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VICINO & MEDIO ORIENTE

XV - 2011

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F. Pinnock, M. Ramazzotti, A. Santoro, L. Sist

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SANCTUARIES, TEMPLES AND CULT PLACES IN EARLY BRONZE I SOUTHERN LEVANT

Maura Sala - Roma

Recent investigations, publications of past excavations, and current researches have progressively shed light on Early Bronze I period (3400-3000 BC) in Southern Levant: on its chronology, settlement pattern, socio-economic developments, and trade relationships. Among the prominent features of this period is the appearance and progressive enucleation within the settlements, or in the countryside, of cult places, shrines and sacred precincts, from the earliest open sanctuaries and shrines inside the EB IA (3400-3200 BC) rural villages, towards the erection of the first temple compounds during the EB IB (3200-3000 BC). It, thus, appears noticeable the connection between the outlining of the earliest public cult places and the progressive codification of a local monumental sacred architecture in the Southern Levantine centres, from the one hand, and, from the other hand, the socio-political and economic developments which took place in the late 4th millennium BC and which eventually led to the emergence of the earliest urban societies at the beginning of the 3rd millennium BC.

1. INTRODUCTION

Early Bronze I (3400-3000 BC) is a crucial and formative period in the history of Southern Levant: after the collapse of the Chalcolithic societies, new communities of shepherds and farmers settled in the region and engendered new social entities, based on the practise of Mediterranean agriculture, and expression of a new culture, mostly evident in the diffusion of innovative regional pottery traditions.¹ A sedentary agricultural society definitively develops, and promotes decisive cultural achievements, as the capability in gathering and controlling specific raw materials (fundamental in the following proto-urban and urban economic systems of exchange), and quality improvements, above all in the metalwork and craftsmanship productions. In spite of sometimes puzzling terminological correlations,² the period is nowadays commonly subdivided in two sub-phases:³ Early Bronze IA (3400-3200 BC) and Early Bronze IB (3200-3000 BC).

The Early Bronze IA (3400-3200 BC), most recently investigated in many sites of costal Southern Palestine⁴ and Transjordan, which have added information to the known data from key-sites in Northern Palestine and along the Jordan Valley,⁵ and from the contemporary necropolises, is a very well characterized period, both in terms of its

¹ Lapp 1968, 26-39; 1970, 102-109; Kenyon 1979, 66-83; Mazar 1992, 92-105.

² Mainly depending on the marked regionalism of pottery traditions (for a summary, Nigro 2005, 2-3, tab. 1).

³ Esse 1984; de Miroschedji 1989, 63-64; Stager 1992; Yekutieli 2000.

⁴ Yekutieli 2000; 2001; Gal 2004.

⁵ Braun 1989b; 1997; Eisenberg 1989; Eisenberg - Gopher - Greenberg 2001, 39-43, 117-131.

regionally diversified pottery traditions and its distinctive curvilinear domestic architecture.⁶

But even more distinctive is the following Early Bronze IB (3200-3000 BC), when some Southern Levantine centres definitively overcome the limits of a simply husbandry and agricultural based village economy, include the control and exchange on long-distance routes of precious stuff in their economic system, and set the basis for the successive rise of the earliest urban culture with a developing ranked society, economic specialization and cultural growth.⁷ This process reaches its apex at the end of the 4th millennium BC with the erection of the earliest fortified settlements,⁸ where city-walls attest the coordination of public works by an emerging ruling institution. During this period, the earliest public buildings, of both religious and administrative functions, also appear,⁹ and the curvilinear domestic architecture, mainly based on an agglutinant juxtaposition of houses, is progressively substituted by settlements with a certain degree of planning, made of rectangular houses and large apsidal buildings (probably devoted to some kind of community or at least extra-familiar functions), often displaced along streets which cross throughout the settlements and organize the space with a neater partition into separated compounds.¹⁰ Villages undergo a noticeable regularization and gradually start to be transformed into towns, under the control of central authorities capable of organizing centralized storage systems and of implementing large-scale building operations. The

⁶ For an overview on the curvilinear architecture of EB I Southern Levant see Dunand 1973a, 217-219; Saidah 1979; Braun 1989a; Nigro 2005, 23-32; 2007a, 14-15, 21-22; 2008, 646-648; up to recent excavations of some EB IA villages in the Leja region, in Southern Syria, as the site of Sharaya (Nicolle - al-Maqdissi 2006).

⁷ Esse 1989, 82-85. The beginning of processes of goods centralization and exchange, pointing at proto-administrative practices and demonstrating the transition to an incipient urban stage, is meaningfully illustrated by the introduction of cylinder sealing procedures (Mazzoni 1992, 178-196; Greenberg 2001, 192-195; Joffe 2001, 361-364). The increasing social complexity and economic specialization at EB IB centres is also testified by the retrieval of status-symbols, such as limestone and calcite mace-heads (Nigro 2008, 652), and by the typological diversification of pottery assemblages, with the diffusion of some fine specialized production, as the Line-Painted Ware (Sala 2005b, 174-175; Charloux 2006; Nigro 2008, 653), or the so-called "Proto-Metallic Ware" (Paz - Shoval - Zlatkin 2009).

⁸ Paz 2002. Namely, Tel Shalem (Eisenberg 1996) and Tell es-Sakkan (de Miroschedji *et al.* 2001, 80-84). Evidence from other centres (as Pella/Tabaqat Fahl [Bourke 1997, 99-100], Tell es-Sa'idiyeh [Tubb - Dorrell - Cobbing 1997, 65-66] or Ras el-'Ain [Kochavi - Beck - Yadin eds. 2000, 61-66]) is more doubtful. At Jericho/Tell es-Sultan, the wall of Garstang's levels VII-VI, excavated in the north-eastern corner of the northern plateau, and then re-excavated in its southern prosecution by K.M. Kenyon in Square EIII (wall ZZE - ZZT, then ZA; Kenyon 1981, 315-322, pls. 313-314), and wall EO excavated in Squares FI-DI on the western slope of the tell (Kenyon 1981, 96, pls. 77-78, 229a), were actually terrace-walls of the EB I village (Holland 1987, 22; Nigro 2005, 23-25, 35-36, 111-112, 120-122; 2008, 647-648; *contra* Parr 2000, who interpreted Kenyon's wall ZA as the earliest city-wall of the proto-urban settlement).

