Phase 1e is the destruction phase). Above the destruction layer and a mudbrick makeup layer (Pre-Phase 1d) there are 3 EB III architectural phases (door socket phase, hearth phase, and mudbrick wall phase—Pre-Phases 1c–a) that continue seemingly without break into our EB IV Phase 1–3. This was really a stunning discovery of actual stratigraphic evidence for that enigmatic EB III–IV transition.

#### **Conclusions**

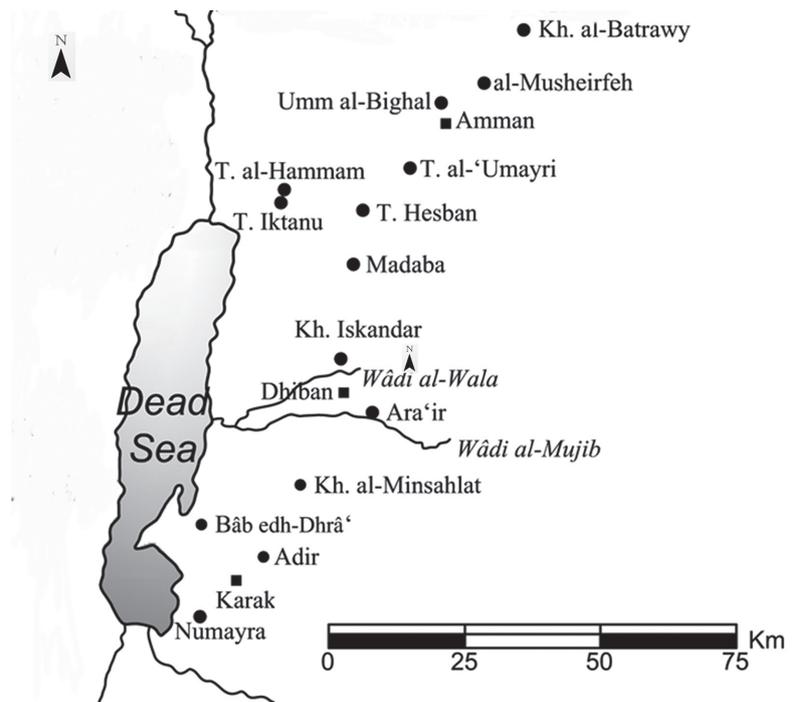
This article has re-evaluated the long-debated issue of the nature of the Early Bronze Age in the second half of the third millennium BC, concluding that at KHirbat Iskandar the stratified evidence does not support a

catastrophic or traditional “collapse” scenario at the end of the EB III period. At the critical EB III/IV transition, Phase 1 EB IV occupation appears above the crumbled remains of an EB III mud-brick wall. There is no indication of a destruction. The new dataset at KHirbat Iskandar resonates robustly with the new higher chronology (2500 cal BC for the transition) and the newer theoretical frameworks on collapse (above) arguing for collapse/post-collapse as a process and one better served using the term societal transformation for the gradual development from urban to rural organizational strategies at the site. Moreover, the new higher chronology for the Early Bronze Age makes untenable the numerous causes for collapse advocated by scholars in the past, virtually all of which now occur at least 200 years after the end of EB III.

The Area C stratified profile offers a new and extraordinary lens through which to view the occupational trajec-

tory at KHirbat Iskandar from urban to rural organizational strategies. By way of interpretation of the new dataset and its contextualization within the theoretical frameworks set out earlier, some tentative conclusions may be drawn about the resilience and the agency of the occupants as attested by the recovery following the EB IIIA destruction, the reorganization in late EB III, and ultimately the societal transformation of the site into a non-urban, but rurally complex EB IV settlement. Notably, there was a transition and continuity but no collapse at the EB III/IV nexus at the site of KHirbat Iskandar. Remaining to be tested are the posited correlations between Area C and Area B. The new dataset on the social transformation from urban to rurally complex organizational strategies at the site of KHirbat Iskandar may offer perspective on Jordan’s distinct pattern of EB III/IV mound occupation in the third millennium BC.

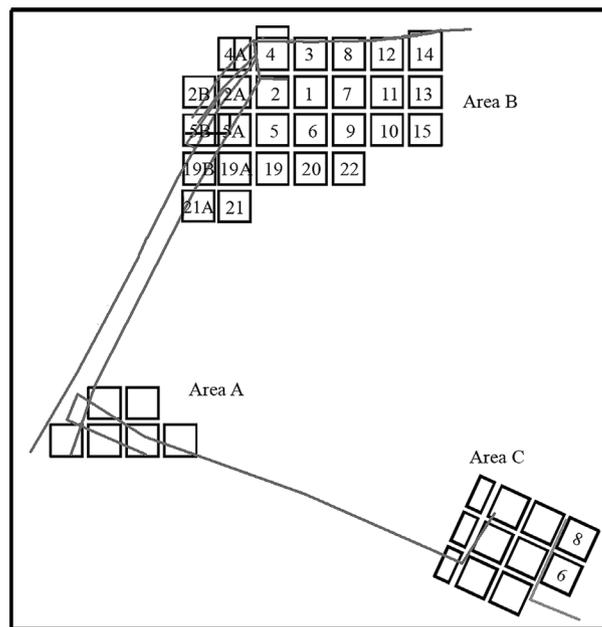
REDEFINING SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATION IN THE EARLY BRONZE AGE OF JORDAN



