

## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 1922, representatives of the British, French and American Schools of archaeology in Jerusalem, John Garstang, W.J. Phythian-Adams, Louis Vincent and W.F. Albright, hammered out a new, four-part chronological scheme for the archaeology of Palestine. First published by the *Bulletin* of the American Schools of Oriental Research,<sup>1</sup> the new scheme – composed of Stone, Bronze, Iron and Arab ages with several subdivisions – was soon printed in Palestine Exploration Fund's *Quarterly Statement*<sup>2</sup> and the Dominican friars' *Revue Biblique*.<sup>3</sup> Although its subheadings were almost immediately jettisoned by the committee members themselves (including the designation of an Early, Middle and Late "Palestinian" period for the entire stretch between 1200 BC and AD 636), the new scheme's adherence to the European prehistoric Three-Age system – Stone, Bronze and Iron – quickly became the universal standard for archaeologists working in the area administered by the League of Nations Mandates of Palestine and Syria. This was hardly a trivial or obvious choice: Vincent<sup>4</sup> had previously argued vigorously for the terms "Indigenous," "Canaanite," "Aegeo-Canaanite," "Israelite" and "Judeo-Hellenic," vying with the German school's "Prehistoric," "Canaanite," "Israelite" and "Jewish," and R.A.S. Macalister's "Pre-Semitic" and "Semitic I–IV." But times had changed: Ottoman administration and an active German archaeological presence had been supplanted, in the wake of the First World War, by British and French occupations, and the terms of the League of Nations Mandates (under which "advanced" nations were to administer former Ottoman territories until they were prepared to stand on their own) promised a new era of scientific research, spearheaded by European and American scholars. Although all four members of the self-appointed committee were firmly committed to the biblical paradigm in Palestinian archaeology, they clearly realized that by establishing a neutral, technological frame of reference, the validity and independence of the archaeological evidence produced by excavation would be enhanced. Moreover, there was nothing to fear; archaeology had, so far, validated the existence of biblical peoples and

cultures. As J.F. McMurdy had put it, in his introduction to H.V. Hilprecht's *Recent Research in Bible Lands* (1896):

It is the province of Oriental archaeology to deal with the peoples and countries and languages of the Bible so as to bring out their true relations to Bible teaching. They were formerly regarded as the mere framework of the picture. Now we are learning that they make up the groundwork, its coloring, and its perspective.<sup>5</sup>

But choosing the three-age terminology implied something more profound, complementing the very terms of the Mandates themselves: modernity was being defined through its framing of the past. Each epoch now occupied a fixed place in the evolution of mankind, from Stone to Bronze to Iron (incorporating Rome and Byzantium) to the historical “Arab” era and, thence, to the modern era of European hegemony (AD 1700 according to the articles of the two Mandates). Archaeology was no longer a theological pastime, but part of the nation-building project embodied in the terms of the European Mandates. Thus, even as archaeologists staked out neutral ground, science itself was positioned as political.

Despite its broad use, the concept of Bronze Age archaeology would not have carried much significance in the Near East during much of the twentieth century. Egyptian and Mesopotamian archaeology was dominated by the discourse of state formation, urbanization (in Mesopotamia) and dynastic succession. Syrian archaeology was fragmented, with the Jezireh and Euphrates Valley largely linked to the Mesopotamian sequence, western Syria to the independent ‘Amuq sequence (Periods A–J), and the dry-farming belt between them developing its own terminology, based on that used by the excavators of Tell Mardikh. Only in Palestine (east and west of the Jordan) and Lebanon would the term have signified much, and that largely of a typological and chronological nature. Its European connotations – large metal hoards, burial circles and the emergence of powerful chiefs and chiefdoms – would hardly have been recognized in the local Levantine sequence. In recent years, however, the Bronze Age, as a significant epoch in human history rather than a mere “chunk of time,”<sup>6</sup> has undergone a rehabilitation of sorts, so that it is understood to encompass Childe’s materialist approach to social change, in which the Bronze Age is the setting for the “Urban Revolution” and the emergence of states,<sup>7</sup> and broad-canvas conceptualizations of the movement of people, materials, technologies and cosmologies across space.<sup>8</sup> The Bronze Age as used here, therefore, connotes an era during which the Levant was affected by the earliest movements toward urbanization, political centralization, and the coalescence of charismatically led kingdoms and empires, and by the powerful forces of long-distance interaction, exchange, and cultural interference – and indeed of resistance – spawned by these movements. Bronze itself, while not a defining feature of many “Bronze Age” societies (it arrives in the

Levant only in the late third millennium BCE), is perceived as emblematic, insofar as it required the exploitation and alloying of scarce resources of copper and tin found at the margins of the ancient Near East. It thus symbolizes resourcefulness, connectivity and the ability to wield power over great distances, which may be said to be the characteristic attributes of fourth to second millennium leaders, kings and gods.