⁹ Besides sacred buildings (temples and cult precincts, which it will be dealt with in the following text; § 3.), the earliest public buildings of administrative function were erected in some major Palestinian towns during the EB IB: Building 7102 at Tell el-'Areini (Brandl 1989, 365-368; Nigro 1994, 7-11; 2007b), and Building MA at Beth Shean (Mazar - Rotem 2009). Both of them are larger than any other contemporary residential structure, show a high degree of planning, with large pillared halls, and yielded many storage vessels and remains of flint tools workshops (three copper axes were also found in the building at Beth Shean, hinting at the high status of the holder), which indicate their specific socio-economic function.

¹⁰ Ben-Tor 1992, 62-66; Nigro 2005, 35-41, 115-119, 122-126, plan III; 2008, 650-652.

cultural growth and social stratification in EB IB, with the emergence of social groups and group-leaders, thus, fairly justify the definition of incipient urban phase or proto-urban phase for this period.

The presence of cult places, namely open cult places and shrines inside the settlements, is attested to since the earliest EB IA phase. Open sacred areas, possibly related to funerary rituals, were excavated at Gezer/Tell el-Jazari and Jerusalem, while other EB IA cult places interpreted as open sanctuaries were identified at Jebel al-Muʿawwaq and al- $\frac{1}{2}$ awettan in Transjordan, and possibly at Megiddo/Tell el-Mutesellim and er-Rujm, before the erection of the earliest temples in EB IB. Moreover, an important intervention towards the end of EB IA was represented by the outlining of the earliest religious compounds inside some major settlements: in an advanced phase of the EB IA, around 3300 BC, in fact, three shrines were erected at Byblos, Tell es-Sultan/Jericho and Jebel Muʿawwaq.

Nonetheless, after the end of the Chalcolithic-Ghassulian culture, a local tradition of official sacred architecture developed in Southern Levant only since the following EB IB, when monumental temple compounds, implemented by emerging centralized powers, were erected. Public temples start to be built according to a shared and codified local architectural tradition, as attested to by the temple compounds at Megiddo/Tell el-Mutesellim (§ 3.3) and er-Rujm (§ 3.4). These buildings inherit the architectural tradition of the *Breitraum* temple with direct entrance (first codified in the Late Chalcolithic sacred precincts of En-Gedi¹¹ and Tuleilat el-Ghassul¹²), which becomes distinctive of the EBA religious architecture of Palestine, and perhaps more in general of Southern Levant, since the EB IB onwards.¹³

2. EARLY BRONZE IA

2.1. *The Enceinte Sacrée at Byblos*

The earliest EBA shrine at Byblos dates back to the end of the 4th millennium BC, to the period called “Énéolithique Récent” in the local periodization of the site, roughly corresponding to the EB IA of Southern Levant.¹⁴ The shrine was erected just to the south-west of the natural spring,¹⁵ which gushed out from the depression at the centre of the ancient site:¹⁶ it is the so-called *Enceinte Sacrée*.

¹¹ Ussishkin 2007; Sala 2005c, 274-282; Sala 2008a, 8-19, pl. 1.

¹² Seaton 2000; Sala 2005c, 283-290; Sala 2008a, 19-30, pl. 2.

¹³ Kempinski 1992; de Miroshedji 1993; Sala 2005c, 269-272, 290-292; Sala 2008a, 3-4, 37, 291-296.

¹⁴ Dunand 1982, 197. A first assessment on this topic was offered by A. Ben-Tor (Ben-Tor 1989). The periodization of Byblos proposed by its excavator (Dunand 1950), in fact, used a terminology different from the ones of contemporary sites of both Syria and Palestine. After the “Installation Néolithique” (*Installation I*), Dunand singled out the so-called “Énéolithique Ancien” (*Installation II*), representing a local Chalcolithic horizon, and the “Énéolithique Récent”, nearly corresponding to Palestinian EB IA (3400-3200 BC). The following stage, which marks the passage to the proto-urban phase, is that of *Installation III*, called “Proto-Urbain” by Dunand and roughly corresponding to Palestinian EB IB (3200-3000 BC). For a chronological reassessment see Nigro 2007a, tab. 1; for a reassessment of the *Néolithique* and *Énéolithique* Periods at Byblos in the Southern Levantine context see also Garfinkel 2004.

¹⁵ During the Early Bronze Age, the spring was gradually regularized and built-up as a sacred well (Dunand 1973a, 235; 1982, 195; Saghieh 1983, 1-3; Margueron 1994, 18-19) and became the core of the religious life

The *Enceinte Sacrée*, delimited by a solid *temenos* (fig. 1), was built aside the spring towards the end of the *Énéolithique Récent* (around 3300 BC), when a sector of the previous *énéolithique* village was expressly enucleated to host the shrine,¹⁷ and a stone-paved street was realized across the settlement flanking the *temenos*, while domestic compounds continued to be in use to the west, south and south-east of it. The erection of the *Enceinte Sacrée* with its *temenos* and the flanking stone-paved street was, thus, a major transformation within a general reassessment of the layout and spatial organization of the EB I settlement.

The sacred precinct¹⁸ was encircled by a curvilinear stone enclosure (fig. 2), around 33.50 m wide on its NW-SE side, and probably including the spring itself (which was the centre of the cult) in its north-eastern part.¹⁹ The temple built inside it, though very badly preserved (just the southern part of it was brought to light), might be feasibly reconstructed as a rectangular building of *Breitraum* type, 6.60 m wide, with a central access opened to the east, towards the spring (as it will be in its following 3rd millennium BC reconstructions). The building was apparently preceded by a stone-paved courtyard:²⁰ a strict parallel for this feature is offered by a stone-paved courtyard in the EB I sacred precinct of Megiddo/Tell el-Mutesellim (stratum XIX/level J-2; § 2.6.).

