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## On the Collective Ethos of Fortification in the Levantine Bronze Age

*Attributing the large-scale, but tactically suspect, south Levantine Bronze Age fortification systems a 'social' role has become an archaeological commonplace, yet it begs the crucial question of form – if a polity, a social class, or a collective wish to advertise their cohesion, power, or wealth, why choose fortifications, rather than burial monuments, temples or palaces? In other words, what social end was served by conspicuous, inefficient, military consumption? This paper aims to offer a preliminary answer to this question through three interlocking arguments: The first, that societies like that of the Levantine Bronze Age are characterized by the existence of cooperative labor obligations; the second, that this collective labor investment was, in the ancient Levant, primarily dedicated to defense; the third, that tactically imperfect fortifications were nonetheless strategically successful as defensive installations, even while promoting social cohesion and projecting elite power.*

### Introduction

The attribution of a primary non-defensive 'social' role to large-scale, but tactically suspect, south Levantine Early and Middle Bronze Age fortification systems was mooted in the heyday of late 20<sup>th</sup> century 'social archaeology', first with regard to 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium earthworks<sup>1</sup> and later, with regard to the stone walls of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE.<sup>2</sup> Although these proposals did not negate the military value of the fortifications, they appeared to place a higher value on the symbolic and communicative significance of the massive earth and stone structures, thus intimating that their construction represents a form of 'false consciousness': they might look like fortifications, but in reality they are no more than vehicles of elite propaganda. While we remain fundamentally sympathetic to the 'social' position – indeed, no military investment can be contextualized outside society – its presentation as a 'mere' social fact appears to beg two important questions: First, why choose fortifications as the vehicle of civic or elite self-aggrandizement, when other options were presumably on the table (e.g., monu-

mental temple or tomb construction), and, second, why make them tactically inferior or incomplete? What possible purpose could that serve?

This paper aims to offer a preliminary answer to these questions through three interlocking arguments: The first, that societies like those of the Levantine Bronze Age – sometimes characterized as 'intermediate', i.e., lacking full-fledged, permanent administrative institutions – are characterized by the existence of cooperative labor obligations, often embedded in ritual schedules, which could be directed toward large construction projects, including defense works. The second, that collective and cooperative labor investments in fortifications do, in fact, characterize Early and Middle Bronze Age societies in the Levant, often at the expense of other forms of conspicuous consumption, such as wealth accumulation or monumental palatial construction. The third, that *tactically* imperfect fortifications were nonetheless *strategically* successful as defensive installations, while fulfilling their equally important roles in the promotion of social cohesion and the projection of the power of polities and of their elites.

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<sup>1</sup> Bunimovitz 1992; Finkelstein 1992; Ilan 1995; Herzog 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Philip 2001; Greenberg 2002.

## Fortifications as Collective Action

In a recent volume on cooperative and collective action,<sup>3</sup> Charles Stanish, David Carballo, and Paul Roscoe offer complementary insights on the nature of such action in communities lacking a developed administrative hierarchy, where economic interactions rest on a foundation of mutual, constantly deferred debt and debt restitution, rather than on terminal exchanges and institutional coercion.<sup>4</sup> Stanish's cross-cultural study of societies without fixed hierarchical structures shifts the long-standing emphasis in anthropological literature from the political to the productive aspects of ritual gatherings, highlighting the economic role of calendric ceremonial occasions: "A very effective way to create and maintain cooperative labor organizations in intermediate societies (i.e., those without the institution of coercive force as seen in state societies) is to embed the production process in set schedules, defined by political ritual, conducted in periodic feasts and sanctioned by taboo or customary law."<sup>5</sup> Carballo's study of pre-Hispanic labor collectives in Mexico expands on this point: "Labor obligations such as *tequitl* are not merely how individuals get things done: they construct and continually redefine communities; they are interwoven with systems of ritualized consumption and reciprocity that set the standards for evaluating social roles and responsibilities; and they are the building blocks of more complex sociopolitical systems..."<sup>6</sup>

Both Stanish and Carballo document the ability of communities to mobilize large numbers of people who, in limited time, are able to carry out critical agricultural tasks or engage in public works, such as the digging of irrigation canals and the building of temples. Complementing this observation, Roscoe identifies the physical protection of communities and settlements as a primary objective of collective action in 'polities': "Polities as political communities are and were almost everywhere defensive organizations, aimed at securing the collective benefits of mutual protection against enemy attack."<sup>7</sup> This resonates with Otterbein's observation that warfare was inimical to the

development of early political formations and that avoiding conflict was, therefore, in their interest.<sup>8</sup>

While temporary mobilization to thwart an attack could be carried out by groups of almost any size, mobile or sedentary, there is probably a minimum threshold for the kind of collective defensive mobilization implied by the construction of permanent fortifications. It may be assumed that the builders of such fortifications lived in proximity to them (whether inside the fortified enclosures or in the surrounding countryside) and that they felt better served by staying within the walls in times of danger than by escaping to a different place. They also had to be loyal to the polity (i.e., receptive to its legitimacy) and great enough in number to be able to pull off the task of fortification within a reasonable amount of time, without prejudice to more productive pursuits. In other words, we may expect the collective construction of fortifications to correlate with larger and more sedentary populations, and with a lower tendency to exit the system.<sup>9</sup> A negative population trajectory would, conversely, reduce the benefits of collective action and increase the attraction of departure. As we will suggest below, both Early and Middle Bronze Age episodes of augmented fortification in the southern Levant can be associated with population nucleation and attempts to bolster the legitimacy of the polity through centralized ritual.