The end of the Bronze Age is often perceived as a distant precursor to modern “disenchantment”: the elegance of bronze, mined in hallowed locations and cast by skilled craftsmen in exquisite shapes, was replaced by the coarse and brutal utility of iron, gouged out of the mountains of the north and worked by blacksmiths; heroes were replaced by armies; gifts gave way to commodities; ambassadors, to traders. The world itself was carved into antagonistic nations and their warring gods. Like any other simplification, the “end of the Bronze Age” trope is best seen as a reflection of the concerns of those who employ it. At ground level, change was generally incremental, with new technologies added to old, and old ideas reworked into new structures. In this sense, it may be claimed that the Bronze Age never ended at all.

What, then, is Bronze Age archaeology? It is the archaeology of a stretch of time during which long-standing institutions came into existence that still structure human societies: cities, states, markets, military power, legal codes and institutionalized religion. This period also witnessed the human transformation of the physical landscape, bringing large swathes of the countryside under cultivation, introducing widespread horticulture and implanting the artificial, layered raised mound (*tell*) – a strategic node of economic and political power and *axis mundi* between lower worlds and heavenly deities – as a permanent fixture in the countryside. Finally, it saw the integration of the Levant into a Mediterranean world, establishing corridors and networks of contact and interaction that endure, in some senses, to modern times.

## THE LEVANT

The same political circumstances that shaped the 1922 chronological chart composed by the Jerusalem “Group of Four” can be held responsible for the geographic scope of this volume. It includes primarily the area of the British Mandate and a portion of the fragmented French one: Palestine on both sides of the Jordan River, the Lebanese massif and coast, the area between them, southwest of Damascus, and – when directly relevant to the Levant – portions of the Sinai peninsula. The volume mostly excludes sites and regions covered in the *Archaeology of Syria*, published in this series,<sup>9</sup> except where they are crucial to the understanding of more southerly developments.

This narrow definition of the Levant, which excludes most of modern Syria, is nonetheless geographically sustainable, since it describes an internally diverse region set apart from its geographic surroundings by deserts on the east, south

and southwest, by the Mediterranean Sea on the west, and by the edge of the Lebanese massif, marked by the Homs gap, to the north (Figure 1.1). The Levant as defined here is also quite closely congruent with historical Canaan, at least from the mid-second millennium BCE onward.<sup>10</sup> I will therefore occasionally use the term “Canaan” as a replacement for the unwieldy “southern Levant,” and the term “Canaanite” to describe the residents of Canaan (albeit with no strict ethnic connotation). The peculiar geography of the Levant is reflected in ancient local characterizations of the cardinal directions: the inhabitants of Canaan faced the eastern horizon – *qedem* (literally, that which is before one), which denotes the place of origin in temporal, geographic and cosmic senses. To their conceptual right – *yamin*, or south – lay the deserts of Negev or Teiman; to their conceptual left – *sm'al*, or *zafon* (north) – were the Amanus mountains and, by extension, the eastern Anatolian massif; and at their back lay *yam*, the Great Sea. For most of the Bronze Age, therefore, east would be the source of wisdom (light) and the place of ancestral origin;<sup>11</sup> south would denote the domain of nomads and, beyond them, the fabulous wealth of Egypt; north would symbolize the mountainous seat of the storm-god and the source of precious metals; and west would mark the edge of chaos and the dwelling place of the monsters of the deep (*tehom*).

