

ARCHAEOLOGY: THE LATE BRONZE IN PALESTINE

Note: The following material is from the latter half of the class period of this date which was a question-and-answer discussion of the Iron Age period and Palestinian archaeology as a whole. Because this was a discussion session, and not straight lecture, the continuity of the material may become a little erratic. Please bear this in mind when reading these pages.

The End of Middle Bronze

The assumption is that Middle Bronze continues down to the 18th Dynasty and therefore is the destruction in Palestine by the Egyptians of an older culture and then the imposition of the Egyptian influence (Late Bronze).

This is not quite right! The destruction that took place in Palestine is the Israelite destruction of the Philistines which led to a new blossoming of Israelite culture. That is, Middle Bronze ended in a period of war which was the Philistine conquest; the close of Middle Bronze was a kind of war-like period, the opening of Late Bronze is the flowering as a result of the Israelite revival.

The story had nothing to do with the Egyptians. Rather, it's the story of the great struggles all over Palestine between the Philistines and the Israelites. And, for that matter, it also includes the struggle in the days of Saul of Saul and the northern Israelites against David and Judah in the south.

Relationship to Egypt

Now we should comment on the invasion of Judah and Jerusalem by Shishak or Thutmose III in 967-966 which was the fifth year of Rehoboam (pages 121-127 of vol. one of the Compendium, 1970 revision). We should expect evidence of this event at Megiddo—the story of Thutmose is that he took Megiddo (page 124, bottom, vol. one). Therefore, at Megiddo we should expect it; in my estimation, we can find it there. In other words, I think archaeologists correctly identify Thutmose's conquest at Megiddo.

Remember that Late Bronze is correctly associated with Thutmose and all of the Ramesses down to Ramesses III. There's no question about that. So Late Bronze is correctly paralleled with Dynasties 18, 19 and 20 — except that they don't have enough time between 19 and 20 (but then Palestine was very minor in population). Thus, whenever they make these associations with Egypt they are probably correct; when they make associations with some other areas they are probably wrong!

You see, they cannot be correct with Nebuchadnezzar because, although they know when to date Nebuchadnezzar, they have Dynasties 18, 19 and 20 wrongly placed. Thus some of the things which they associate with Ramesses II (the Great) ought to be associated with his contemporary, Nebuchadnezzar (whose dates are 610-544 and 604-561 respectively).

Dating the Periods of Late Bronze

Now let's take a closer look at the Late Bronze period. Late Bronze I is normally defined as going to 1400 B.C. by their dating. In reality, this would be the period of the United Monarchy and the early Divided Monarchy in Israel. Late Bronze II A would be the next major period which probably takes us to the end of Israel. And Late Bronze II B would be the 19th Dynasty and would normally take us to the period of Nebuchadnezzar (see Chart 7 of Chapter Four in The Bible and the Ancient Near East).

I had a problem with this for a time. I didn't know whether Late Bronze II B ended with Nebuchadnezzar and the 19th Dynasty or at the 20th Dynasty. But the latest evidence from Southern Palestine is very, very clear that it ends with Ramesses III in the 20th Dynasty; and the rest of Dynasty 20 is Iron I A.

Now let's take a closer look at our story: I concluded, on the basis of the available information, that Late Bronze I is the period of the United Monarchy—that is David, Solomon and on down to the conquest of Thutmose III (966 B.C.). So LB I gets into the very beginning of the Divided Monarchy; that is, Rehoboam and Jeroboam. It ends basically with a war layer. (The death of Solomon occurred in 971.)

Then Late Bronze II A would include the story of the remainder of the Divided Monarchy and takes us through the Assyrian conquest of Israel. The Assyrian conquest, remember, was not just one singular event with the fall of Samaria; rather, it was a period of time during which they took over other areas of the country and maraud through Judah. So let's say it includes the Assyrian Period of domination, roughly down to 700 B.C. I don't know if I will ultimately adopt this as a final date. But that's the time when we have a significant event when Sennacherib again came into the country in 701—I think the decline starts there.

Then Late Bronze II B seems to be for the rest of the period in which there was Nebuchadnezzar's invasion and destruction; and then there was the limited revival; and finally including Ramesses III down to around 350 B.C.

In going through the material, there is admittedly very small population in the middle of Late Bronze II B. Now it has never been studied much, I'll tell you why. The reason is that Early Bronze and Middle Bronze prove to be very interesting. They have all kinds of war layers. Late Bronze proved to be much less interesting. The culture was very similar with very little change; and they have assumed that the Iron Age which follows is related to Palestine and Israel (the period of the Kings), and hence they've spent most of their time trying to unravel that—which they have confused! So really very little has been said about the demarcation line ending Late Bronze II B, for instance.

 Dr. Hoeh re-examined G. Ernest Wright's Chart 7. He then said: I think now that Late Bronze II A may well take us down not to 700, but probably down to the 650's. If we assign, roughly, Late Bronze I—I'm figuring some of this out on the basis of re-examination of the material. Probably Late Bronze I is down to around the 900's, roughly speaking. Late Bronze II A would then be down to around 650 because that's the end of the Assyrian domination and marks the beginning of the rise of Dynasty 19. We could then say that Dynasty 18 is Late Bronze I and II A—the whole period is Dynasty 18. Then Late Bronze II B is Dynasty 19 and, later on, Dynasty 20 at the end of the period.

The beginning of Late Bronze I is difficult to pin-point. It's probably the Philistine domination of the land in the days of Saul. You have more than one characteristic present. Kathleen Kenyon says you pass through a phase of transition from Middle to Late Bronze at Megiddo level IX—there's a transition. Where do you put the phase? Certainly the true Middle Bronze is the end of Judges. The transition is mostly the period of Philistine domination—I would certainly say so, the transition at Megiddo IX—and Late Bronze would be the rest of the story. What has happened is that they have arbitrarily said, "Well, we'll go from Middle to Late Bronze"—but when you begin to excavate you find this transition, so then where do you put the transition layer? This is like the close of Late Bronze into the Iron Age: There is a transition—logically a transition. So it is hard to assign dates to the layers with such a situation.