The *temenos* wall (1.60-2.00 m wide), with a possible entrance (2.80 m wide) in the south-western stretch, was characterized by squared inner buttresses, projecting 0.80-1.20 m, and placed at quite regular intervals (from 1.40 to 2.10 m), which represent a remarkable feature of the cult compound.²¹ Similar buttresses lined the inner face of Byblos city-wall in the 3rd millennium BC.²² A sort of bench or buttress (0.65-1.00 m wide, and around 0.40 m

of Byblos, around which most of the Gublite religious compounds were arranged in the course of the 3rd millennium BC: the Baalat Gebal Temple (Dunand 1937-1939, 290-308; 1982, 195; Jidejian 1968, 17-20; Saghih 1983, 40-51, 55-58, fig. 13, pls. X-XVII); the so-called "L-shaped" Temple (Dunand 1950-1958, 895-898, fig. 1007, pls. XXXVII-XLII; Saghih 1983, 14-25, fig. 7a, pls. II, III:1; Sala 2008b; later on, the Obelisk Temple); the *Chapelle Orientale* (Dunand 1950-1958, 898-899, pls. XLIV-XLV; Saghih 1983, 69-71, 74-75, fig. 19, pls. XXII-XXIV); and the *Champ des Offrandes* (Dunand 1950-1958, 271-272, 393-399, 481, 899; 1982, 197; Saghih 1983, 30-32, fig. 9, pl. VIII). All these cult places date back to the 3rd millennium BC, to the time of the first urban settlement at Byblos.

¹⁶ Dunand 1973b, 18. On the general topography of Byblos see Dunand 1973a, 1-7; Margueron 1994, 13-14.

¹⁷ Dunand 1982, 195.

¹⁸ Dunand 1973a, 235-241, fig. 143, pl. J:c.

¹⁹ Dunand 1950, 590; 1973a, 240.

²⁰ Remains of a curvilinear stone installation in the northern sector of the *temenos* were reconstructed by Dunand as a possible rounded platform, since circular open-air stone platforms are a distinctive cult device of EBA Palestinian sanctuaries, as attested to by later EB II-III platforms in the sacred areas of Tell el-Mutesellim (Loud 1948, 70, 73-76, figs. 164-165; Sala 2008a, 201, 214-218), Khirbet ez-Zeraqon (Ibrahim - Douglas 2004, 371-373, fig. 4; Sala 2008a, 243-245), and Khirbet al-Batrawy (Nigro [ed.] 2008, 283).

²¹ Dunand 1973a, 235, 238, pls. CXXVII:1, CXXVIII:1, 2.

²² It is thus also possible that the buttressed *temenos* was actually the enclosure of a following EBA reconstruction of the *Enceinte Sacrée*. The same architectural feature is attested also in the perimeter wall of the EB IIIB Palace B at Khirbet Yarmouk (de Miroschedji 1999, 9-12; 2003: 159*, figs. 3-5, 8:2), suggesting the existence of a somewhat shared architectural tradition in the Southern Levant, where squared inner buttresses seem to have been used to dress the open spaces of public buildings.

high) lined the outer face of the *temenos* wall; an architectural element that is attested to also in the Late Chalcolithic sacred precinct of En-Gedi.²³

Possible comparisons for the earliest shrine of the *Enceinte Sacrée* are represented, in fact, by the Late Chalcolithic sacred precincts of En-Gedi and Tuleilat el-Ghassul: both of these religious compounds were surrounded by a *temenos* wall and included a temple of *Breitraum* type with a central entrance across one of the long sides, exhibiting the earliest codification of a temple-type (the *Breitraum* temple with direct entrance), which will be adopted by the EBA religious architecture of Southern Levant. The EB I *Enceinte Sacrée* at Byblos is, thus, especially significant, if one takes into consideration that Byblos in particular, and the Levantine coast in general, show a high degree of cultural continuity between Chalcolithic and EB I: EB I at Byblos seems, in fact, to arise straight from the preceding Chalcolithic cultural stage.²⁴ More remarkable changes took place at Byblos in the following proto-urban stage (that is in EB IB), at the very end of the 4th millennium BC, when also the compound of the *Enceinte Sacrée* was refurbished (§ 3.1.).

2.2. The so-called “Babylonian Shrine”/Shrine 420 at Tell es-Sultan/ancient Jericho

In an advanced phase of EB IA (around 3300 BC; Garstang’s level VII; period Sultan IIIa1),²⁵ an area for a shrine was enucleated on the northernmost terrace of the rural village of Tell es-Sultan/ancient Jericho on the northern plateau,²⁶ within a general reorganization of the layout and inner organization of the settlement, among which the addition of a new north-west/south-east “demarcation-wall” terracing the northern slope. The shrine was, thus, erected within the northern dwelling quarter, but in an area deliberately separated from the contemporary houses to the south by the new north-west/south-east demarcation-wall, and according to a quite different plan from that of the surrounding ordinary dwellings.²⁷

This building, called by J. Garstang “Babylonian Shrine”,²⁸ that is Shrine 420, consisted of a small roughly rectangular chamber (6.50 m long × 3 m wide), delimited by thick walls, with a bent-axis entrance on its long north side (fig. 3). Continuous benches were lined along the walls inside the room, while the western sector was occupied by a large raised plastered dais 1.60 m wide with some circular depressions (“cup-marks”; fig. 4). Dais, walls, benches, floor and entrance were all carefully plastered. A niche, not noticed by Garstang, was opened just in front of the cup-marks in the dais of the shrine. It seems, thus, reasonable that at least some of the cult furnishings,²⁹ found in the same level (Garstang’s level VII) and associated by Garstang to the shrine, were originally placed on

²³ Ussishkin 2007, 34.

²⁴ Ben-Tor 1989, 50.

²⁵ According to the periodization proposed by the recent Italian-Palestinian Expedition to Tell es-Sultan (Marchetti - Nigro [eds.] 1998, 13-14).

²⁶ For a detailed description of the village of this phase see Nigro 2005, 23-34, 111-115, plan II.

²⁷ Nigro 2005, 33-34, plan II.

²⁸ The bent-axis access of the building recalled, in fact, the Proto-dynastic temples of Mesopotamia. Garstang *et al.* 1936, 73-74, pl. XLIa; Garstang - Garstang 1948, 78-79, fig. 8; Sala 2005a; 2008a, 71-79, pl. 5.