Internally, the Levant may be divided into several dominant longitudinal units:

- (a) The coastal plain, which is extremely narrow until Ras el-Naqurah, broadens toward the Akko Valley, narrows again along the Carmel ridge, and then opens to the south, along the Sharon and Philistia coasts and inwards to the Shephelah (lowland) plains; a series of north–south kurkar sandstone ridges defines the central part of the coast, allowing easy access to groundwater in the troughs but also creating seasonal and permanent marshes at some locations.
- (b) The central highlands, composed of the Alpine and high-Mediterranean Lebanese massif, the upper and lower Galilee, and the Samarian and Judean hills. Softwood forests of the higher altitudes (cedar of Lebanon and Aleppo pine) give way to *pistacia* and evergreen oak open forest with accompanying garrigue vegetation that form a fairly intractable barrier to cultivation and grazing on the western flanks of the central highlands; the semiarid eastern flanks merge into the steppic landscape of the southern and middle Jordan valley.
- (c) The Dead Sea Rift Valley, which includes the Biqua', the upper and the lower Jordan Valleys (the Lake Hula, Lake Kinneret and Dead Sea basins), and the Arabah Valley; the valley is arid to steppic in its south and central parts, while the northern Jordan (Hula) Valley and Biqua' are prone to poor drainage and the expansion of wetlands. The convergence of water (the Jordan and Yarmuk Rivers as well as major springs and oases along the

