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BETWEEN THE DESERT AND THE JORDAN: EARLY URBANIZATION IN THE UPPER WADI AZ-ZARQA RIVER- THE EB II-III FORTIFIED TOWN OF KHIRBET AL-BATRAWY

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ABSTRACT

Recent research activities by Rome “La Sapienza” University in North-Central Jordan allowed to identify the previously unknown fortified town of Khirbet al-Batrawy, dating back to the Early Bronze II-III, with an EB IV village on the top. Khirbet al-Batrawy, for its location (both in respect of the regional tracks-network through the Black Desert and the steppe towards the Arabian Peninsula, and the flourishing district of the Upper Wadi az-Zarqa, the easternmost perennial river in the Jordanian plateau) and its preservation state (almost without superimposition after the 3rd millennium BC), represents an extraordinary opportunity for a cantonal study of the origins, development and crisis of the Jordanian early urbanisation at the fringes of non-agricultural regions, where pastoralists and nomads interacted with this new social institution: the fortified town. Its dimensions, the monumental defensive works all around it, and the discovery of a major temple inside it hint a the role of “central place” of the district played by Batrawy in the Early Bronze II-III and testify to its “urban” character.

1. PREMISE

Archaeological research in the Hauran region in Syria¹ and in Northern Jordan (in the provinces of al-Mafraq and Zarqa),² and especially the flow of surveys and landscape studies which followed the discovery of Jawa in the Jordanian Black Desert,³ and Khirbet al-Umbashi on the eastern piedmont of Syrian Jebel al-‘Arab during the last quarter of the 20th century,⁴ suggested the necessity of a complete re-evaluation of the

1 A survey was carried out in the Hauran and Jebel Druz regions in years 1984-1993 (Braemer 1984; 1988; 1993).

2 Recently Bartl, al-Khraysheh and Eichmann 2001. See also Nigro (ed.) 2006: 233-250 for a reassessment of previous researches activities and updated surveys results in this area.

3 In the 90's systematic surveys were carried out also along the Wadi Rajil and Wadi al-‘Ajib in the area of the western Basalt Desert between southern Syria and northern Jordan, producing a preliminary map of the Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age sites in the region between the al-Mafraq district and the EB I site of Jawa, as well as further to the north in southern Syria. Some of these Early Bronze Age Jordanian sites in the western fringes of the Syro-Arabic Desert are, from west to east, Tell el-Qihati, Qasr el-Hallabat, Rukeis, Salatin, Karyat Khisha al-Sletin, Tell Umm el-Quttein, Hawshiyay (Betts *et al.* 1995; 1996).

4 Braemer, Échallier, Taraqqi (eds) 2004. Further discoveries and investigations in the steppe and

human settlement and achievements in this ‘marginal’ area during the Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age, with special attention to the semi-nomadic component of the ancient societies. New discoveries in the same region, for example, at the Syrian site of Labwe⁵ have, moreover, indicated that this area played a relevant role also during the rise of early urbanization in the Southern Levant, in the 3rd millennium BC, when, however, the main streams of secondary urbanization developed in the Jordan Valley, on the Lebanese coast, and in inner Syria.

In this perspective, the discovery of the previously almost completely unknown site of Khirbet el-Batrawy near Zarqa,⁶ shed new light on this specific and peripheral early ‘urban’ phenomenon⁷ flourished in North-Central Jordan, at the border between the Jordanian highlands and the Syro-Arabic Desert crossed by its huge and long *wadis*. Systematic surveys and excavations carried out by Rome ‘La Sapienza’ University at the Early Bronze Age II-III site of Khirbet al-Batrawy – which represents the central focus of the Project in the Upper Wadi az-Zarqa (Fig. 1)⁸ – provided a somewhat unique opportunity for studying urban origins and developments in this region. The fact that the site was almost untouched allowed to set up the project in order to investigate a series of basic issues for the definition of its ‘urban’ phenomenon: relationship with landscape (the city origins in a territorial perspective); gradual shifting from village subsistence to urban economy; road network and goods exchange control; monumental buildings with their economic and ideological meanings (both defensive and religious architecture).

2. EBI PREMISES AND THE PATHS TOWARDS THE CITY IN UPPER WADI AZ-ZARQA

Khirbet al-Batrawy arose as a major centre controlling Upper Wadi az-Zarqa, a river which – from its sources in Amman, down to the junction with Wadi edh-Dhuleyl⁹ – offered a series of geo-ecological niches extremely favourable to human occupation. Some sparse evidence testifies to the frequentation of the khirbet already in the EB I

the desert both in Jordan and in Syria in the first years of this century, such as al-Rawda (Gondet, Castel 2004; Castel, Peltenburg 2007) and Tell Sh’airat (al-Maqdissi 1995), have further enhanced archaeological research in this area (Barge, Moulin 2008).

5 al-Maqdissi, Braemer 2006.

6 Nigro 2006a; 2006c; 2006d; 2007; 2008; *in press a*; Nigro (ed.) 2006; 2008.

7 ‘Urbanism’ in this region of the ancient Near East is a local experience with its own characteristics (Esse 1989; Liverani 1999: 227-231; Rast 2001; Greenberg 2002). The use of terms ‘urbanisation’ and ‘city’ to define the Palestinian and Transjordanian phenomenon is up to now a matter of discussion (firstly, Schaub 1982: 67; Seger 1989: fn. 1), because of its restricted and local character in comparison with the Mesopotamian and Egyptian urban experiences (Liverani 1986); on this issue see also: Philip 2001: 163-168; Chesson, Philip 2003; Savage, Falconer, Harrison 2007; Schaub, Chesson 2007, suggesting caution in employing such a terminology in the Southern Levantine context.

8 This regional study was started by G. Palumbo in 1993 and carried on systematically until 1999 (Palumbo *et al.* 1996; 1997; Caneva *et al.* 2001). The survey was then resumed in 2004 under the direction of the writer, together with systematic excavations at Khirbet al-Batrawy (Nigro 2006a: 229-230; Nigro [ed.] 2006: vii-viii, 1-8).

9 Nigro (ed.) 2006: 4-8.

(see below).