## Early Bronze Age Fortification Projects

The Early Bronze Age I (EB I, c. 3700–3050 BCE) began with a long period of relatively stable village existence based on an expanded Mediterranean triad (cereal/pulse agriculture, olive/vine horticulture and sheep/goat husbandry). In the latter part of the period, however, settlements grew larger and more nucleated, and several 'megavillages' came into existence, covering 30–60 ha and boasting populations of thousands. While these large agglomerations reproduce, for the most part, village modes of domestic construction and little evidence for social articulation, there are several instances of wealth accumulation – presumably by leading families (e.g., at Tel

<sup>3</sup> Carballo 2013a.

<sup>4</sup> Graeber 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Stanish 2013, 88.

<sup>6</sup> Carballo 2013b, 261.

<sup>7</sup> Roscoe 2013, 59.

<sup>8</sup> Otterbein 2004, 96.

<sup>9</sup> Blanton/Fargher 2008.

Bet Shean<sup>10</sup> and at Tel Erani<sup>11</sup>) – and of collective labor. One striking example of the latter is the ‘Great Temple’ of Megiddo,<sup>12</sup> which must have functioned as a regional ritual center, located on a hilltop adjacent to a large village. In other isolated cases, large EB I communities chose to surround themselves with fortifications, among which the massive mudbrick wall of Tel Shalem is the best-documented example.<sup>13</sup> Fortification became universal, however, only in the following period – the Early Bronze Age II (EB II, c. 3050–2850 BCE), when settlements of every size, from 1.5 to 30 ha, were newly designed as fortified enclosures. These settlements are marked by the uniform character of their domestic dwellings and material culture assemblages, manifesting little evidence of elite social articulation or of wealth accumulation. Chesson,<sup>14</sup> followed by Paz<sup>15</sup> have suggested the template of the ‘House society’ to model how social power was negotiated and deployed within these settlements. What is immediately striking in the EB II fortifications is the apparent existence and repeated use of a bare-bones template for fortifications, consisting of a relatively thin and low curtain wall, interrupted at intervals by narrow gaps or wider gates. The gaps (or posterns) either afforded passage through the wall or led to round or square towers appended to the wall. Such towers are best known from the extensively excavated site of Arad,<sup>16</sup> but have been found as far north as the western Galilee site of Me’ona.<sup>17</sup> The gates could be protected by flanking towers, as at Tell el-Far’ah and Tel Bareqet,<sup>18</sup> but such protection was by no means universal, and often there were adjacent posterns that circumvented the gates (e.g., at Zeraqun, ‘Ai, and Tell el-Far’ah). Sites with natural protection (e.g., a ravine or a body of water) could be walled only over part of their circumference (Bet Yerah, Bab edh-Dhra’, Khirbet ez-Zeraqun). By way of contrast, Tel Yarmuth exhibits casemate-like construction, buttressed tower fortifications and, in a late phase of EB II (or early EB III), the construction of a massive revetment

pierced by an indirect-entry gate. This style of seemingly excessive investment in construction is relatively rare in EB II, but becomes the norm in the following period, EB III.

The uniform thickness of most EB II walls, their modest height, and especially their permeability (due to the presence of multiple gates and narrow ‘posterns’) suggest that they represent a strategic compromise between partially competing social objectives: the exclusionary and defensive objective, which seeks to protect and define the inhabitants of the fortified enclosure as a self-contained community; a collective or egalitarian objective, which seeks to conceal status differences within the community by collective mobilization and by the standardization of the fortification segments; and a power-distributing objective, which allows maximum freedom of movement and minimal surveillance over the comings and goings of the inhabitants of the fortified villages and towns.

South Levantine Early Bronze Age III (EB III, c. 2850–2450 BCE) is marked by the abandonment of the latter two objectives, in favor of the enhanced adoption of the first objective – the inscription of fortified towns in the landscape as centers of population and power. Towns – fewer in number but probably more densely built-up than those of the preceding period – were now surrounded by increasingly massive fortifications, with only one or two fortified gates and broad platforms (bastions) that permitted both inward and outward surveillance. In addition, the widespread construction of ritual enclosures and temples in EB III, as well as a few large buildings interpreted as elite residences,<sup>19</sup> suggest a power-grab by the prominent Houses, who could now more readily manipulate the ritual calendar to mobilize labor for defensive construction. Late EB III Yarmuth, where fortification gives way to the construction of a large manorial compound, provides a striking exception to the EB III ‘arms race’ of enhanced fortification by taking the next logical step: buttressing the status of local elites at the expense of the common interest.