1. Map showing the location of KHirbat Iskandar, north of DHībān (image © The KHirbat Iskandar Expedition).



2. View of the environs of KHirbat Iskandar, looking west to the mound (photo © The KHirbat Iskandar Expedition).



3. Plan showing the three excavation areas at KHirbat Iskandar (image © The KHirbat Iskandar Expedition).



4. Plan of Area C, the EB IV gateway (image after Richard *et al.* 2010: 51, fig. 3:26; © The KHirbat Iskandar Expedition).

REDEFINING SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATION IN THE EARLY BRONZE AGE OF JORDAN

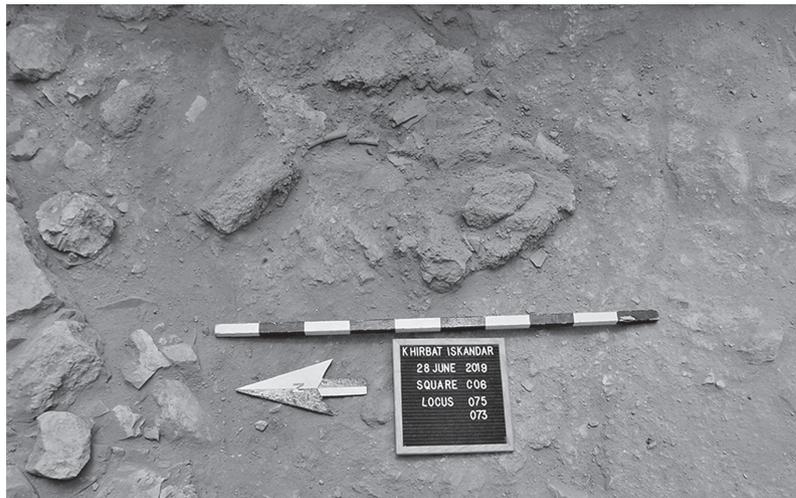
5. Area C, Square C6: superposition of three EB IV architectural phases (Phase 1 at bottom) (photo © The KHirbat Iskandar Expedition).



6. Area C, Square C6: EB III Pre-phase 1a mudbrick structure below EB IV Phase 1 (photo © The KHirbat Iskandar Expedition).



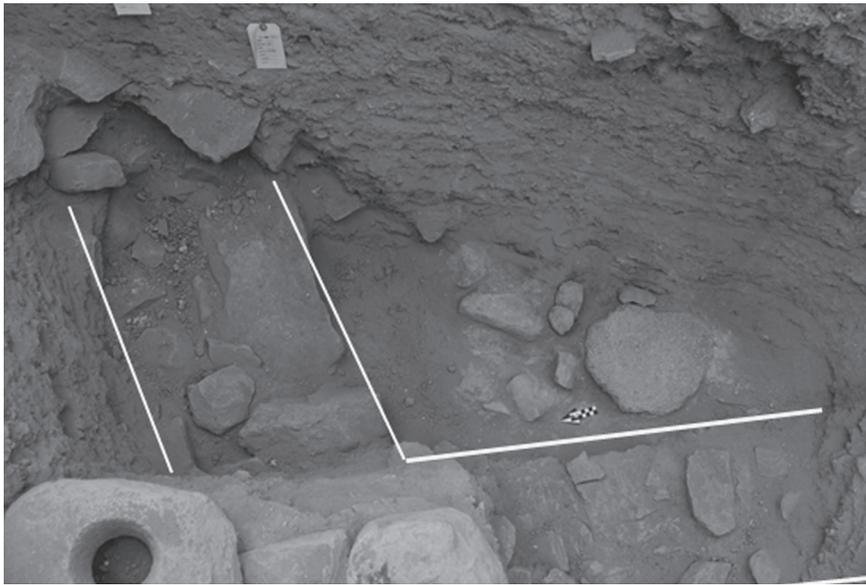
7. Area C, Square C6: EB III Pre-phase 1b stone wall and associated burning and ash from cooking installations (photo © The KHirbat Iskandar Expedition).



8. Area C, Square C6: EB III Pre-phase 1b blackened cookpot in cooking installation (photo © The KHirbat Iskandar Expedition).



9. Area C, Square C6: EB III Pre-phase 1c wall and door socket (photo © The KHirbat Iskandar Expedition).



10. Area C, Square C6, view of the earliest EB III Pre-phase I settlement lying beneath a destruction layer with stone tools found on the surface (photo © The KHirbat Iskandar Expedition).



11. Area C, Square C8: EB III/IV W. 8018/8018a on the interior; excavation into lower levels revealed tentative correlation with the Square C6 profile (photo © The KHirbat Iskandar Expedition).

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