During Early Bronze I a series of rural hamlets and villages was scattered along the river banks,¹⁰ while some major centres, usually flanked by dolmen fields,¹¹ grew on top-hill sites, dominating the valley, such as Jebel al-Mutawwaq, which hosted a central sanctuary.¹²

In this period the main site in Upper Wadi az-Zarqa was Jneeh, a 3 ha. village located on a flat terrace overlooking the western bank of the river, only 1.5 Km south-west of Khirbet al-Batrawy.¹³ Jneeh and Batrawy are in a central point of the Upper Wadi az-Zarqa, a strategic location controlling a ford and a relatively wide area of cultivable land. Some cup-marks identified on the Acropolis of Batrawy, near a cave, may indicate a religious frequentation of the site before the foundation of the fortified town in Early Bronze II, at the time when Jneeh was the central place in the valley. The possible presence of a sanctuary at Khirbet al-Batrawy may, thus, partly explain why the population living in the valley concentrated on the top-hill site in Early Bronze II.¹⁴ Such a phenomenon was probably determined also by other factors, first of all the need of security and protection at least judging by the location of the new born town and looking at its powerful fortifications. It seems probable that the accumulation of goods and a certain degree of social instability along the main road network made necessary to protect the community by settling the top-hill site, defending it with strong fortification works, and re-organizing the social group according to a more powerful and effective hierarchy.¹⁵

Spatial analyses show that there was a sharp increase in population shifting from Jneeh to Batrawy, thus indicating that presumably the synecistic process (i.e. the unification of people arriving from several rural villages along the river), which led to the foundation of the city, was also accompanied by a catalytic process (i.e. the attraction of other components of the social body into the city), inducing groups of semi-nomads previously living along the routes to the desert to settle in the town itself or in the rural villages under its control, such as Tell el-Bireh, Tell es-Sukhne North and Khirbet er-Ruseifeh, thus shifting from a semi-nomadic to a sedentary life style. When the two processes – synecism and catalysis – reached their apex during Early Bronze II, the birth of the fortified town of Khirbet al-Batrawy was definitely accomplished, and the new born city apparently extended its territorial control over the whole Upper Wadi az-Zarqa from Amman to Tell el-Bireh (Fig. 2).

10 Douglas 2006: 50-52.

11 Nigro, Sala, Polcaro 2008: 220-228.

12 Hanbury-Tenison 1987: 132; Fernández-Tresguerrez Velasco 2004; 2005; Douglas 2006: 51-52.

13 Douglas 2006: 50-51, Figs 1.4, 2.16, maps 4-5); Jneeh also had a major Iron Age II occupation (JADIS nr. 2516.016, p. 2.172).

14 Khirbet al-Batrawy and Jneeh are in sight: it has been suggested that the population of Jneeh was one of the components settling at Batrawy; a relationship similar to that suggested for Tell el-Fukhar and Khirbet ez-Zeraqon (Douglas 2006: 51).

15 The shrinking and abandonment of EB IB sites all over Palestine and Transjordan is actually a general trend registered in the transition from Early Bronze I to Early Bronze II (Esse 1991: 146-152; Finkelstein 1995: 50).

3. A STRATEGIC LOCATION: A FORD, A CROSSROAD AND A GATE TOWARDS THE JORDAN VALLEY

The location of the EB II-III town of Khirbet al-Batrawy was highly strategic: erected on top of a hill dominating the upper course of the Wadi az-Zarqa, Batrawy at the same time controlled the ford through the river and the shortcut crossing the hills and connecting directly the Upper Wadi az-Zarqa with the Jordan Valley.

Towards the east, Batrawy looked over the tracks arriving from south-east, east and north-east (from al-Qihati and al-Azraq), being the arrival in a valley with a perennial river (the easternmost at the border of the Syro-Arabic Desert) of the east-west routes crossing the desert; in other words, a gate controlling the access not only to the Wadi az-Zarqa, but to the Jordan Valley itself.

The role of crossroad and gate was strongly linked to two specificities of the Batrawy early urban model: the strict relationships with semi-nomadic people living between the desert and the steppe, and its inclusion within the network of long-distance trade as a centre of exchange.

3.1. *A Fortified Hill: Topography and Defensive Vocation*

The topography of the hill of Batrawy was particularly favourable to defensive purposes, and altogether functional to territorial control due to its dominant position in respect of the underlying valley (Fig. 3). The khirbet has a roughly triangular shape, with the base along its western side, where it looks towards the Wadi az-Zarqa (Fig. 4). Steep rocky cliffs protected it all around its perimeter, except at the mid of the northern side, where a shallow saddle connected it to a facing hill¹⁶. With the foundation of the town in Early Bronze II, natural defences were reinforced and completed by a massive fortification system, which transformed the hill in an almost unassailable citadel.

3.2. *Stating the Urban Status: the Erection of Fortifications in the Early Bronze II*

The construction of the city-wall was apparently the major enterprise carried out by the Batrawy community definitely stating the urban status of the settlement and the inner hierarchy of the social group achieving such a complex task. An articulated fortification was built all around the edge of the hill by exploiting any cliff and spur during Early Bronze II, around 2900 BC. The main defensive work was a solid stone and mud-brick wall, from which at irregular intervals bastions and towers projected¹⁷. This structure was repaired several times and occurred at least two major reconstructions in the Early Bronze IIIA and Early Bronze IIIB, with the addition of an outer wall and a further scarp-wall.

¹⁶ Nigro 2006a: 233-235; Nigro (ed.) 2006:16-23.

¹⁷ Nigro (ed.) 2006: 175-177.

3.3. *The EB II-III Fortification System*

Due to the triangular shape of the mound, the main pinpoints were the corners, where huge tower-fortresses were located (many of them were added to the main wall or reconstructed together with it during the Early Bronze II-III).

The north-western corner (Area C) hosted a rectangular tower (Tower C1), built directly on a rock terrace with big limestone boulders. This tower protected a strategic point, flanked by a secondary access to the city, a postern (located but not yet excavated).¹⁸ The western side of Batrawy was the best protected one, due to the almost vertical cliff, which was cut and adapted to defensive purposes. At least two projecting towers built with large boulders set directly on the bedrock protected the defensive line on this side.¹⁹

In the south-western corner, offering a wide panoramic overview, a huge tower (Tower D1) controlled the Zarqa Valley; such a structure was reconstructed several times and also resettled in EB IVB.²⁰

The main city-wall, though badly eroded, was preserved along the whole southern side. A probe opened roughly at the centre of the southern fortification line in Area E demonstrated that the structure there preserved dates back from the Early Bronze II, since the later Early Bronze III reconstruction collapsed and was almost completely obliterated by erosion.²¹ A typical feature of this phase was the presence of fragmentary light-greyish mud-bricks, belonged to the superstructure of the Early Bronze II city-wall.