There is no dominant fortification template in EB III: each town emphasized different details. For example, at Tel Dan, excavations at two points on the mound’s perimeter revealed the 12-m wide and 10-m high fortification, preserved beneath the Middle Bronze Age ramparts.<sup>20</sup> At the northwest

<sup>10</sup> Mazar/Rotem 2009.

<sup>11</sup> Kempinski/Gilead 1991.

<sup>12</sup> Adams *et al.* 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Eisenberg 1996.

<sup>14</sup> Chesson 2003; 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Paz 2012.

<sup>16</sup> Amiran/Ilan 1992.

<sup>17</sup> Braun 1996.

<sup>18</sup> de Vaux 1962; Paz/Paz 2007.

<sup>19</sup> Miroschedji 2014.

<sup>20</sup> Greenberg 2002, 30–35.



Fig. 1 Acropolis of Early Bronze Age Zeraqun (after Douglas 2011 Fig. 3)

corner, a massive stone and mudbrick wall, 4.5 m thick, was preserved, furnished with six rectangular external  $2 \times 3$  m buttresses. The Lawieh (Leviah) enclosure, on a long, narrow ridge surrounded on three sides by precipitous cliffs, was traversed, from side to side, by three parallel walls, of which the outermost was 16 m wide and pierced by a gate protected by two square towers. A recent publication<sup>21</sup> attributes quantities of sling stones found near the gate to the final battle at the site. The 3–4 m wide EB II wall at Khirbet ez-Zeraqun was reinforced in EB III by the addition of an external buttress along its entire length that brought the fortification to a total width of 6–7 m.<sup>22</sup> A large bastion was built near the acropolis gate, which was adjoined by a large cultic complex, and the two gate passages were progressively narrowed and screened by walls and gate structures, with the adjacent posterns being blocked. The lower-town gate, near an area of domestic buildings, was also fortified by a large bastion built next to it and eventually was completely blocked, with entry to

the town enabled by a flight of stairs that led up over the blocked gate and thence down to street level (Fig. 1).

The southeast gate of Tel Bet Yerah was blocked with mudbricks at the start of EB III.<sup>23</sup> Later, a completely new fortification line (Wall C) was built just inside the previous fortifications. It has a saw-tooth plan and was furnished with at least 15 rectangular and circular towers. At Khirbet el-Batrawy, east of Amman, an EB II town had been fortified by a 3.2-m wide wall, built in 6-m long segments, furnished with a narrow, direct-entry gate.<sup>24</sup> This gate was blocked in EB III and two additional belts of fortification added outside the original wall, resulting in a 7-m wide fortification, protected by a stone glacis and two rectangular towers. Two elite residences and a temple are attributed to this phase. A similar sequence of fortification enhancement and temple construction can be seen at the site of et-Tell (Ai), in the hills north of Jerusalem: the EB II wall was doubled, its posterns blocked, and a massive bastion was built near the main gate in EB III.

<sup>21</sup> Paz 2011.

<sup>22</sup> Douglas 2011.

<sup>23</sup> Greenberg/Paz 2005.

<sup>24</sup> Nigro 2010.