²⁹ Garstang *et al.* 1936, 73-74, pl. XLIb.

the benches and into the niche of the shrine; namely: a stone smoothed object/betyl of oval section (0.68 m high and 0.16 m wide) from *locus* 451 (fig. 5:a), tentatively interpreted by Garstang as a *massebah*;³⁰ a small libation altar (fig. 5:b), and two limestone bases (fig. 5:c, d) from *locus* 421, and two other betyls (fig. 5:e, f) from *loci* 451 and 393.

Shrine 420 well represents a cult structure for both its architectural features (plan, installations and fine plastered refining of the inside), the kind of associated finds, and its distinguished location on a separated terrace. Moreover, the prolongation of the lateral walls into the northern section of the trench leaves open the possibility that the shrine was preceded by a fenced courtyard; but this sector was not investigated. Nonetheless, the building was inserted within a residential quarter, and also its small dimensions, as well as its plan, which differs from the official tradition of EBA Palestinian sacred architecture (namely that of the *Breitraum* temple with direct entrance), allow to identify it more properly as a shrine or chapel of the northern dwelling quarter of Sultan IIIa1 village.

2.3. The “Temple of the Serpents” at *Jebel Mu'awwaq*

The village of *Jebel Mu'awwaq* is one of the largest EB I sites of all Southern Levant,³¹ located on a terrace 500 m high over the underlying valley, and probably representing also the major religious centre, around which the EB I rural villages along the banks of the Zarqa River were grouped,³² as the presence of a huge dolmens field³³ and a sanctuary testify to. A sector inside the village was, in fact, set aside for a religious compound.

The EB IA sanctuary of *Jebel Mu'awwaq* is located in the western sector of the village, next to the boundary wall which encircled the settlement,³⁴ and consisted of an articulated ceremonial complex (fig. 6), including a rectangular fenced courtyard with a monumental stone entryway to the north-east, three main halls (named as Houses 75, 76, 77), and five auxiliary units (rooms 1-5).

The temple itself, Shrine 76, stood on the south-eastern side of the yard and consisted of an elongated roughly rectangular building (12.7 m long × 3.30 m wide) facing NE-SW, with rounded corners (as characteristic of EB IA Southern Levantine architecture), and two entrances on each of the long sides of the shrine.³⁵ It was erected over a natural step of the bedrock, which, thus, formed two platforms both inside and outside the building, and it was built with big field-stones arranged in irregular rows without mortar. In the northern sector of the shrine, the bedrock surface was regularized with an artificial platform, and a low table/altar (1.4 × 0.55 cm) was set in the NE corner; behind it, a rock-cut pit was filled in

³⁰ The presence and diffusion of *massebot*, that is aniconic and anepigraphic stones vertically set in the ground with a religious function, is widely attested to in the cult and religion of Palestine during the pre-classical period (and even later; Graesser 1972; Sala 2008a, 86-88). As it concerns the end of the 4th millennium BC, the use of *massebot* is attested to at Tell el-Jazari, in the area of the so-called “Troglodyte Crematorium”, and at er-Rujm, where a row of vertical slabs included in the rear-wall of Hall 152 should originally represent a freestanding alignment of *massebot* (§ 2.7.).

³¹ Hanbury-Tenison 1987, 132.

³² Nigro 2009, 658-659.

³³ Polcaro - Polcaro 2006.

³⁴ Fernández-Tresguerrez Velasco 2005a, 365.

³⁵ Fernández-Tresguerrez Velasco 2005b; 2008.

with pottery, flint hammers and a mace-head. The cult focus of the temple was thus located in the northern end of the building and with a bent-axis orientation in respect of the location of the doors, as it was the case of Shrine 420 at Tell es-Sultan (§ 2.2.): in the initial stage of EB I, the classic type of the EBA Palestinian temples, with *Breitraum* plan and direct entrance, has not yet become the official type of the local sacred architecture. Many fragmentary jars were found aligned along the walls of the temple: their decorations consisted of zigzag motifs, incised and painted trees, and both applied and incised bands representing snakes (hence the name of the sanctuary; fig. 7).³⁶

Just 1 m to the south-east of Shrine 76, outside the fenced yard, was House 77, consisting of an apsidal building, subdivided into three parts and hosting a platform in its western end.³⁷ The other main hall, House 75, was located instead in the SW corner of the courtyard and consisted of an oval-shaped building, subdivided into two rooms by a partition wall:³⁸ the north-west sector was found full of ash (which probably came from a fireplace in the northern corner), while the south-east part hosted a big flagstone set on two smaller blocks, that could be used as an offering table. North of House 75, a group of smaller auxiliary units, connected to each other, was also brought to light (possibly added to it in a second phase of use of the area).³⁹

The identification of the articulated complex of Jebel Mu'ayyawaq as a sanctuary was made sure both by its architectural features and by the characteristic types of finds and pottery, which differ from those of the contemporary houses. The presence on vessels of decorations like trees and snakes, traditionally symbols of life and fertility or death and resurrection, further supported the religious destination of such a compound.

2.4. *Open Cult Areas at Gezer/Tell el-Jazari*

The earliest EB I (EB IA) occupation at Gezer/Tell el-Jazari is substantially represented by cave dwellings (the so-called “troglodyte dwellings”), used by a community of semi-nomadic shepherds and farmers, initially for habitation and storage, and then re-used as burial places⁴⁰. Many open rock surfaces, often levelled and smoothed, and distinguished by the presence of rock-cut circular cup-marks, are associated to this earliest EB IA occupation: they have been interpreted as possible cult places connected with libatory and sacrificial practises, perhaps related to funerary rituals.

Among them, two areas, in particular, have been commonly interpreted as open cult places: the first one is an area with eighty-three cup-marks, associated to three caves (Caves 16 III, 17 III, and 17 IV), and to an orifice and a channel running into one of them;⁴¹ the second one is the area in front of the so-called “Troglodyte Crematorium” (Cave 2 I), distinguished by the presence of round cup-marks and, in its second phase of use,⁴² also by

³⁶ Fernández-Tresguerrez Velasco 2008, 30-32.

³⁷ Fernández-Tresguerrez Velasco 2008, 29-30.