Roughly 45 m west of the eastern corner, a ravine in the edge of the hill indicated the location of a gate, which was approached through a ramp turning left from the foot of the cliff into the city. This entrance was flanked by large piers and protected by the structures built over the spur to the west of it (Fig. 5).²²

4. THE EARLIEST BATRAWY II (EARLY BRONZE II) CITY-WALL AND MAIN CITY-GATE IN AREA B

The northern side of the town was thoroughly investigated in Area B, where the main entrance to the city was located in the easiest spot to approach. Here, excavations reached the earliest occupational layers lying directly over the bedrock, i.e. the city-wall and city-gate of the Early Bronze II (2900-2700 BC; Fig. 6).²³

The city-wall was erected over a massive foundation made of huge limestone blocks and boulders (some exceeding 1.5 m in length), carefully set into the bedrock,

18 Nigro 2006a: 235-236, Figs 6-7; Nigro (ed.) 2006: 25-29, Figs 1.27-1.33.

19 Nigro (ed.) 2006: 33, Figs 1.43-1.45.

20 Nigro 2006a: 236, Fig. 9; Nigro (ed.) 2006: 32-33, Figs 1.39-1.42; 2008: 241-244.

21 Nigro 2007: 357-358, Fig. 17; Nigro ed. 2008: 245-255.

22 Nigro (ed.) 2006: 32, Fig. 1.37.

23 Nigro 2007: 349-352; Nigro (ed.) 2008: 75-88.

with a battering outer foot making it firmer²⁴. It was built in separated stretches of 6-8 m length,²⁵ according to a technique attested to in many Early Bronze fortified sites in Palestine and Jordan,²⁶ in order to prevent dangerous effects of earthquakes.

The inner filling of the wall was made by medium-sized limestone undressed stones, displaced in layers with pebbles, limestone chops and mud mortar. Such a stone built structure reached the elevation of the gate capstone (around 2.5 m); over that a mud-brick superstructure stood up (several fragments of mud-bricks were found outside the city-wall, even if the collapse layer of the end of the Early Bronze II was successively razed with the following reconstructions of the city).

In spite of the monumentality of the city-wall, the gate was a simple opening, 1.6 m wide (Figs 7-8), since the town was approachable only by pedestrians and possibly donkeys (onagers) through a street which flanked the wall (Fig. 9).²⁷ The outer jambs of the gate were reinforced with big blocks, and a step marked the entrance itself. The gate capstone was a monolith on the outer side and a wooden beam on the inner side of the passage. There is no evidence for the presence of towers adjoined to this early gate, even though the area was completely reconstructed when the gate was blocked at the beginning of the Early Bronze IIIA.²⁸ Two earthquake cracks on both jambs witness to the event which caused the collapse of the capstone and the end of use of the gate itself.²⁹

The simple layout of the gate, nonetheless, finds several comparison in contemporary EB II defensive architecture of the region, such as at Khirbet Kerak,³⁰ 'Ai,³¹ Arad³² and, later on, also at EB III Bab edh-Dhra'.³³

4.1. The Socio-Economic Significance of the Earliest City-Wall

The overall length of the city-wall, its width and elevation, allowed to approximately calculate the volume of stones and mud-bricks necessary for its construction and to infer the number of worker involved in its erection in a hypothetical time span of one

24 Nigro (ed.) 2006: 175-176, Fig. 4.32.

25 Nigro (ed.) 2006: 176-177.

26 Such as at Tell el-Mutesellim (Loud 1948: 66, Figs 152-154, 391), Tell Ta'anek (Lapp 1969: 9, Fig. 2), Khirbet Kerak (Maisler, Stekelis, Avi-Yonah 1952: 170-172, Pl. 9), et-Tell (Callaway 1980: 113-114, Figs 75, 85), Tell es-Sultan (Kenyon 1957: 174-175, Pl. 36; 1981: 100, 213, 262, 374, Pls 83a, 201; Nigro 2006b: 370-371), Bab edh-Dhra' (Rast, Schaub 2003: 280-283) and Numeira (Rast, Schaub 1980: 42, Fig. 15).

27 Nigro 2006c: 57-58, Fig. 2; 2007: 352, Figs 10-11; Nigro (ed.) 2008: 83-88.

28 Nigro 2007: 349-350, Fig. 8; Nigro (ed.) 2008: 89-90, Figs 3.38, 3.40.

29 Nigro (ed.) 2008: 87, Fig. 3.37.

30 The south-east gate in Wall A, possibly also blocked at the beginning of the Early Bronze III (Greenberg, Paz 2005: 84, 86-89, Figs 8, 10-14).

31 The Citadel Gate at Site A (Callaway 1980: 63-65, Figs 38, 41); the Postern Gate (Callaway 1980: 72-73, Figs 48-49, 51) and the Lower City Gate (Callaway 1980: 114-115, Figs 74-75) at Site L.

32 Amiran - Ilan 1996: 20-22.

33 The EB III West Gate in Fields IV and XIII, also blocked during the Early Bronze III (Rast, Schaub 2003: 272-280).

season (summer/4 months). At least 400 workers took part into the building of the earliest Batrawy defence, which were able to extract and move more than 11,000 tons of limestone blocks, and to produce around 1 million mud-bricks (with an enormous employ of water for mud-mortar). This work was a tremendous enterprise for a community of no more than 2000 people, in which surely non-urban groups were involved, with the aid of specialized workers and animals. The complexity of the work, and food supplies for workers, as well as raw materials (straw, wood, clay, huwwara were largely employed), do imply the existence of a central ruling institution, which planned and executed the construction of the city-wall. Some structural details, such as the partition in between the various stretches of the wall, the regular displacement of block of similar size at the same elevation, the cutting of regular squared blocks testify to the strong central direction of the authority responsible for the work, and are an indirect proof of an established social hierarchy.