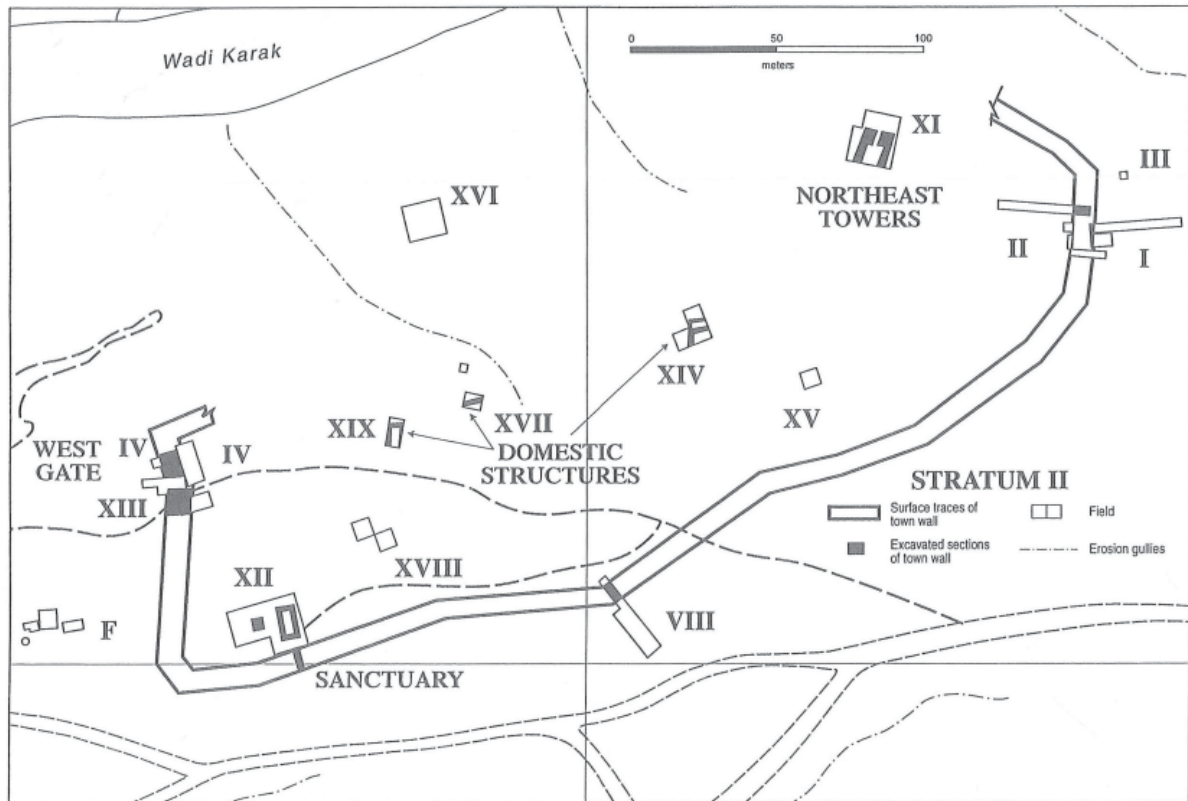


Fig. 2 Bab edh-Dhra'. Area XI includes two freestanding towers and at Area XVI only domestic houses were found (after Rast/Schaub 2003, 286 Fig. 10.1)

Despite their sheer size, EB III fortifications exhibit many tactical deficiencies.<sup>25</sup> At Bab edh-Dhra', Bet Yerah and Zeraqun, fortifications still did not encircle the whole site (Fig. 2). At Bet Yerah and Rumeida (Hebron) they occupied topographically inferior positions. Towers and bastions, though massive, often exhibit a limited field of view (either due to their location in the path of the wall or by being built facing inward, e.g. at 'Ai and Bet Yerah) and were usually separated by very large gaps, far exceeding the typical "bowshot gap" of 25–40 m. Over time, towers and bastions at some sites were allowed to fall into disrepair without being replaced ('Ai, Yarmuth). Most sites lacked a secured water source. Finally, the massive fortified enclosures could scarcely be effectively manned by the limited population of the towns (which, in any case, were not likely to have had any form of permanent military garrison): the only putative evidence for battle – at the Lawieh/Leviah enclosure – comes in the form of what could at best be termed a raid involving hand-to-hand combat within the gate passage, rather than a siege, and it appears to have been won by the attackers!

Tel Yarmuth,<sup>26</sup> whose massive and sophisticated late EB II fortification anticipated EB III developments, appears to buck the trend of most contemporary settlements: In the EB III, a series of large rectangular stone platforms (10–12 × 30–40 m), interpreted as foundations for internal bastions, was constructed upon the fill between the two earlier walls. Later, one of these platforms as well as the first wall (Wall A) were put out of use by the construction of Palace B1, reinforcing the sense of a change in priorities of the local leadership: instead of recruiting local labor for public works through the medium of ritual centralization, a concentrated effort was made to bolster the status of the leading family or families, leaving the rest of the inhabitants to fend for themselves without the benefit of a functioning defense system. This approach was a harbinger of the final demise of EB III, when towns were no longer able to function as communities, and the mutual obligations of the various classes of inhabitants were no longer honored.

Late EB III was marked by the progressive abandonment of large settlements – a process that almost certainly reflects a demographic decline

<sup>25</sup> Ashkenazi 2016.

<sup>26</sup> Miroschedji 1990; 2013.

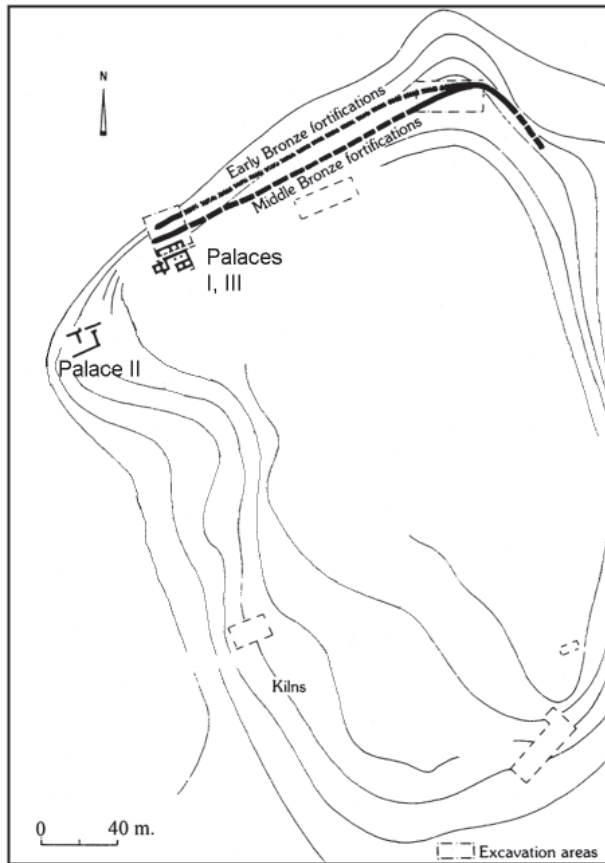


Fig. 3 Aphek (after Kochavi *et al.* 2000 Fig. 1.5)

