



Fig. 4.33. Decorated bone handles from Jericho and Ai

whether all or most of the objects represent contacts of a different sort—the exchange of gifts, personal property of foreigners in Palestine, or the like. If actual trade relations did exist, we do not know what it was that Palestine exported. If it was agricultural produce, it was not of the sort shipped in pottery containers, as vessels of Palestinian origin have not been found in the north; we must therefore assume it was invisible exports, such as textiles or food products shipped in sacks or skins.

CHRONOLOGY

The date of the beginning of the Early Bronze Age II is closely linked to that of Narmer, the first king of the First Dynasty. Abydos ware, characteristic of the Early Bronze Age II, appears in Egyptian tombs that date, at the earliest, to the reign of Djer, the third king of the First Dynasty. The year 3000 has here been taken as the approximate date of Narmer's accession; Djer and the appearance of Abydos ware in Egypt must therefore be dated about 2950-2900 B.C.E. The importance of Arad for the chronology of the Early Bronze Age I-II must here be reaffirmed: the vessel bearing the incised serekh of Narmer appears in stratum IV, dated on ceramic grounds to Early Bronze Age I; Abydos ware appears in stratum III at Arad. The table below sums up this Palestine-Egypt synchronism.

The disruption of contacts between Palestine and Egypt during the Early Bronze Age II makes the chronology of the end of this period and of the Early Bronze Age III difficult to establish. At this stage the Egyptian synchronisms are still the most reliable data points in Early Bronze Age chronology. Many Egyptian objects bearing names of Old Kingdom rulers of the Fourth and Fifth Dynasties have been found at Byblos (no Third Dynasty objects appear there, however); unfortunately, most of these were not found in context, nor has a comparative study of the ceramic assemblages of Byblos and Palestine yet been performed. Despite these difficulties, there are sufficient grounds to ascribe stratum III at Byblos to the Early Bronze Age II, and strata IV-V (and perhaps part of stratum VI) to the Early Bronze Age III. This synchronism is of the greatest importance, as there is much in common between this rich site and the assemblages of Palestine.

Albright proposed a three-part division of the Early Bronze Age III based on the presence of Beth Yerah ware: a phase preceding its introduction, a phase in which this ware flourishes, and a post Beth Yerah ware phase. More recent research suggests that the phase preceding the appearance of Beth Yerah ware cannot be substantiated, whereas the phase following the disappearance of this ware should probably not be included in Early Bronze Age III.

The date of the beginning of

	Palestine	Egypt
<i>Early Bronze Age I</i>	Arad IV; Narmer <i>serekh</i> No Abydos ware.	Narmer founds Dynasty I No Abydos ware.
<i>Early Bronze Age II</i>	Arad III; Abydos ware first appears.	Reign of Djer; Abydos ware first appears

Early Bronze Age III (and the end of Early Bronze Age II) is thus dependent on the dating of the appearance of Beth Yerah ware. As this ware has not yet appeared in a context dated by Egyptian finds, its range has been difficult to determine. A date around 2700 B.C.E. for the end of Early Bronze Age II and the beginning of Early Bronze Age III is widely accepted. Four carbon-14 dates from Early Bronze Age II destruction layers at Ai have provided an average date of 2700 B.C.E. An object bearing the name of the last king of the Second Dynasty was found at Byblos in an early Early Bronze Age III context (the object should be attributed to late stratum III or early stratum IV at that site). The date of this king has been set at about 2700–2680 B.C.E. Finally, the Beth Yerah ware family is related to population movements originating in the Armenia and Caucasus regions. Carbon-14 analyses from these regions indicate that this type of pottery flourished in southwest Russia about 2800 B.C.E. A date one hundred years later is thus plausible for the appearance of this style in Syria-Palestine.

The dating of the end of the Early Bronze Age III is also quite difficult. Most of the sites excavated indicate that the period was a long one, revealing several phases of building and destruction, for example, the six phases at Jericho, subdivided into two main stages. A subdivision into two phases is indicated at other sites such as Megiddo, Beth Shean, Beth Yerah, Ai, or Tell el-Hesi. It has therefore been suggested that the period be split into the Early Bronze Age IIIA and IIIB, allotting each phase a similar span of about 200 years. Where Beth Yerah ware appears (at Beth Yerah itself, Beth Shean, and Ai), it is found in both phases. A split in the period has also been observed

in sites of Syria and the Lebanon, for example, in the Amuq and at Byblos. If the beginning of Early Bronze Age III has been fixed around 2700–2650 B.C.E., the two divisions may be dated thus: Early Bronze Age IIIA, 2700–2650–2550 (Third and Fourth Dynasties) Early Bronze Age IIIB, 2550–2350 (late Fourth and Fifth Dynasties).