This, however, does not necessarily mean that the city-walls were mainly erected to show with their skyline dominating on the surrounding landscape (and road-network) the power of this ruling institution, and to identify the city as the emerging social institution ruling over the whole valley. This, of course, was one of the basic outcomes of their erection, but perhaps their major social impact was not the ideological, but the economic one, implying a long and continuous involvement of a large part of the district population into their erection. Moreover, they testify to the urgency of a protection for the material and symbolic values accumulated by the agricultural communities of Upper Wadi az-Zarqa into the new town.

4.2. The Sudden End of the EB II Town: Earthquake in Jordan

The EB II city-gate and attached fortifications at Batrawy show undoubtedly that a violent earthquake brought to a sudden end the earliest city (Batrawy II), as it was the case of other centres of the North-central Jordan Valley: Pella/Tell el-Husn, Tell Abu Kharaz and Tell es-Sa'idiyeh, which were apparently destroyed in the same period and by a similar agency.³⁴ Traces of such a dramatic event were detected both on the northern and southern city-wall in Areas B and E; it provoked almost the full collapse of the mud-brick superstructure of the city-wall and seriously damaged the 2 m high stone foundations, which still exhibit cracks and inner collapses. The collapsed main gate was thus abandoned and blocked by a secondary wall.³⁵ The greyish mud-bricks of the city-wall superstructure were split over the stone foundations and left a thick layer of ashy dump all around the defences, especially visible on the southern side of the khirbet.³⁶

34 Bourke 2000: 233-235. Such a conflagration apparently caused by an earthquake is attested to also at Megiddo (Finkelstein, Ussishkin and Peersmann 2006:49-50), 'Ai (Callaway 1980: 147; 1993:42), Jericho/Tell es-Sultan (Kenyon 1957: 175-176, Pl. 37A; 1981: 373; Pls 200-201, 343a; Nigro 2006b: 359-361, 372-373).

35 Nigro 2007: 352; Nigro (ed.) 2008:89-90, Figs 3.38-3.40.

36 Nigro (ed.) 2008: 250, 255.

5. THE EB II-III BROAD-ROOM TEMPLE AND THE ORIGINS OF THE CITY

Due to its geomorphology the Acropolis of Khirbet al-Batrawy (Area A), on the western higher terrace of the hill, suffered heavy erosion, and this possibly explains why only extremely razed traces of a major building were identified over it, in spite of the wide excavated area.³⁷ On the opposite lower easternmost terrace, in Area F, excavations brought to light a huge rectangular building, which stretched E-W over an area of around 400 sqm, including a forecourt and some cult installations.³⁸

The building consisted of a broad-room (L.500; 2.7 × 11.0 m, with a ratio of 1:4), delimited by a 1.2 m-wide wall, with the entrance located at two thirds of its length. In the EB III reconstruction of the building, the western side of the room hosted a raised platform on which a niche was inserted; in front of the niche there were the bases of two betyls. The entrance was 1.36 m wide, and opened on a forecourt (L.504) paved with crushed limestone (Figs 10-11).

In the court, facing the entrance, there was a round platform (S.510), 0.35 m high, erected around an emergence of the bedrock, with a diameter of 2.5 m, a cult installation that was a typical one in Early Bronze II-III Levantine sacred areas.³⁹ In the centre of the platform, there was a slab with a small circular hollow in the middle, similar to those visible on the steps of the Round Altar 4017 at Megiddo.⁴⁰

The overall plan of the building, the niche in the cella, and the circular platform in the forecourt suggest to interpret it as a broad-room temple, belonging to a religious architectural typology well attested to in Southern Levant during the Early Bronze Age, similar to the renown EB II-III sanctuary of Bab edh-Dhra'.⁴¹

The broad-room plan of the temple belongs to an early architectural type, still preserving a religious architectural tradition descending from the Chalcolithic Period (as the precincts of En-Gedi and Tuleilat el-Ghassul testify to);⁴² moreover, the location of the temple on a very panoramic spot, and its monumental architecture made it a major reference point in the landscape of the underlying valley.

6. THE EB IIIA RECONFIGURATION OF THE FORTIFICATION SYSTEM: THE GROWTH OF THE CITY

The violent destruction which interrupted the life of Batrawy at the end of Early Bronze

37 Nigro (ed.) 2006: 109-115, Figs 3.57-3.63; Nigro (ed.) 2008: 20-26, Figs 2.11-2.12.

38 Nigro 2007: 359, Fig. 20; Nigro (ed.) 2008: 276-293.

39 See for instance: Altar 4017 at Tell el-Mutesellim/Megiddo (Loud 1948: 70, 73-76, Figs 164-165; Sala 2008: 214-219); circular platform i0.1 in the sacred area of Khirbet ez-Zeraqon (Genz 2002: 94-96, Fig. 2; Sala 2008: 243-244), and the semicircular platform (*locus* 13) in Field XII at Bab edh-Dhra' (Rast and Schaub 2003: 321-332; Sala 2008: 288).

40 Finkelstein, Ussishkin 2000: 71, Fig. 3.50.

41 Rast, Schaub 2003: 157-166, 321-335, Figs 8.2, 10.57.

42 Sala 2008: 3-30, 291-294.

II was immediately followed by an overall reconstruction of the site defences,⁴³ which marks the passage to the Early Bronze III, the period which witnessed the major flourishing of the town.

The main inner city-wall was reconstructed in elevation using stones instead of mud-bricks (previously separated wall sectors were joint at the varying elevation 1 to 2 m),⁴⁴ apparently with a wooden coronation, up to a height of around 6 m.