and a concomitant increase in the attraction of 'exit options' from the collective model. The relative lack of economic specialization and integration in the Early Bronze Age system allowed most of the population to opt out of the system without endangering their subsistence base. The resultant Intermediate Bronze Age (IBA, c. 2500–1950 BCE) society was therefore characterized by a very low level of collective endeavor and the apparent rise of interpersonal violence. This can be seen, on the one hand, in the general lack of fortifications and monumental buildings at IBA sites and, on the other, in the marked increase in the number of weapons found, especially in IBA burials. The collective spirit of IBA communities was expressed primarily in the maintenance of large cemeteries, which in some cases bear evidence for short-term collective labor, such as in the periodic carving of individual or family cave-tombs and the raising of megalithic dolmen graves.<sup>27</sup>

## Middle Bronze Age Fortification Projects

The second wave of south-Levantine fortifications, which began in the late 20<sup>th</sup> or early 19<sup>th</sup> century BCE, was distinguished by the construction of massive earthworks, either on top of earlier, Early Bronze Age fortifications or in new locations. Scores of fortified Middle Bronze Age (MB) sites have been excavated and the fortifications themselves have been repeatedly and exhaustively described.<sup>28</sup> The principal contrast to the earlier waves lies in the clear evidence for a top-down process: Invariably, the earthworks enclose an area much larger than that required by the extant population, an area used for different expressions of elite power: the construction of palatial manors, the appropriation of water sources – springs, wells, and reservoirs, the construction of family mausolea and the construction of temples. Massive and elaborate gateways typify the earliest Middle Bronze Age enclosures, highlighting issues of surveillance and economic control. The end of the Middle Bronze Age is marked by a general exodus, not only from fortified sites but from the entire village system that supported them. The subsequent Late Bronze Age sees an abrupt about-face: fortifications are shunned by the new elite, who invest their economic and social capital in a wealth economy focused on palatial settings, temples, and attached craft workshops.

The fortified sites of Aphek, Ashkelon and Hazor may be taken as representative of the central tendencies of Middle Bronze Age fortification. At Aphek (Fig. 3), an initial village phase is succeeded by a settlement characterized by a sturdy fortification (clearly identified and traced only along the northern and part of the eastern flank of the mound), consisting of a solid brick wall fronted by an earthen supplementary rampart, and a large, well-built structure dominating its acropolis, termed 'Palace I'. A coeval occupation consisted of scattered walls and a number of primary interments of all ages and genders. The fortifications of Aphek would thus have enclosed a settlement consisting of a large, central manor house surrounded by a few huts and open areas used for refuse disposal and for burials. In the following phase, still in MB I, a new 'palace' (Palace II) was built in the former open area, while the earlier mansion was

<sup>27</sup> Prag 2014.

<sup>28</sup> For the most recent, comprehensive review, see Burke 2008.

abandoned, scavenged for building materials, but not resettled or rebuilt. Several richly furnished built tombs, excavated in 1936 and situated northwest of the acropolis, have been attributed to this phase.<sup>29</sup> A third reversal of fortunes occurred at the end of MB I or early MB II, when 'Palace III' was constructed on the site of Palace I.<sup>30</sup> There is room for doubt whether Aphek ever achieved urban status in the Middle Bronze Age. Rather, a feudal-like social structure appears to be in place, with the 'palaces' surrounded by far smaller residences of dependents and retainers and, beyond the fortified enclosure, by a network of villages that served as a resource for seasonal labor.

At 60 ha, Ashkelon (**Fig. 4**) would have been by far the largest site of the south Levantine MB I; it has been interpreted as the populous center of a kingdom with up to 15,000 inhabitants,<sup>31</sup> but there is reason to doubt that it was ever settled to such an extent. Excavations of Middle Bronze Age remains have centered on a small stretch of fortifications abutting the north slope of a mound that dominates the northwest angle of the site (the North Tell). Here, an imposing earthen rampart faced with stone and plaster glacis has been revealed, built in several incremental stages, each associated with one of the main stages of a striking series of massive, superimposed gates built in combinations of dressed *kurkar* sandstone and mudbricks. For visitors heading eastwards, up the ramp, from the sea shore, the glare of the sun on the white sand dunes to their left and on the steep, stepped whitewashed glacis to their right would have created an instant and unnerving contrast with the gloom of the long, sloped vaulted corridor, and by the time they became accustomed to the gloom, they would have been thrust out again into sunlight, in the internal gate plaza. This manipulation of the senses was a crucial opening gambit, advertising the power of the city and of its rulers and the insignificance of the visitor. But this was very much a shallow façade, with little substance. Soundings excavated along the western flank of the rampart suggest that parts of it were more simply constructed than the gate area, and that it may have followed the contours of natural ridges that demarcated the site.<sup>32</sup> Excavations with-

in the enclosure revealed some stratified remains on the south tell (the natural hill in the center of the enclosure), as well as MB I–II tombs and burials without associated structures. Detailed studies of the scarp of the mound facing the sea suggest an uneven topography and checkered settlement sequence.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, as far as can be made out from the preliminary reports, MB I Ashkelon was a huge, sparsely settled enclosure, undefended on the side facing the sea, that captured within it an area of multiple functions. The quick succession of gates built during MB I indicates maintenance issues of the mudbrick superstructure that could be attributed to an inadequate labor pool.