The Early Bronze Age IV: The Decline of Urban Culture

This phase is the most problematic of the Early Bronze Age phases. A phenomenon so central in Palestinian history as that of the formation of an urban society, with all its consequences for the material and spiritual culture of the country, dissolves before our very eyes. Some have suggested that this phase be excluded from the framework of the Early Bronze Age; others prefer to see it only as the first of three subphases labeled Early Bronze Age IVA, IVB, and IVC, a period of transition from the urban culture of the Early Bronze Age to that of Middle Bronze Age Palestine. Those who have pointed out the continuity between this phase and the preceding phases are no doubt correct: all three subphases share in the general process of the decline of urban culture and the rise of nomadic and seminomadic societies subsisting mainly in the marginal zones of Palestine; they also share components of material culture, such as the pottery assemblage and metallurgy. Nevertheless, it seems preferable to consider only the first of the subphases as part of the Early Bronze Age (designated Early Bronze Age IV) and to assign the other two subphases to the period termed Intermediate Bronze or Middle Bronze I. This is not merely a semantic distinction, for differences in terminology (for example, "Early Bronze

Age I" versus "Late Chalcolithic") reflect differences in the conception and understanding of a period. It is true that the Early Bronze Age IV is related to the following period, but that is true of every period in the history of the land. Some periods are more firmly interrelated, some less; but in no case is there an absolute break between periods.

The Early Bronze Age IV should be seen as the phase during which the process of the desertion of the towns reached its peak; some of the towns had been abandoned during the Early Bronze Age IIIB, and others were abandoned during this phase. By the end of the Early Bronze Age IV, there were no urban settlements left in Palestine. What were the causes of the decline of urban culture? Which sites were abandoned in the Early Bronze Age IIIB, and which survived into the Early Bronze IV? Which were destroyed, and which merely deserted? Too little data are available regarding these questions, and their answers remain largely in the realm of hypothesis.

Three alternate explanations of the events in Palestine during this period have been offered. Some scholars have proposed that a wave of northern invaders (part of the Amorite migration to this region) or a campaign of Egyptian Fifth Dynasty kings was responsible for the destruction of the towns. The supporters of this theory tend to emphasize the wave of destruction that overtook some of the sites, while the undestroyed sites are understood to have been abandoned in terror. Others prefer an ecological explanation, pointing to data indicating a decrease in rainfall and a lowering of the water table, which would have doomed many settlements. The third approach sees the city-state system destroyed by attrition, a result of the constant warfare between the city-states evidenced in the re-

peated destructions and reconstructions visible in the Early Bronze Age II–III layers. This process would have been aggravated by the severing of trade relations with Egypt and the loss of the chief market for Palestinian produce at the end of the Early Bronze Age II. At present, the available data do not decisively support any one of the three approaches, and it seems that an approach integrating the three, along with additional reasons that are not yet manifest, should be preferred in explaining the demise of urban culture.

In other lands throughout the Near East, this is a period of increasing unrest, which culminates in the collapse of existing political structures. In Egypt, the period parallels the sixth and last dynasty of the Old Kingdom. Mesopotamia is in the last days of the dynasty of Akkad. Egyptian and Mesopotamian texts reveal the unrest and the population movements that threatened the borders. Destruction and desertion are visited on many sites in Asia Minor, perhaps at the hands of new peoples, the forefathers of the Hittites, who penetrated the region. The great towns of Syria, however, were seemingly unaffected by the turmoil overtaking the Near East; Byblos (stratum VI?) prospered, as did Ebla, Hama, and Qatna, among others. The reason for the conspicuous difference between Palestine and Syria is not known and may be added to the long list of unresolved questions concerning the Early Bronze Age IV.