The EB II gate was blocked and a new one was opened presumably further to the west, still approached by the street⁴⁵ now running in between the inner city-wall and the newly added outer wall W.155, a 1.6 m wide massive wall erected around 1.5 m off of the main wall, thus doubling the line of fortification, which had an outer battering face made up of polygonal boulders and an inner face made of medium size stones regularly displaced, with a filling of stones and limestone chops (Fig. 12). A curvilinear outwork (W.185) was added to the defence just in front of the blocked gate, similar to those known from EB III Khirbet Kerak (Fig. 13).⁴⁶

6.1. The EB IIIA Destruction: Structural Crisis and the Mutual Relationship between Urbanism and War

However, also the EB IIIA town underwent a dramatic destruction, which testifies to the structural character of crisis of Southern Levantine Early Bronze Age 'urban culture'. A certain degree of political turbulence was provoked by goods centralization, especially in centres like Batrawy located at the border between different (sometimes antagonist) social groups/landscapes. Such an observation, i.e. the occurrence of violent destructions during the Early Bronze III,⁴⁷ as well as the progressive enlargement of the EB III defensive systems, which is repeated in other contemporary urban sites,⁴⁸ suggest that urbanism was in some way linked to war,⁴⁹ as a more direct mean to obtain territorial control and to gather goods, which had been concentrated within the walls of a town.

43 Nigro 2007:3 49-351; Nigro (ed.) 2008: 89-99.

44 The original stretches in which the wall was subdivided (Nigro [ed.] 2006: 176-177) were linked one to the other (and this indicates in several spots the height upon which the wall was reconstructed).

45 The street running along the city-wall became a corridor in between the outer (W.155) and the main city-wall (W.103) leading to a new gate located further west; its floor (L.144; Nigro [ed.] 2006: 191, Figs 4.53-4.54) was re-plastered and was in use until a new violent destruction.

46 Greenberg, Paz 2005: Figs 84, 94-96.

47 Seger 1989: 117-119. A series of destructions may be attributed to the end of Early Bronze IIIA: a 3.5 m deep layer of ash marks the end of the EB II-III A occupation at Tell el-Khuweilfeh (stratum XV; Seger 1989: 125); similarly, at Tel el-Hesi the end of EB III A occupation (phase 4b) was marked by heavy deposits of ash and mixed debris (Seger 1989: 127-129); at 'Ai signs of destruction were detected in the EB III A fortification walls (Callaway 1993: 43); and at Jericho/Tell es-Sultan the EB III A city came at a sudden end, being drastically destroyed around 2500 BC (it is not clear if again an earthquake was the cause of such destruction, or it was due to a military attack, since at some spots fierce fire is documented; Nigro 2000: 16-17; 2006e: 18, Fig. 24).

48 The emblematic cases of 'Ai (Callaway 1980: 147-158, 185-189), Tell Ta'anek (Lapp 1969: 9-14) and Khirbet Yarmouk (de Miroschedji 1990), just to mention a few better known instances.

49 Nigro *in press* b.

7. EB IIIB RECONSTRUCTION: MULTIPLE FORTIFICATIONS AND BUILDING B1

After the violent destruction which marked the end of the EB IIIA town, the fortifications were rebuilt and strengthened, with the addition of a scarp-wall (W.165) to the outer wall, which brought up to 15 m the overall width of the defensive works in Area B (Fig. 13).⁵⁰ A new street was paved by razing the collapse layer in between the main wall W.103 and the outer wall W.155. The main wall was also reconstructed in its upper section, and on its inner side a staircase (W.181) was uncovered, made of wooden posts and tables supported by a flight of stone steps, fixed into the inner face of the wall and protruding 0.3-0.5 m from it (Fig. 14). Such a staircase allows to reconstruct the overall height of the city-wall around 8 m.

A huge building (Building B1) was erected in Early Bronze IIIB in the area just inside the blocked city-gate (Fig. 15).⁵¹ It had rectangular plan and a staircase (W.421) to the upper floor. An oven (T.413)⁵² with a corbelled vault was built against the eastern side of the building, presumably devoted to extra-familial food production. Building B1 had solid stone foundations; it was in use for a relatively long time span, and, eventually, destroyed by a fire. Ceramic finds from the building include jars and painted jugs and bowls,⁵³ and the so-called stoppers, perhaps to be considered counter units (of a proto-bureaucratic – illiterate – system).

8. EB III ECONOMIC FLOURISHING

The massive fortification works as well as public buildings and finds from various areas in the site testify to the extraordinary flourishing of Batrawy during the Early Bronze III. A preliminary study of material culture also provides interesting insights into the organization of the Batrawy economy.

EB III material horizon shows a strong standardization of ceramic productions both in terms of shapes, fabric and functions, but also a drastic increase in number and variety of pattern-combed and other metallic wares, pointing to an increased income of agricultural and husbandry products (mainly olive oil, goat fat, lentils, beans, and other stuff); also specialized wares (painted and red-burnished or polished wares) become more widespread, indicating a horizontal diffusion of items, which initially had a more limited (and socially symbolic) distribution.

As regards the inner organization of the Batrawy subsistence system, an exemplary case study is that of Pattern-combed Ware storage containers; a few of these pattern-combed storage jars belong to a Metallic Ware production of a high fired quite depurated fabric. The comparison of pattern-combed fragments found at the site with those from the survey in the Upper Wadi az-Zarqa demonstrated that the vast majority

50 Such a battering wall W.165 was constructed with irregular boulders leaning on a rubble filling lying against the northern face of the outer wall W.155 (Nigro [ed.] 2008: 100-102).

51 Nigro 2007: 352-353, Fig. 14; Nigro (ed.) 2008: 151-159.

52 Nigro 2006c: Fig.3; Nigro (ed.) 2008: 158-159, Figs 4.53-4.57

53 Nigro 2007: Fig.15; Nigro (ed.) 2008: Fig. 4.52, Pls XL-XLI.

of Metallic and Pattern-combed jars found in Batrawy came from the countryside, especially from the hilly area west of the Zarqa river, where olive tree was largely cultivated, thus suggesting that these storage vessels contained olive oil and were sent to Batrawy from the surrounding farms (under the central site administration?). Moreover, the large amount of pattern-combed jars, in a figure of almost 30% of Preservation Ware, possibly suggest that olive oil, usually stored and shipped in this kind of containers, was not mainly locally produced but was received from the district to the north and the west.

Moreover, faunal remains, from the one hand, demonstrate an integrated diet, a variety of tamed animals being part of the life of the inhabitants, from the other hand, show a large percentage of Equids,⁵⁴ surely the main mean of transportation at the time, thus confirming the role of the town as caravans station. In fact, the retrieval of foreign imports, such as sea-shells and mother of pearl from both the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, carnelian, obsidian, and copper fragments (from the Arabah/Wadi Feinan)⁵⁵, as well as stone balance weights for metals, shed rays of light on the economic links and exchanges focusing on the site through an extended network of tracks crossing the desert and the steppe (Fig. 16).