The earliest Middle Bronze Age settlement at Tel Hazor is recorded only in late MB I (Stratum Pre-XVII), but the presence on the mound of a large tomb, T. 1181, and the concomitant beginning of rampart construction on the eastern terrace of the site, nearly doubling its size,<sup>34</sup> indicate that something was afoot. Within a short span of time, at the start of the MB II, a huge enclosure was erected, extending north from the original hill and Early Bronze Age mound and encompassing an area of 80 ha.<sup>35</sup> The western flank of the enclosure consists of a massive rampart, standing 90 m wide and 30 m above the fosse that runs along its base. A deep depression lies at the south end of the rampart, where it approaches the high mound. On the north and eastern sides of the enclosure, the rampart is far less prominent, but still rises steeply above the adjacent plain. Two gates were built on the eastern flank of the lower city, one in Area P, at the junction of the mound and the enclosure, or lower city, and one near the northeast angle of the enclosure (Area K). Set into the earthen ramparts and bonded with them by means of an elaborate system of stepped casemate walls and revetments, the gates have a classic six-chambered plan that was first introduced in MB I Syria and became standard in the late MB I and MB II southern Levant. A massive retaining wall, built of cyclopean boulders, supports the entrance ramp and gate plaza facing the later phase of the Area K gate, and must have offered an imposing sight to those approaching the site from the main north-south highway.

<sup>29</sup> Ory 1937.

<sup>30</sup> Kochavi *et al.* 2000.

<sup>31</sup> Stager *et al.* 2008; Burke 2008.

<sup>32</sup> D. Master, personal communication.

<sup>33</sup> Raban/Tur-Caspa 2008.

<sup>34</sup> Dunayevsky/Kempinski 1990; Covello-Paran 2007.

<sup>35</sup> Yadin 1972.