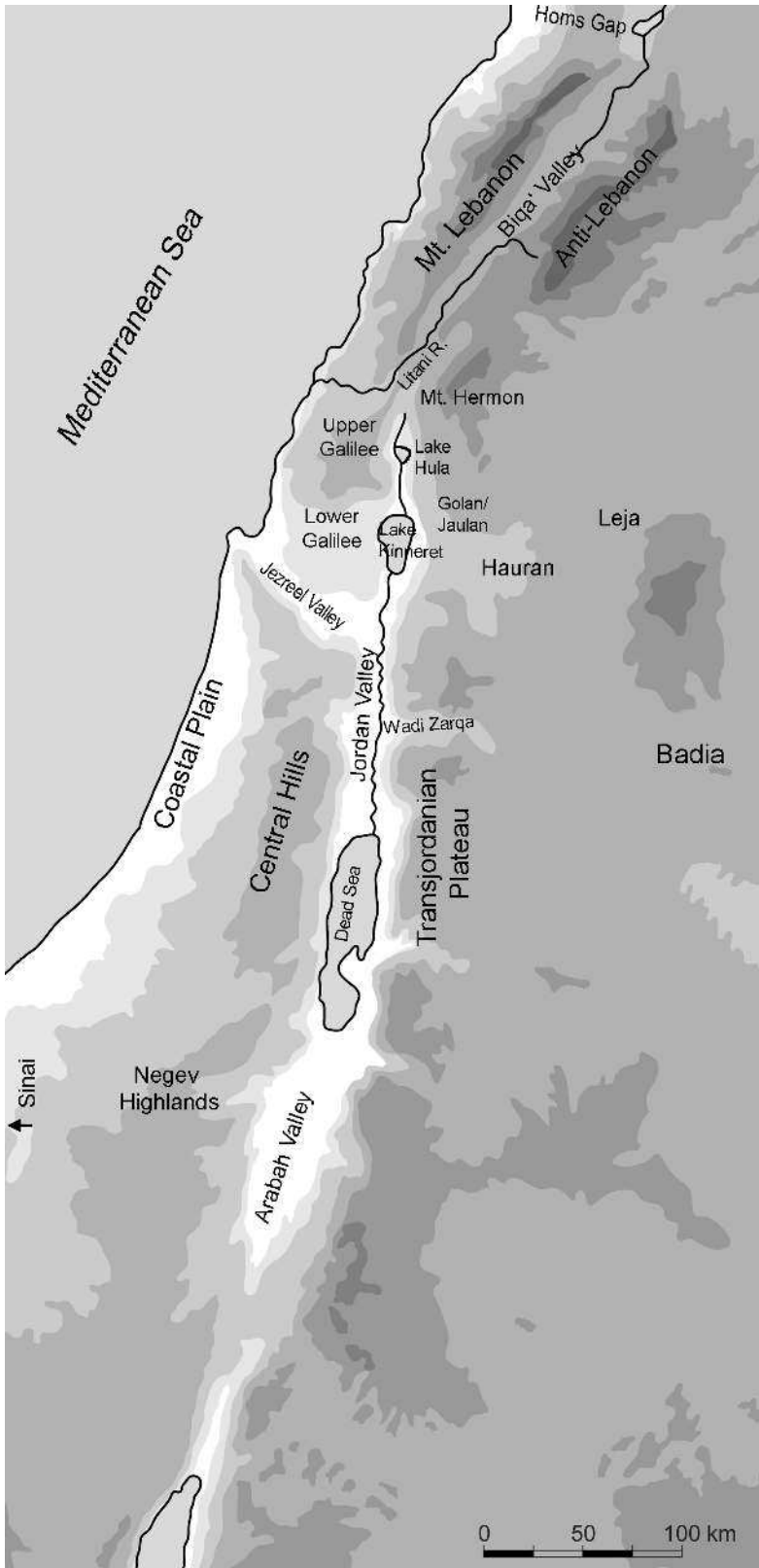


Figure 1.1 Map of the Levant.

flanks of the valley) and warm temperatures along the central part of the valley have attracted human settlement from earliest times, permitting the valley to function both as a corridor for people and ideas and as a locus of independent development. The “bewildering diversity” of the Biqa‘ has been described at length by Horden and Purcell,<sup>12</sup> who note its complex ecology and “extremely local” climatic conditions, which they view as representative of many parts of the Mediterranean.

- (d) The eastern mountains and tablelands, from the Anti-Lebanon mountains to the Transjordanian plateau. The basaltic Leja and the western Hauran and Golan are well watered but difficult to farm, while the area suitable for dry farming in the plateau, which is bisected by many deeply etched wadi systems, extends no more than 50 kilometers east of the Jordan, and about 25 kilometers in the south.

These units are bisected by several transverse basins, formed by geological faults, and small river valleys that afforded passage inland from the coast, from the highlands to the rift valley, and from the rift valley to the eastern plateau. Settlements are often found at the coastal river mouths, which afforded relatively safe anchorages along a seacoast with few natural bays, and along the wadi catchments leading inland or flanking the rift valley. The most significant transverse basin is the broad Jezreel Valley, extending from the eastern flank of the Carmel ridge to the Bet Shean and Jordan Valleys. Several important tells – chief among them the much-excavated site of Megiddo – are situated at the points of access to the valley. In addition, there are several small but significant inland valleys in the central and eastern highlands. The southern plains merge into the loess plains of the northern Negev and the Arad-Beersheba basins, which lie at the southernmost boundary of the dry-farming belt under the best climatic conditions, and beyond it in harder times. South of the Beersheba basin are the semiarid to arid central Negev Highlands, well suited for sheep and goat grazing, but containing many pockets of soil and water catchment that allow seasonal agriculture with simple water-harvesting techniques.

From the foregoing description, it is clear that the Levant offered its early inhabitants a diverse patchwork of environmental affordances and potentialities. These would have encouraged the development of local specializations in productive strategies, that is, differential exploitation of areas suited – by virtue of their topography, soils and moisture regime – to different kinds of agricultural activity, to husbandry of small or large cattle, or to the extraction of unique resources. Knowledge of the diverse opportunities offered by the landscape would have helped minimize risk for each community, but worked against the existence of large economic institutions. Locally integrated systems of specialized producers could be created, but these would not have accumulated the huge surpluses characterizing, for example, the river-valley civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia, or the extensive dry-farming and pastoral belts that supported

Bronze Age economies of scale in Syria. The flip side of this absence of scale was the relative long-term security of Levantine existence: the ecological mosaic of which the Levant is composed ensures that for every niche lost, for example, to minor climatic change, a new niche will be won. Thus, a period of extended desiccation (drought), which would harm the southern dry-farming belt, might release former marshlands in the rift valley or along the coast for cultivation, or open up forest land for horticulture or grazing. Taking the long view, the economic stakes in the southern and central Levant were relatively low, and subsistence uncertainty, though always present due to yearly fluctuations, could be overcome by maintaining flexibility.<sup>13</sup> In view of these considerations, the role of climate in the history of Bronze Age settlement fluctuations in the Levant should, as a rule, not be seen as decisive: climate change – which was never drastic in the Holocene<sup>14</sup> – could affect local affordances and strategies, but it cannot explain major shifts in settlement, social organization or political hegemony.