9. THE FINAL DESTRUCTION OF BATRAWY

The renewal and growth of fortifications and the erection of Building B1 during Early Bronze IIIB, however, did not prevent Khirbet al-Batrawy from a further and definitive destruction, which occurred around the end of the 24th century BC. The town was set on fire, and the relics of such a dramatic event were clearly visible on structures and in stratigraphy⁵⁶. There is no evidence available for investigating who was the responsible for such a dramatic destruction, even if a natural event apparently has to be ruled out; the attack from a foreign enemy seems a possible explanation, which should also surmise the deportation of the population, since the site was deserted. The khirbet remained, in fact, abandoned and was resettled only after a certain while by sparse EB IV dwellings.

10. A NEW RURAL LANDSCAPE: THE EARLY BRONZE IV VILLAGE ON THE ACROPOLIS

In the last centuries of the 3rd millennium BC the ruins of the EB II-III town were resettled by a rural community, which erected dwellings spread all over the site. The Batrawy evidence points out that this EB IV occupation occurred towards the end of the 3rd millennium, after a brief period of abandonment (Batrawy IVa, Early Bronze IVA, 2300-2200 BC), for a relatively short time span (some decades), illustrating the

54 Alhaique 2008.

55 Wadi Feinan was the main source of copper in Jordan during the Early Bronze Age: Levy 2007: 83-88.

56 Nigro (ed.) 2008: 18, 69, 141.

most recent phase of development of this period (Early Bronze IVB, 2200-2000 BC)⁵⁷. On the summit of the Acropolis (Area A), two separated sectors of this rural village were brought to light (Fig. 17)⁵⁸. Each houses cluster included a couple of rectangular rooms, probably the main domestic units, flanked by stone-lined courtyards, which hosted several annexed structures, food producing and storage installations (the latter usually circular in plan), such as silos, working platforms and other devices.

Another area of intense occupation during Early Bronze IVB was the terrace just inside the collapsed northern EB II-III city-wall⁵⁹, where houses were linked by a series of connected walls on their rear side, along the edge of an embankment made up with the remains of earlier collapsed structures.⁶⁰ A rectangular structure (L.450) was characterized by a stone-paved double installation (Fig. 18), presumably devoted to the processing of semi-liquids (fruits, grape juice/wine),⁶¹ thus showing the reappraisal of structured agricultural activities, albeit still at a house-hold level. A second more substantial house (L.122), excavated in year 2005,⁶² was presumably reinforced to serve as watching tower or somewhat similar also having a secondary defensive purpose. In the central sector of Area B South, two constructive phases were detected. A more recent phase included a wide square house (L.354), with a semi-circular central installation (L.370) devoted to food production and storage (with a bench or a platform, and a bin).⁶³ This house was apparently abandoned, as it is shown by a flint blade found on the working platform (B.374) abutting against the inner side of western wall (W.353). In the underlying layer, sparse remains of an ephemeral initial occupation (huts and related installations) of the village were uncovered, including hearths, cists, and stone platforms.⁶⁴

Another major cluster of houses, again showing the typical elongated rectangular domestic units, was excavated on the easternmost terrace in Area F.⁶⁵ Here houses were again equipped with cists, platforms and several kinds of storage devices.

A further area of the khirbet also reoccupied in the Early Bronze IVB was the South-Western Tower (Area D), where a major structure, perhaps with a somewhat defensive purpose, was erected in the core of the corner fortress of the preceding period. Also this house had platforms (Fig. 19) and other working devices.⁶⁶

The above mentioned structures spread over several spots of the site provided a quite rich set of materials belonging to the last phase of Early Bronze IV, when the

57 Nigro (ed.) 2006: 37-40.

58 Nigro 2006: 237-240, Figs 10-19; 2007:348-349, Fig. 3; Nigro (ed.) 2006: 77-102, Figs 3.15-3.51, plan II; Nigro (ed.) 2008: 28-36, Figs 2.26-2.37.

59 Nigro (ed.) 2008: 164-176.

60 Nigro 2007: 349, Fig. 7; Nigro (ed.) 2008: 102-103, Figs 3.54-3.55.

61 Nigro 2007: 353; Nigro (ed.) 2008: 168-169, Figs 4.73-4.75.

62 Nigro 2006: 242-243, Fig. 21; Nigro (ed.) 2006: 167-174, Figs 4.19-4.30.

63 Nigro 2007: 353, Fig. 12; Nigro (ed.) 2008: 170-174, Figs 4.76-4.80.

64 Nigro 2007: 353, Fig. 13; Nigro (ed.) 2008:164-167.

65 Nigro 2007: 358, Fig. 19; Nigro (ed.) 2008: 294-305, Figs 7.35-7.57.

66 Nigro 2007: 355-356, Fig. 16; Nigro (ed.) 2008: 244, Fig. 5.5.

major site in the area was Jebel er-Reheil.⁶⁷ Flint and stone tools from the dwellings of this phase, as well as ordinary pottery (Fig. 19),⁶⁸ show the reverse to a rural based economy, with scarce specialization and a limited typological variety.

11. CONCLUSIONS

Three seasons (2005-2007) of excavations at Khirbet al-Batrawy confirmed that this site was the major Early Bronze Age centre of the Upper Wadi az-Zarqa, occupied by a fortified town in the Early Bronze II-III (2900-2300 BC) and re-occupied by a rural village in the Early Bronze IVB (2200-2000 BC), with almost no successive superimpositions.⁶⁹ The archaeological investigation is still at its beginning and it is not possible to draw any conclusion. In any case, at this preliminary examination, public architecture, material culture, especially pottery and flint tools, are typical of a flourishing urban centre which established successful relationship with its territory and the surrounding region.