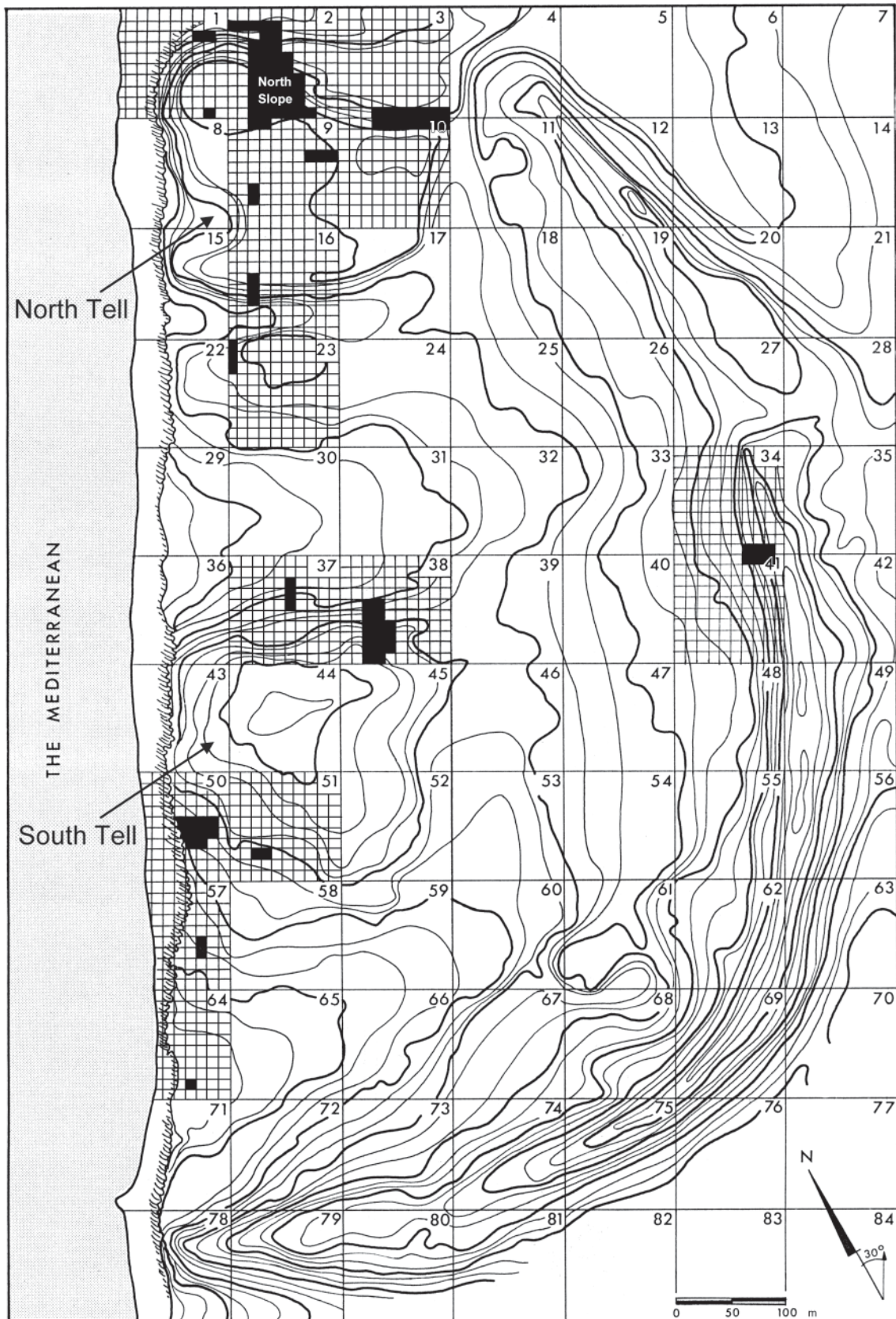


Fig. 4 Ashkelon (after Stager *et al.* 2008 Fig. 1.4)



Zuckerman has suggested that, as in other Middle Bronze Age sites, the city developed from the outside in.<sup>36</sup> That is, the ramparts were the first element to be constructed, accompanied by the creation of a ritual axis extending from the Area H temple in the north, through the double-temple in Area F to the ceremonial compound built on the high mound (Area A), on the south (Fig. 5). Domestic architecture appeared only after the ramparts were built. The large, deep depression at the south end of the western rampart might mark the location of a water reservoir or well.

Numerous additional Middle Bronze Age fortifications, whether erected as rampart enclosures on pristine ground or built as supplementary ramparts around preexisting mounds or natural hilltops, reproduce the model described above: top-down planning, multipurpose enclosures that often contain ritual centers, and relatively straightforward engineering principals that demanded a large, but unskilled, work force. Because the massive enclosures invariably precede urbanization (which is not universally attested at fortified Middle Bronze Age sites), we must assume that the mobilization of the collective labor required for their construction had to be carried out in the villages of the surrounding countryside. Some of those mobilized might have then relocated into the fortified area, but unlike the Early Bronze Age, village-town integration appears to have been strong in most regions.

Although massive and often showing advanced engineering capabilities, Middle Bronze Age fortifications were hardly more successful, in tactical terms, than their Early Bronze Age counterparts. Opportunistic in design, often utilizing preexisting natural or artificial formations, and predicated on seasonal labor and periodic, politically determined bursts of activity, Middle Bronze Age fortifications were markedly uneven, often leaving some parts of the town perimeter poorly protected in relation to other parts. The absence of a wall on top of most ramparts rendered them susceptible to easy scaling. Attackers had the benefit of being able to scale the rampart from various directions without the fear of a ladder being pushed away from the wall. Ramparts at the seaside sites of Yavneh-Yam and Ashkelon had no sea walls. Other tactical issues were the lack of towers along the flanks of the fortified enceintes, which limited the field of view

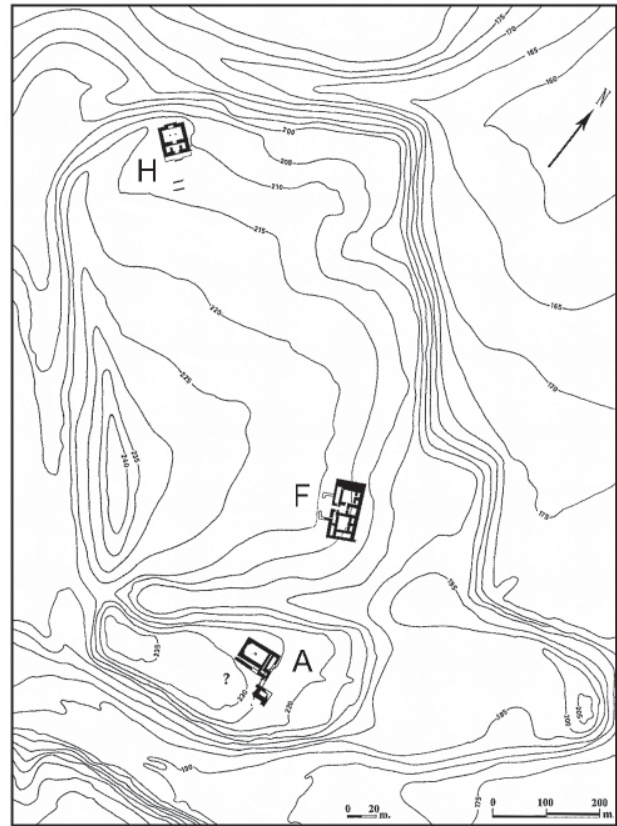


Fig. 5 Hazor ramparts and Stratum 3 (XVI) temples (after Zuckerman 2012 Fig. 5)

afforded to the defenders and deprived them of a defended firing platform. The only excavated towers were those that flanked the large gates, perhaps an indication that these complex structures functioned as small forts.<sup>37</sup> In some sites the ramparts encompassed large and only partially inhabited tracts of land, creating unnecessarily long fortifications that in times of war would have necessitated excessively large garrisons.