³⁸ Fernández-Tresguerrez Velasco 2005b, 14-15; 2008, 26.

³⁹ Fernández-Tresguerrez Velasco 2005b, 15-18; 2008, 26-29.

⁴⁰ Macalister 1912a, 70-158.

⁴¹ Macalister 1912a, 100, pl. xxvii; 1912b, 378-381, fig. 476.

⁴² Callaway 1962.

the presence of a monolith/standing stone (around 60 cm high, 48 cm in diameter), which stood in front of the entrance of the cave.⁴³

Round cup-marks are a typical evidence of EB IA Palestine and Transjordan, often interpreted as cult installations. An EB I open-air cult place, characterized by the presence of round cup-marks and possibly associated to funerary rituals, was identified also at Jerusalem (§ 2.5.). Round cup-marks and other rock-cut installations, dating from the EB I, have been detected in other Transjordanian sites, as Jneneh,⁴⁴ and et-Tell,⁴⁵ and Khirbet al-Batrawy, where the presence of cup-marks on the emerging bedrock of the Acropolis has suggested a possible utilization of the hill-top during the EB I as a cult site.⁴⁶

2.5. *The Cult Site at Jerusalem*

In the late 4th millennium BC, at the beginning of the EB I, Jerusalem was probably occupied by a seasonal campsite, frequented by a semi-nomadic community of shepherds and farmers, probably thanks to the presence of the perennial Gihon Spring, which worked as a catalyser for the earliest sedentary occupation on the eastern flank of the Eastern Hill. Here, the earliest occupation is attested to by scattered pottery sherds, tombs,⁴⁷ and some caves probably used as dwellings, as like as in the earliest EB I settlement at Tell el-Jazari, among which “Caves IV, V and VI” excavated by K.M. Kenyon,⁴⁸ or those identified by Shiloh in Area E2.⁴⁹

An open cult site belonged to this earliest EB I occupation. The excavation carried out by J.G. Duncan and R.A.S. Macalister in the 1920s, in fact, exposed on the summit of the ancient tell, in their “Field 7”, a rock open space, distinguished by a levelled and smoothed surface, and by the presence of rock-cut features (fig. 8), namely circular cup-marks and channels,⁵⁰ recently re-excavated by E. Mazar,⁵¹ very similar to those exposed in the open-air sacred areas at Tell el-Jazari, and representing a typical feature of the EB IA period. In a hollow in the bedrock, in the same “Field 7”, Macalister and Duncan retrieved, moreover, two complete vessels and the spout of a jar dating from the EB I.⁵² This area might, thus, represent an open cult place, localized at the highest point of the earliest EB I settlement.⁵³

⁴³ Macalister 1912a, 74-76, fig. 21.

⁴⁴ Sala 2008c, 367, fig. 13.

⁴⁵ Sala 2008c, 374, fig. 25.

⁴⁶ Nigro 2009, 659, fn. 8, fig. 4.

⁴⁷ As “Graves 2 and 3” discovered by M.B. Parker (Vincent 1911, 27-28, 31-32, pls. IX:1-5, X:1-4, XII:2; Macalister - Duncan 1926, 21-22, figs. 14-15).

⁴⁸ Steiner 2001, 7.

⁴⁹ Shiloh 1984, 9, pl. 15:1.

⁵⁰ Macalister - Duncan 1926, 17-19, 35-36, figs. 7-10, 31, pls. III-IV.

⁵¹ Mazar 2009, 21. Mazar attributes these features to the Late Chalcolithic Period (as the ones excavated by Macalister and Duncan in “Field 5”; see below fn. 53), but round cup-marks are typical evidence of the EB IA.

⁵² Macalister - Duncan 1926, 177, fig. 186.

⁵³ During Macalister and Duncan’s excavations, other 17 oblong cavities cut in the bedrock were brought to light in “Field 5” (Macalister - Duncan 1926, 20-21, 26-27, figs. 11-12, 19-20, pl. D). Nevertheless, these cavities, also recently re-exposed by E. Mazar (Mazar 2007, 20-22; 2009, 20-21), are bigger (around 50 × 30

2.6. The “High Place” at Megiddo/Tell el-Mutesellim

The excavations of the Oriental Institute of Chicago in the 1930s exposed in the north-eastern sector of the Acropolis of Megiddo/Tell el-Mutesellim (in the so-called Area BB) an extensive sacred area,⁵⁴ continuously in use from the beginning of the Early Bronze Age, with the earliest EB IB temple compounds (stratum XIX/levels J-2 - J-3),⁵⁵ up to the Iron Age I, with the last use of Temple 2048 (stratum VIA),⁵⁶ which represents one of the main cult areas of whole pre-classical Southern Levant.

The earliest temple compound was erected in EB IB (§ 3.3.1), that is in stratum XIX of Oriental Institute sequence and level J-2 of the renewed periodization proposed by the recent excavations of Tel Aviv University.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, in a reassessment on Megiddo stratigraphy, A. Kempinski proposed to distinguish two phases in stratum XIX of Oriental Institute sequence, named as “early XIX” and “late XIX”, and dated respectively to Late Chalcolithic/EB IA and to EB IB.⁵⁸ To the earliest phase Kempinski attributed the existence of an open-air cult place (a “high place”), possibly identified in the lower slab-paved area brought to light in *locus* 4008, inside the courtyard of the following EB IB sacred precinct.⁵⁹ This cult place remained in use in EB IB, when it was re-paved and it was included in the *temenos* of the earliest temple (§ 3.3.1). That this sector of the Acropolis had a cult destination as early as the Chalcolithic and EB IA periods, that is before the erection of the earliest temple compound in EB IB, was also recently suggested by I. Finkelstein and D. Ussishkin.⁶⁰

2.7. The Alignment of Massebot at er-Rujm

The Acropolis of the EB I settlement of er-Rujm (Area A) is occupied by a public complex erected in EB IB (stratum II). Here, a row of vertical slabs set in the rear-wall of the main hall of the complex (Hall 152; § 3.4) could originally represent a freestanding alignment of *massebot*, only afterwards included in the building when it was erected (fig. 9). The Acropolis could, thus, host in the beginning (stratum III) an open-air sacred area, distinguished by the presence of a row of standing stones, subsequently replaced by a

cm), deeper (15-20 cm deep) and more elongated (oval, and not rounded in shape): they have been interpreted as devices for food preparation or collecting rainwater for watering livestock, and dated to the Late Chalcolithic Period (van den Brink 2008, 16-17, fig. 8).