The distinct geographic borders of the Levant and its internal diversity should not imply that it was isolated from its neighbors, or that it could never show any internal unity. The Levant was always a corridor, conduit and receptacle for people, materials, technologies, ideologies and experiments in social organization emanating from points north, east and south. Moreover, its internal relief and divisions did not permit complete isolation and autarky in any part of it. However, the flow of persons, commodities or ideas was always filtered by the attrition caused by distance, hardships along the route, the mechanisms of cultural translation, and the creativity of the receiving communities, who should never be seen as passive subjects whose destiny has been preordained by geography. Estimating relative travel distances in antiquity<sup>15</sup> is instructive: about three weeks would have been required to traverse the Levant itself from north to south; Egypt lay ten days or a fortnight away from the coastal centers, while settlements of the northern Lebanese coast were perhaps a week's travel from the towns of western Syria. Sea travel occupied similar spans of time, weather permitting. Connectivity was therefore always an option, but archaeology shows that it was an option that was exercised only intermittently. People in the Levant could initiate contact with neighboring zones or refrain from it; people from the Nile Valley or western Syria could migrate to or pass through the Levant, but could also bypass it. If the Levant – as is often stated – was a land bridge between western Asia, Arabia and Africa, it was a self-sufficient, long and densely inhabited one, in which people, ideas and technologies could be received, reinvented or retooled as they made their way across it.

#### HISTORICAL TRENDS IN LEVANTINE BRONZE AGE ARCHAEOLOGY

As illustrating the Old Testament literature, or its words and thoughts, archeology is concerned with the peoples of Bible lands, their local habitations,

their languages, their manners and customs, their political constitution, their mental and moral characteristics. As auxiliary to Old Testament history, it considers the same things genetically, in their bearing upon the preparation of Israel for the place assigned to it in the order of Providence. (McMurdy 1896: 5)

While all early Anglo-European excavation in the Ottoman East, beginning in the early nineteenth century, was motivated by the quest for the wisdom and wealth of the ancient empires of Egypt and Babylon, the “birthright and sacred legacy of all civilized people” (James Henry Breasted),<sup>16</sup> antiquarian interest in the Levant, and particularly in Palestine, was primarily motivated by the desire to uncover, recover and possess the biblical past. The first systematic attempt to superimpose a scriptural geography on Arab/Ottoman Palestine, by the American scholars Edward Robinson and Eli Smith, had an immense effect on nineteenth-century European explorers, who determined “to lay open the treasures of Biblical Geography and History . . . treasures which have lain for ages unexplored, and had become so covered with the dust and rubbish of many centuries, that their very existence was forgotten.”<sup>17</sup> Initially, this program was effected by intensive surveys, capped by the monumental Survey of Western Palestine and the partial survey of Eastern Palestine and the Jaulan.<sup>18</sup> In Lebanon, the Archaeological Museum of the American University of Beirut, established in 1868, exhibited pottery and other artifacts from private collections, thus offering early archaeologists an opportunity to view prehistoric ceramic industries from the Levant and Cyprus.<sup>19</sup> Systematic Bronze Age archaeology in the Levant began with the first stratigraphic excavation in Ottoman Palestine, conducted at Tell el-Hesi (then thought to be ancient Lachish) between 1890 and 1892, first by W.M. Flinders Petrie and then by Frederick Bliss, son of the founder of the American University in Beirut Daniel Bliss (Figure 1.2).<sup>20</sup> Petrie and Bliss’s pioneering understanding of the nature of multilayered mounded sites and the relation between building strata and ceramic typology paved the way for the first series of excavations at pre-Israelite “biblical” sites – i.e., mounds identified with specific places mentioned in the Old Testament and associated with “Semite,” “Canaanite” or “Amorite” predecessors. These included Ta’anakh (Tell Ta’anek) (excavated in 1902–1904), Gezer (Tell el-Jizr) (1902–1909), Megiddo (Tell el-Mutesellim) (1903–1905), Jericho (Tell es-Sultan) (1907–1909) and Shechem (Tell Balata) (1913–1914). Following the First World War (1914–1918), when the British and French “opened up” Palestine and Syria for excavation, the trend of excavating at large “biblical” mounds was resumed, with long-term projects initiated by American institutions at Megiddo, Tel Bet Shean (Tell el-Husn) and Tell Beit Mirsim; British work at several sites in the southern plain (Tell el-‘Ajjul, Tell Jemmeh and southern Tell el-Far‘ah), at Jericho and at Lachish (Tell ed-Duweir); and numerous salvage excavations in Bronze Age sites and cemeteries – occasioned by the rapid development of Palestine – conducted by