### The Strategic Efficacy of Bad Fortifications

Despite the tactical shortcomings of both Early and Middle Bronze Age fortifications, the archaeological record, by and large, testifies to remarkably few instances of violent conflict in either period: there are few destruction layers, and little incidental evidence for sieges, siege-craft or mass burial. As for weaponry, the Early Bronze Age is almost devoid of military hardware (the sling stones attributed to the decisive battle at Lawieh are, at best, an illustration of how little was actually required, in terms of actual combat, to subdue a

<sup>36</sup> Zuckerman 2012.

<sup>37</sup> Herzog 1997, 134.

massively fortified town). In the Middle Bronze Age weapons are common in ‘warrior burials’, but seem to belong to the realm of individual combat rather than organized warfare.<sup>38</sup> Thus, despite their vulnerabilities, the massive walls and ramparts served as effective deterrents, proving to be a wise investment of collective labor. The strategic success of the ‘bad’ fortifications can be ascribed to several possible causes:

*They were good enough.* The elaborate fortifications were used as strategic deterrents and were not designed in relation to a specific siege technology. During the Early Bronze Age there were no long-range weapons to speak of, nor were the extant towns populous enough to maintain standing armies, whether as attackers or defenders. During the Middle Bronze Age as well, there is little evidence for military campaigns, and both textual and artifactual evidence points to localized conflicts, determined by the outcome of battles between rival warriors. The tactical value of the fortifications was therefore less significant than it would have been in periods of organized state-sponsored warfare and of extended sieges.

*They inspired confidence and awe.* Bronze Age fortifications in the Levant were not tested by their tactical efficiency, but by their indexical power – their ability to convey the potency of the polity that built them. In this sense, even their imperfection was a statement of power. For example, the enormous rampart that overshadowed the west side of Hazor’s lower city was tangible and ample testimony to the organizational prowess of its rulers and to the collective strength of the populace, as were the cyclopic retaining walls that supported the approaches to its gates. They conveyed a message that the city is strong enough, cohesive enough, and well enough armed to protect itself, even with less than perfect defenses. The elaborate gates of the Middle Bronze Age, standing several stories high and heavily fortified, also communicated power and sophistication, and would have been an important locus of civic power (e.g. at Dan, Ashkelon or Shechem).<sup>39</sup>

*They were statements of the collective will.* While the modest EB II walls appear to have been collective projects of the inhabitants of the adjacent wards, the massive stone ramparts of the EB III and great earth and stone enclosures of the Middle

Bronze Age required the input of a larger swathe of the population, recruited – presumably by the local leadership, in the context of mutual, ritually sanctioned, obligations – from the town and from outlying populations, whether sedentary or mobile. In this manner, legitimacy was conferred on the fortified centers by the very nature of the social contract – a legitimacy that served as insurance against internal conflict and that permitted the elaboration and maintenance of the defensive structures. Late Early Bronze Age and Middle Bronze Age towns, for their part, provided multiple communal institutions and functions – temples, cemeteries, and a protected water supply – for their own inhabitants as well as for those of the surrounding countryside.

By way of contrast, the absence of fortifications in the Intermediate Bronze Age as well as in the Late Bronze Age (c. 1600 to 1150 BCE) can be viewed as clear testimony to the *loss* of legitimacy of the ruling factions and to a fragmented society – a fragmentation that, in the former period, effectively prevented the creation of local polities over half a millennium and in the latter period, permitted and accompanied the three centuries of Egyptian hegemony in the southern Levant.

## Conclusion

In this paper, we have proposed to identify a common template for the construction of south-Levantine Bronze Age fortifications, in which competing social and political aims are reconciled through periodic collective labor mobilization for erection of defensive walls and ramparts. The quality and magnitude of construction varied, in correspondence with the ability of local leadership – whether heterarchical or hierarchical in nature – to recruit and deploy a large labor force. Broadly speaking, however, it emerges that an important predictor of large-scale fortification work was the presence of temples, around which periodic, ritually sanctioned labor-recruitment could be organized. Despite the uneven, often inefficient appearance of south Levantine fortifications, they were efficacious insofar as their primary function was concerned: the prevention of war and the assertion of the power of the polity. Once the polity entered into demographic decline, however, fortifications could not be maintained, and surviving elites sought other avenues of demonstrating their power or wealth.

<sup>38</sup> Philip 2006.

<sup>39</sup> See Biran 1993; Dever 1987; Herzog 1997; Voss 2002.

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