⁵⁴ Dunayevsky - Kempinski 1973; Kempinski 1989, 169-186, pls. 2-10.

⁵⁵ Finkelstein - Ussishkin - Peersmann 2006, tab. 3.1.

⁵⁶ Kempinski 1989, 83, 181-186, pl. 10.

⁵⁷ Finkelstein - Ussishkin - Peersmann 2006, tab. 3.1.

⁵⁸ Kempinski 1989, 19-24.

⁵⁹ Kempinski 1989, 170. The presence of an open-air cult place on a raised spot, dominating the surrounding countryside (as in the case of Jerusalem [§ 2.5] and er-Rujm [§ 2.6]), fits well with the interpretation of the early EB I society at Megiddo as a tribal society put forward by E. van der Steen (2005). This paradigm is pretty suitable for the kind of socio-economic organization of the earliest emerging complex societies of EB IA Palestine, but it seems no more adequate for the following proto-urban communities of EB IB, which are fully developed territorial-political entities (according to Finkelstein - Ussishkin 2000b, 584), and their monumental temple compounds, as van der Steen instead suggests.

⁶⁰ Finkelstein - Ussishkin 2000a, 35-38; 2000b, 576.

public complex, which incorporated in the temple building the standing stones of the previous cult place.⁶¹

3. EARLY BRONZE IB

3.1. *The Reconstruction of the Enceinte Sacrée at Byblos*

The *Enceinte Sacrée* remained in use during the EB IB (3200-3000 BC), when some major changes took place in the layout of the village, which definitely turned into a town:⁶² rectangular houses were added in between and sometimes upon the earliest curvilinear structures; building areas were subdivided both by boundary-walls and terrace-walls delimitating private (familiar) and public (extra-familiar) spaces; streets were outlined and defined the settlement layout. Also the religious compound was reconstructed: the general layout of the *Enceinte Sacrée* was maintained,⁶³ but the *temenos* wall was rebuilt by means of a different building technique, i.e. employing small sandstone slabs.⁶⁴

The *Enceinte Sacrée* continued to be in use throughout the whole 3rd and 2nd millennia BC, with a series of successive and superimposed reconstructions;⁶⁵ but the original roughly oval-shaped layout of the sacred precinct was apparently kept during the whole Early Bronze Age.⁶⁶ Only at the end of 3rd millennium BC the religious compound was completely refurbished and the elliptical shape gave place to a roughly rectangular *temenos*, which housed a rectangular shrine with a vestibule and a *cella*.⁶⁷

3.2. *The “Double Shrine” at Tell es-Sultan/Jericho*

The passage to the EB IB phase at Tell es-Sultan (Garstang's level VI; period Sultan IIIa2) is marked by the construction of rectangular houses and great apsidal buildings within a neater partition into compounds of rectangular or trapezoidal shape;⁶⁸ by the realization of a street running south-west/north-east, which will remain in use during the whole EB II-III urban period;⁶⁹ and by the reconstruction of the north-south terrace-wall⁷⁰ and the east-west boundary-wall delimitating the terrace of Shrine 420.

Shrine 420 was also refurbished and enlarged with the addition to the east of the original chamber of a second unit (447) with a bench (422), and roughly the same outline.⁷¹ This reconstruction gave to the religious compound a more definite plan and the shape of a twin sanctuary, as it happens in other EBA Palestinian sanctuaries, namely: the EB IB

⁶¹ Mazar - de Miroschedji 1996, 11-13; Sala 2008a, 85-88.

⁶² Dunand 1950, 590-591, 593; 1973b, 18-20; Nigro 2007a, 34-35, figs. 40-41.

⁶³ Dunand 1973a, 241.

⁶⁴ Jidejian 1968, 13; Dunand 1983, 94-95.

⁶⁵ Dunand 1950-1958, 481, 616-619, 653, 899, pls. XIII:2, XIV, XV; 1973a, 239, pl. CXXVIII:3.

⁶⁶ Dunand 1983.

⁶⁷ Dunand 1950-1958, 899, pls. XIII:2, XIV, XV; 1973a, 241; 1982, 197; Saghieh 1983, 34-35, 38-39, fig. 11.

⁶⁸ For a detailed description of the village of this phase see Nigro 2005, 35-41, 115-116, 122-126, 200, plan III.

⁶⁹ Sellin - Watzinger 1913, 36-38, fig. 17, pl. II; Garstang *et al.* 1935, 152-154, pl. XXIII; Nigro 2000, 22-23, figs. 1:15, 17-18; 2010, 76-77, 83.

⁷⁰ Kenyon's wall ZA (Kenyon 1981, 322). Parr differently interpreted this structure as a first fortification wall of the proto-urban settlement (Parr 2000, 391-392).

⁷¹ Nigro 2005, 35, fig. 3.30, plan III.

sacred compound at Tell el-Mutesellim, stratum XIX/level J-3 (§ 3.3.2), or the later EB II so-called “Twin Temples” in the sacred precinct of Arad.⁷²

Nevertheless, Shrine 420 continued to represent the shrine/chapel of the northern residential quarter, rather than an official temple.⁷³ Perhaps also for this reason (that is, its non-official destination), the shrine was not reconstructed at the beginning of the 3rd millennium BC (in EB II), in the emerging urban centre of Tell es-Sultan, after the city-wall was erected and the layout of the settlement was reorganized.

3.3. *The Temple Compounds of Levels J-2 and J-3 at Megiddo/Tell el-Mutesellim*

Renewed excavations carried out at Megiddo/Tell el-Mutesellim by Tel Aviv University definitively demonstrated the existence of two superimposed temple compounds dating back to the EB IB in the sacred area in the north-eastern sector of the Acropolis, which overlooked the Spring of ‘Ain el-Kubbi. Features of both of these compounds were actually already excavated by the Expedition of the Oriental Institute in the 1930s, which, nevertheless, assigned all of them to a single architectural phase, that was the temple complex of stratum XIX.