**Figure 1.2** The first systematic excavation at a Bronze Age site in the Levant: Tell el-Hesi, 1892. Courtesy of the Palestine Exploration Fund.

the newly formed Department of Antiquities of Palestine and published in its *Quarterly*.

Departments or Directorates of Antiquities and European expeditions were also active in the northern Levant, under the French mandate, and in Transjordan, after it was separated from western Palestine in 1921. However, the intensity of archaeological investigation never reached that of western Palestine. Bronze Age excavations in Mandate Lebanon include the long-term French excavations at Byblos (which began in 1921 and continued until 1965, well after Lebanon's independence), whereas the Bronze Age mounds of Transjordan (e.g., Pella, Bab edh-Dhra' or Tell el-Umeiri) were excavated only after Jordan's independence, in the latter half of the twentieth century.

The relative imbalance in the intensity of archaeological research in different parts of the Levant continued beyond Mandate times, into the period of national independence and conflict, so that the current map of excavation and research is very much a product of the nature of the different states created in the postwar era and of the impact of numerous wars, between and within nations and territories. Factors that have played a crucial role in the extent of archaeological activity include cultural and religious motivation, national priorities, economic development, and military conflict and occupation. Thus, among the states and national territories in the modern Levant, Israel is the

most intensively excavated, especially along its densely developed coast, and maintains the highest level of research activity due to its stable economy and administration, strong ties to the western academic tradition and the allure of its biblical past. Moreover, because of the synergy between Israel's nation-building project and the archaeological project of recovering a (Jewish) indigenous past, collaboration between archaeologists, the government and the military has usually been close. There are more than 25,000 registered antiquities sites in Israel proper (within its pre-1967 borders). Most of the country has been subjected to systematic surveys, the results of which are largely accessible in print and online. About 300 salvage and 50 research excavations by local and overseas institutions are licensed annually, including scores of sites and cemeteries with Bronze Age remains.<sup>21</sup> Since 1967, Israel has maintained a military occupation of the Palestinian national territories in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, and was responsible for their archaeological administration until the mid-1990s, after which portions of the territory reverted to Palestinian administrative control. These regions too were intensively surveyed and excavated by Israeli institutions, who were always prepared to expand the scope of their work to match the changing boundaries of political and military control. Between 1967 and 1990, some 6,000 archaeological sites were recorded and hundreds excavated.<sup>22</sup> In recent years the extent of Israeli research has diminished (with the exception of occupied East Jerusalem), and a politically unstable Palestinian Authority has fielded only a handful of salvage and research projects in Bronze Age sites.<sup>23</sup>

Because of the strong link between pre-classical archaeology in Israel and the study of biblical history and texts, research priorities in Israeli academia have shifted over the past seven decades, accommodating the shifting frontier between "reliable" and "mythical" historical traditions. In the first three or four decades of nationhood, the biblical archaeology paradigm established by W.F. Albright and his school was dominant among Israeli archaeologists. Under this paradigm, it was asserted that biblical history, extra-biblical texts and archaeology could be reconciled from the beginning of the second millennium BCE onward, and that this reconciliation could best be effected through meticulous stratigraphic excavations and the creation of cultural typologies at large archaeological mounds. The first major tell excavation in Israel was conducted by Yigael Yadin at Hazor (Tell el-Qedah) in 1955–1958 and its results were considered to confirm a portrait of second-millennium Canaan that melded biblical and extra-biblical sources into a consistent picture of "the Patriarchal period."<sup>24</sup> The late second-millennium conquest of Canaan by Joshua was also considered by Yadin and others as historically accurate and archaeologically verifiable. In recent decades, however, a critical shift in biblical-historical studies combined with new interpretations of ancient settlement patterns based on extensive surveys (conducted largely in the occupied West Bank) have led many scholars to relegate both the patriarchal narrative