Some of the towns in Palestine survive through the Early Bronze Age IV and are destroyed or deserted only at its end. Among them may be included Beth Shean, Megiddo, Beth Yerah, and perhaps Ai, Yarmuth, and Jericho, though it seems that the northern towns held out longer than those of the south. The pottery assemblage of this period

clearly preserves the ceramic traditions of the Early Bronze Age, but some marked changes occur: Beth Yerah ware disappears entirely, Abydos ware continues to be produced but in a limited range of types and in degenerate forms, and the same holds true for metallic ware. Among the metallic ware, one type of jar characterized by an applied rope decoration around the base of the neck occurs in Early Bronze Age IV levels. Stone imitations of such vessels have been found in Egypt in Sixth Dynasty contexts. There is a marked decline of slipped and painted decoration, and a number of forms dominant in the following periods first appear. The ceramic picture thus reflects the historical character of the period; it is a transitional period, with the old traditions still in force—though often in a weak and degenerate form—and signs of a new era beginning to appear.

The Early Bronze Age IV lasted 100–150 years, corresponding to the Sixth Dynasty, the last of the dynasties of the Old Kingdom in Egypt. Despite signs of the impending crisis, Egypt was still powerful enough to maintain relations with Syria; the many Egyptian vessels bearing names of kings of this dynasty found at Byblos and Ebla are ample evidence of Egypt's influence.

More evidence of Egyptian activity in Asia is provided by texts and artworks. Unfortunately, not one contains a clear and unequivocal reference to an identifiable event or site. A place named Wenet, which is usually identified with a fortress in southern Canaan (perhaps Rafiah), is mentioned in documents of the Sixth Dynasty, as are battles with Mentiju, Amu, and Shasu, identified as peoples or tribes living in the Sinai and southern Canaan. Two well-known depictions of battles between Egyptians and Asians adorn tombs of the late Fifth Dynasty in

Deshashe and Saqqara. The best known and most widely debated of the documents is in the tomb of a man by the name of Weni (or Uni), who was a general in the army of King Pepi I (2330–2280 B.C.E.) of the Sixth Dynasty. The inscription describes a series of military campaigns (or plundering raids) "to carry off the property of the Asiatics." Six such campaigns were undertaken by Weni, five by land and one by sea. The Asiatics attacked in these campaigns are called Sand-dwellers, and the sea raid brought the Egyptian army to a place called "the nose of Gazelle's head," or Antelope's Nose. Opinion is divided as to the identity of the Sand-dwellers and Gazelle's head, though there seems to be no doubt that the text refers to places north of the Sinai, as it speaks of the destruction of fortified towns, of fig trees, and of vines, none of which occur in Sinai. On the other hand, it is not likely that such raids were conducted against parts of Syria or the Lebanon, as the archaeological record attests to good relations between Egypt and Syria-Lebanon at this time. It thus appears that the southern Palestine coast was the objective of Weni's campaigns.

As the inscription of Weni is the oldest document mentioning place-names and events related, most probably, to Palestine, it seems proper to bring a full translation of the passage describing the campaigns themselves:

This army returned in safety,
It had ravaged the Sand-dwellers'
land.

This army returned in safety,
It had flattened the Sand-dwell-
ers' land.

This army returned in safety,
It had sacked its strongholds.

This army returned in safety,
It had cut down its figs, its vines.

This army returned in safety,
It had thrown fire in all its
[mansions].

This army returned in safety,
It had slain its troops by many
ten-thousands.

This army returned in safety,
[It had carried] off many [troops]
as captives.

His majesty praised me for it
beyond anything. His majesty
sent me to lead this army five
times, to attack the land of the
Sand-dwellers as often as they
rebelled with these troops. I
acted so that his majesty
praised me [for it beyond
anything].

Told there were marauders (?)
among these foreigners at the
nose of Gazelle's head, I
crossed in ships with these
troops. I made a landing in the
back of the height of the
mountain range, to the north
of the land of the Sand-dwell-
ers, while half of this army
was on the road. I came and
caught them all and slew every
marauder among them.

(Lichtheim, Vol. I: 20)

These booty raids of Weni's, and perhaps other campaigns unknown to us, may have been made possible by and may have taken advantage of the weakness of Palestine in Early Bronze Age IV. By the same token, such campaigns may be seen as among the causes that weakened the city-state system and accelerated its decline and utter collapse around the end of the twenty-third century B.C.E.