As the regional survey demonstrated,⁷⁰ at the beginning of Early Bronze II the Zarqa district witnessed a synecistic process which led Batrawy to become a major fortified town at the crossroad of Early Bronze Age main tracks of Southern Levant. Territorial control at a crucial crossroad of the trade network, as indicated by several finds, was, thus, a specificity of the Batrawy early urban experience. Nonetheless, further and deeper investigation is needed to clarify the city plan and history, as well as, to evaluate the socio-economic role of the site in the wider horizon of the Southern Levant in a comprehensive historical conception, that is a specific perspective of Rome "La Sapienza" School of Near Eastern Archaeology.

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67 *JADIS* site n. 2417.022; Palumbo 1990: 57-59; Palumbo *et al.* 1996: 393-401.

68 Nigro (ed.) 2006: 103-108.

69 Nigro (ed.) 2006: 37-40.

70 Nigro, Sala, Polcaro 2008: §§ 3-4; Nigro (ed.) 2008: 359-397.

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Fig. 1: General view of the Early Bronze Age site of Khirbet al-Batrawy from north, with the restored EB II-III city-wall and EB II city-gate (2007).

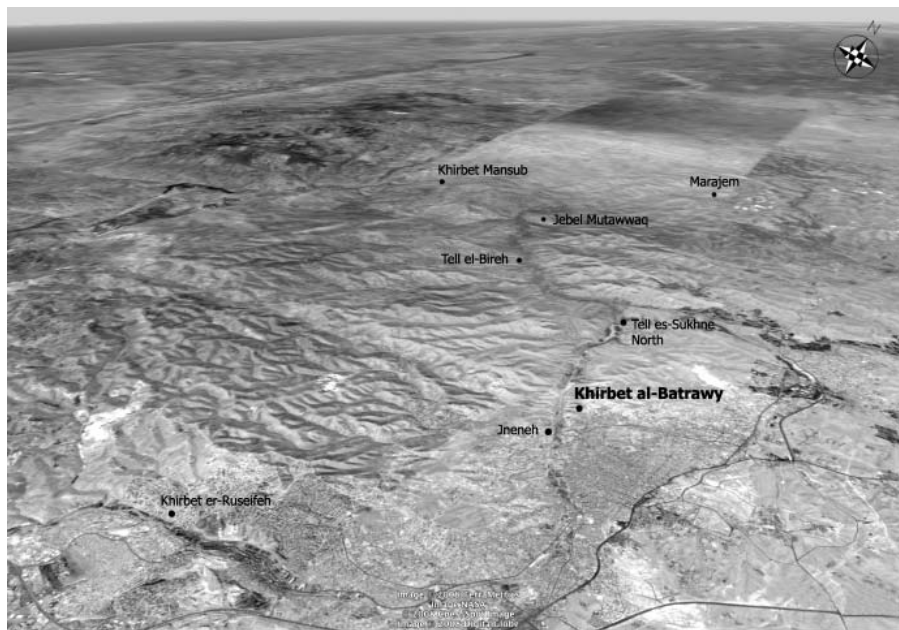




Fig. 3: The site of Khirbet al-Batrawy on the eastern side of the Upper Wadi az-Zarqa Valley, from north-east.

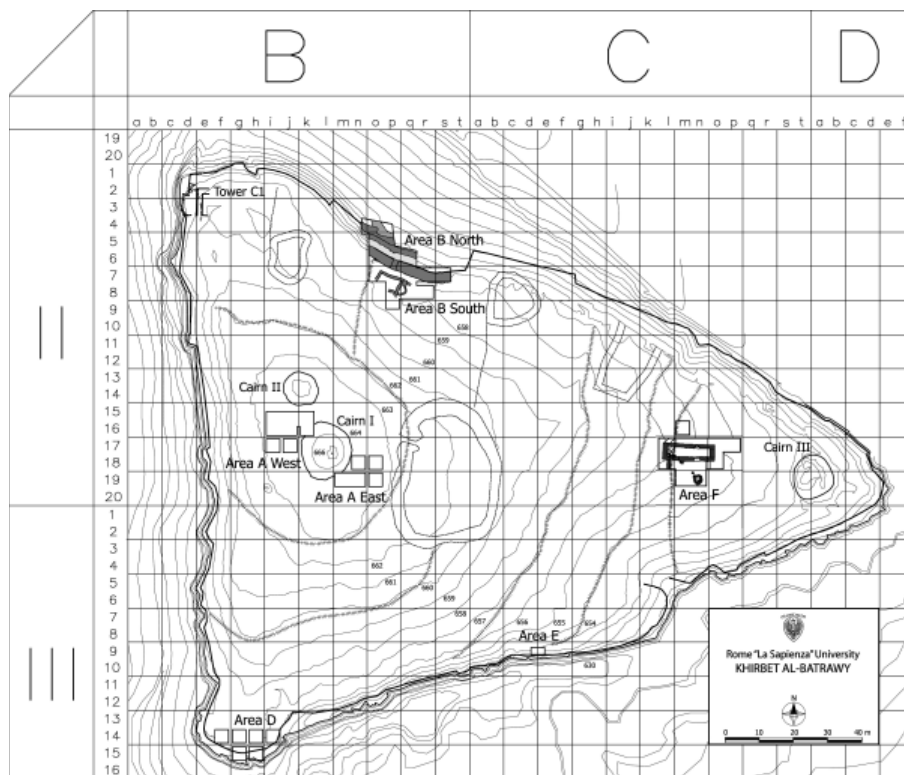


Fig. 4: Map of Khirbet al-Batrawy with areas excavated in seasons 2005-2007.



Fig. 5: The southern gate through the fortification line of the EB II-III city, from east.



Fig. 6: General view of the EB III B triple line of fortifications on the northern side of the Khirbet al-Batrawy, with the restored stretch of the EB II-III main city-wall, and EB III B Building B1 excavated inside it, from east.



Fig. 7: EB II city-gate L.160, from north-east; note the step marking the entrance, the plastered floor over the bedrock inside the passage and the battering boulders at the foot of the city-wall.



Fig. 8: The western jamb of EB II city-gate L.160 from the corridor inside the main city-wall.



Fig. 9: EB II plastered floor L.144 in the corridor in between the main city-wall (W.103) and the outer wall (W.155), from east.