C. Epstein, re-examining the structures attributed by the Oriental Institute excavations to stratum XIX and, namely, the elevations of the different portions of the slab-paved courtyard in front of Temple 4050 (*loci* 4008, 4118 and 4064)⁷⁴ and those of the *temenos* wall, proposed for the first time to assign part of them to an earlier sanctuary, which was ascribed to an intermediate phase between strata XX and XIX, named as stratum XX+.⁷⁵ Epstein interpreted this earlier sanctuary as an open-air cult area, which included the slab-paved courtyard in *loci* 4008, 4118 and 4064 and was delimited by the curvilinear *temenos* wall preserved in quadrants N 14-15.

Recent excavations by Tel Aviv University eventually allowed to ascribe the structures of the EB I *temenos* brought to light in the 1930s to two successive temple compounds and two different architectural phases, named as level J-2 (the earlier one) and level J-3 (the later one, with Temple 4050). Both of them date to the EB IB.⁷⁶

3.3.1. The Earliest Temple Compound: the *Temenos* of Stratum XIX/Level J-2

The earliest temple compound at Tell el-Mutesellim (fig. 10), preceding the erection of Temple 4050, consisted of a sacred precinct delimited by an irregular curvilinear *temenos* wall, preserved on the northern side of the complex (in quadrants N 14-15), with a stone-

⁷² Amiran *et al.* 1978, 38-41, pls. 190-191; Amiran - Ilan 1996, 45-63, pls. 88-89; Sala 2008a, 150-179, pls. 11-13.

⁷³ Other religious buildings excavated in EBA Palestinian centres belong to this category, such as Shrine 671 at Tell el-Far‘ah North, a cult chapel inside a dwelling quarter of the EB II city (de Vaux 1961, 577-578, pls. XXXIII, XLII).

⁷⁴ Loud 1948, fig. 390.

⁷⁵ Epstein 1973.

⁷⁶ Finkelstein - Ussishkin 2000a, 53-55. The monumental temple of level J-4 is not taken into consideration in the following discussion, since it has been recently re-attributed to the following EB II settlement (Sala 2008a, 110-113; Nigro 2010, 335-337).

paved courtyard along the eastern slope of the area and the temple building erected on the western side of the *temenos*.⁷⁷

Recent excavations by Tel Aviv University have identified partial remains of this earliest EB I temple below later Temple 4050; namely: a plastered floor,⁷⁸ and two parallel rows of pillar bases, aligned along the eastern and western inner walls of Temple 4050 (partly already brought to light by the Oriental Institute excavations).⁷⁹ The earliest temple should, thus, appear as a large hypostyle *Breitraum* hall, with two parallel rows of pillars and a direct entrance on its long eastern side. The outer limits of the building have not been identified, but the continuation of the floor of level J-2 below the walls of Temple 4050 suggests that the temple of this phase was even larger than the following one (at least 15.5 × 5.5 m). Each row of pillars included three columns, symmetrically aligned along the major axis of the cella, with rectangular stone slabs (four made of basalt and one made of limestone), set on a roughly circular foundation made of small stones.⁸⁰ Finally, next to the northern base of the eastern row, a hole-mouth jar containing sheep bones was found set in the floor of the cella, perhaps as a votive deposit with the remains of animal sacrifices.⁸¹

The courtyard in front of the temple, along the eastern slope, was paved with stone slabs, preserved in *loci* 4008, 4064 and 4118, and in a narrow stretch in front of Temple 4050 (fig. 11).⁸² In *locus* 4008, two superimposed slab-pavings were identified, indicating two successive phases of the forecourt: the lower one probably represents the earliest religious device of the area (§ 2.6), while the upper one ties to the curvilinear wall excavated in quadrants N 14-15. Both of them are incised with cult graffiti, which represent human figures,⁸³ animals and some other signs of uncertain identification,⁸⁴ and clearly testify the cult destination of the place. A graffito, not registered by Loud, has been recently noted also on a slab in *locus* 4064.⁸⁵

A few findings were associated to the earliest sacred precinct, among which a limestone mace-head,⁸⁶ a piece of an incense-burner and a cult stand⁸⁷ retrieved in the forecourt, and the votive depot represented by the hole-mouth jar with sheep bones inside the temple.⁸⁸

⁷⁷ Finkelstein - Ussishkin 2000a, 38-53, fig. 3.10; Sala 2008a, 42-56, pl. 3.

⁷⁸ Finkelstein - Ussishkin 2000a, 46, fig. 3.19.

⁷⁹ Finkelstein - Ussishkin 2000a, 46-48, figs. 3.17, 23-25.

⁸⁰ Finkelstein - Ussishkin 2000a, 53, fig. 3.23.

⁸¹ Finkelstein - Ussishkin 2000a, fig. 3.24.

⁸² Loud 1948, 61, figs. 144-146, pls. 271-282; Kempinski 1989, 19-21, 170-173; § 2.6.

⁸³ Kempinski 1989, 170-175.

⁸⁴ Loud 1948, pls. 271-282.

⁸⁵ Finkelstein - Ussishkin 2000a, 52.

⁸⁶ Loud 1948, pl. 270:3.

⁸⁷ Loud 1948, pl. 96:23.

⁸⁸ Finkelstein - Ussishkin 2000a, 46, fig. 3:24.

3.3.2. The Reconstruction of the Temple Compound in Stratum XIX/Level J-3: the *Temenos* of Temple 4050

The earliest temple compound at Tell el-Mutesellim was refurbished during EB IB, when Temple 4050 was erected above the razed remains of the previous temple building and a new rectangular *temenos* wall was built to enclose the forecourt of the temple.