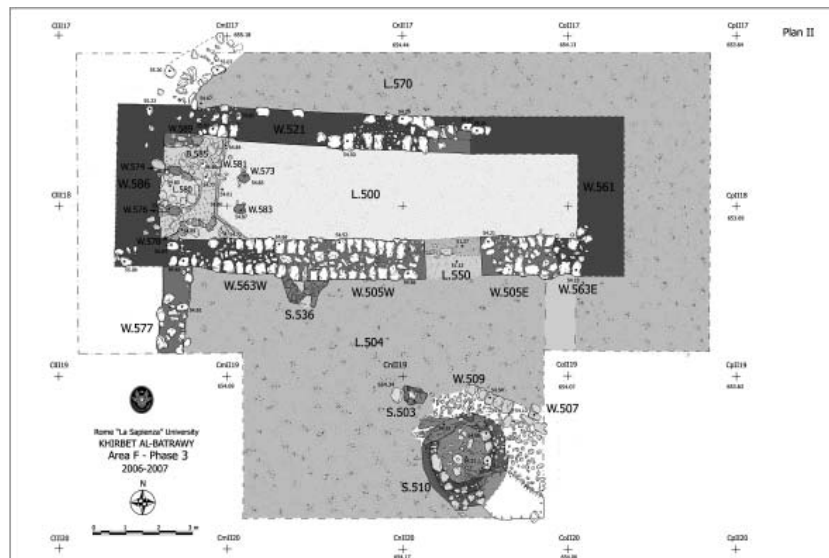


Fig. 10: Plan of the EB III broad-room temple in Area F.



Fig. 11: EB II-III Broad-Room Temple L.500 on the easternmost terrace of Khirbet al-Batrawy, from west; in the foreground, the EBIII slab-paved platform B.585 with its inner niche (L.580) and the couple of pillars facing it.



Fig. 12: Outer wall W.155, with battering face made up of polygonal boulders and inner filling of stones and limestone chops.



Fig. 13: General view of the EB III B triple line of fortifications of Khirbet al-Batrawy in Area B North, from west, with main city-wall W.103 to the right, outer wall W.155 in the middle, and reinforcing scarp-wall W.165 to the left. In the left background, EB III A curvilinear defensive outwork W.185.



Fig. 14: The inner staircase (W.181) which led to the top of the EB III B main city-wall of Khirbet al-Batrawy, from south-east.



Fig. 15: General view of Building B1 and attached semicircular installation T.413, erected inside the blocked city-gate in the Early Bronze III B, from south.



Fig. 16: Early Bronze Age tracks across the ancient Near East, enlightening the crucial position of the site of Khirbet al-Batrawy at the crossroad of the ancient network.

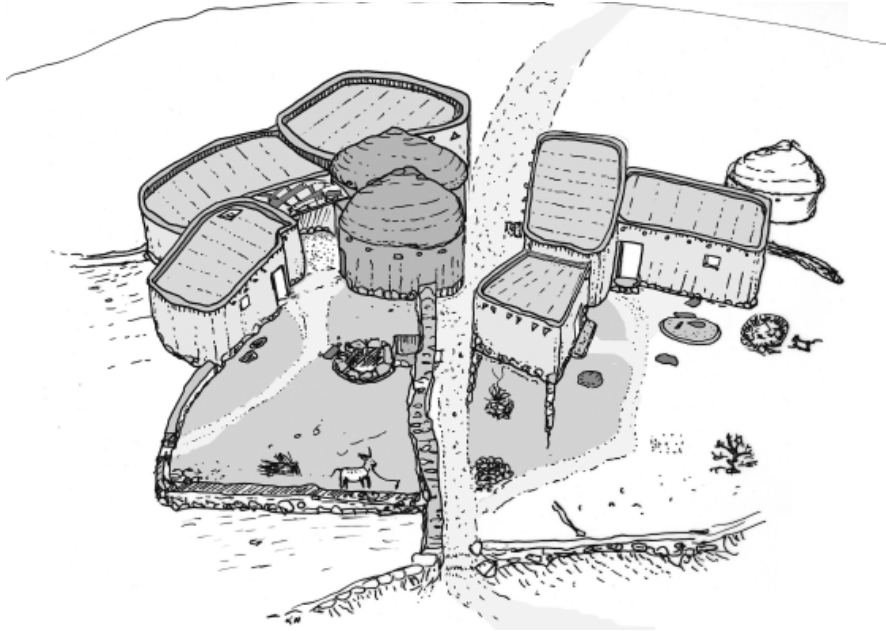


Fig. 17: Reconstruction of Batrawy IV village in Area A East.



Fig. 18: EB IVB stone-paved platform L.450 in Area B South, from west.

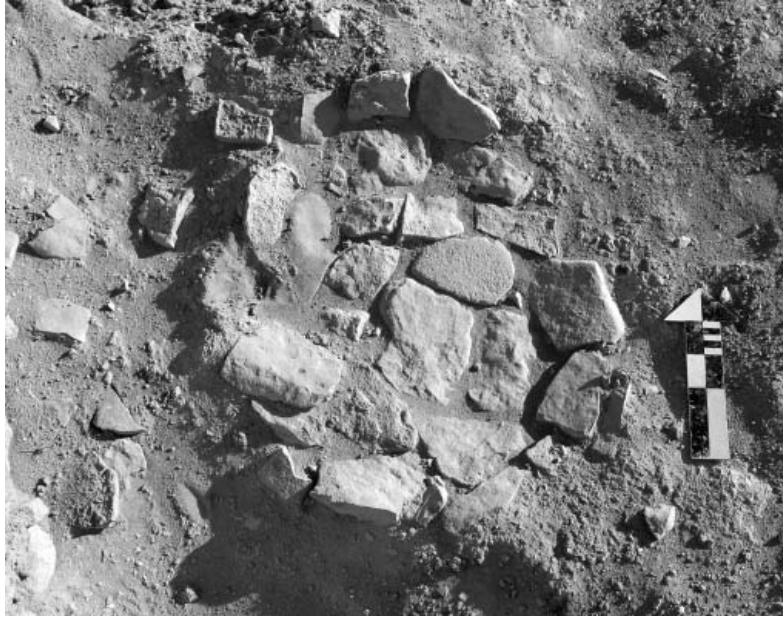


Fig. 19: Round stone-paved platform of the EB IVB village in Area D.



Fig. 20: EB IVB pottery sherds and domestic tools retrieved in the houses excavated in Area B South.