The temple compound of stratum XIX/level J-3 (first investigated in the 1930s, then explored by means of some soundings by I. Dunayevsky and A. Kempinski in 1963 and 1965 and, recently, by the renewed excavations of Tel Aviv University) consisted of a sacred precinct, with a forecourt on the eastern slope, and the temple building (4050) and adjoined auxiliary rooms (S-4047, 4047) erected on the western side of the *temenos* (figs. 12-13).⁸⁹

Temple 4050 was a *Breitraum* hall (approximately 13.2 × 4.2 m), delimited by 1.20 to 1.30 m thick mudbrick walls on stone foundations (except the rear-wall which was 2.80 to 3.20 m thick), with a direct entrance on the eastern side and a central row of four pillars on flat stone bases (one made of limestone, three made of basalt) supporting the roof, and aligned on the main north-south axis. The interior of the building was entirely plastered. Opposite the entrance, a rectangular plastered mudbrick podium/altar stood against the rear-wall of the cella, with two successive phases of construction; in front of the older podium, a plastered clay installation, of roughly hemispherical shape with a depression on the top, was also brought to light, probably a cult installation connected with libatory rituals officiated on the nearby podium (Kempinski proposed to interpret it as the basis for an offertory basin).⁹⁰

Temple 4050 was flanked to the north by two adjacent auxiliary rooms, aligned along the same rear-wall, which was at the same time the rear-wall of the whole *temenos* (2.80-3.20 m wide and 28 m long): units S-4047 (in the middle) and 4047 (to the north). Unit S-4047 was a narrow room, probably a storeroom for vessels or cult furnishings, very similar to the two narrow units (163, 173) in the public complex on the Acropolis of er-Rujm (§ 3.4). To the north of unit S-4047 was room 4047 (approximately 7.5 × 4 m), with a stone-built installation. I. Dunayevsky and A. Kempinski interpreted this installation as an altar, similarly to the podium inside Temple 4050. They, thus, suggested that room 4047 represented a second temple and they interpreted the whole complex as a twin-temple.⁹¹ Actually, the stone-built installation inside unit 4047, recently re-exposed by the excavations of Tel Aviv University,⁹² was a low freestanding rectangular stone platform, built with a single course of flat medium size stones, very similar in its building technique to the low stone platforms set in the floor of some EBA domestic units.⁹³ Its interpretation as an altar remains, thus, much doubtful, as well as the interpretation of room 4047 as a second temple. Moreover, the façade-wall of this unit has not been identified.

⁸⁹ Loud 1948, 61, fig. 390; Finkelstein - Ussishkin 2000a, 38-52, fig. 3.11; Sala 2008a, 56-71, pl. 4.

⁹⁰ Kempinski 1989, 174.

⁹¹ Dunayevsky - Kempinski 1973, 167-168, fig. 4.

⁹² Finkelstein - Ussishkin 2000a, 49-50, fig. 3.12.

⁹³ Sala 2008a, 61-62.

Fragments of jars, bowls, *pithoi* and cult stands were found in the temple compound, while an Egyptian black and white breccia mace-head was retrieved in unit 4047.⁹⁴

The forecourt of Temple 4050 was fenced by a rectangular *temenos*, preserved on the southern side and south-eastern corner (in quadrant O 14). At its centre, on axis with the entrance of the temple, a circular mudbrick installation (4034) stood (erroneously ascribed by G. Loud to stratum XVIII, but correctly assigned by C. Epstein to the forecourt of stratum XIX). Installation 4034, made of mudbricks and plastered, had an overall diameter of 3.20, with a round shallow hole, 2.25 m wide but only 0.10 m deep, in the middle. The original interpretation as a ritual basin, suggested by a comparison with the stone round basin in the sacred precinct of En-Gedi,⁹⁵ appears doubtful, both for the shallow depth and the building technique (plastered mudbricks). But the retrieval of a ceremonial spearhead (0.60 m long),⁹⁶ together with some faience and shell beads, next to the installation suggests its ritual destination: it might have been a sort of offertory table, as those frequently attested to in the Protodynastic temples of Mesopotamia.⁹⁷

The sacred precinct of stratum XIX at Tell el-Mutesellim represents the most extensive and well-structured temple complex so far excavated in EB I Southern Levant, for both its plan and its architectural features. The temple exhibits the classic type of the EBA Palestinian sacred architecture, the *Breitraum* temple with direct entrance, as it will be definitively codified in the following EB II-III temples; at the same time, installations and finds testify to the articulated public ritual and ceremonial activities officiated inside the precinct. Finally, its location on a panoramic spot overlooking the Spring and the surrounding landscape suggests that the broad-room temple was also a major reference point in the territory of the underlying countryside.

3.4. *The Public Complex on the Acropolis of er-Rujm*

During EB IB a public complex was erected on the Acropolis of er-Rujm (Area A). The complex (fig. 14) was apparently an articulated ceremonial building, built of 0.80-1.10 m wide walls, including at least two main *Breitraum* pillared halls (134, 152), and two narrow auxiliary rooms (163, 173), arranged around a central courtyard.⁹⁸

The main hall (152), on the southern side of the courtyard, though not completed preserved, exhibits a clear *Breitraum* plan (with inner dimensions of 15 × 5.80 m), with a direct access on one long side and a central row of pillars on stones bases supporting the roof, aligned along the main east-west axis. A row of vertical stone slabs (around 1 m high), identified as *massebot* belonging to an original open-air cult place (§ 2.7), was incorporated in the rear-wall of the hall, thus apparently pointing at its identification as a temple.⁹⁹ Moreover, a shallow stone bench (for offerings?) stood in front of the standing stones, with traces of ash and animal bones (remains of sacrifices?) on the nearby floor. The

⁹⁴ Loud 1948, pl. 270:2.

⁹⁵ Sala 2005c, 277, 280; 2008a, 12, 15.

⁹⁶ Loud 1948, pl. 283:1.

⁹⁷ Delougaz - Lloyd 1942, 62.

⁹⁸ Mazar - de Miroschedji 1996, 4-13; Sala 2008a, 79-88, pl. 6.

⁹⁹ Mazar - de Miroschedji 1996, 11.

major hall was flanked to the west by a narrow elongated auxiliary room (173), with a central squared stone interpreted as cult base and preceded by a rectangular slab, possibly connected to some ritual activities related to the nearby temple.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Religious architecture of EBA Southern Levant is distinguished by very characteristic and homogenous local developments, above all if compared with contemporary traditions of surroundings regions, as Northern Levant and Inner Syria: the *Breitraum* temple, with direct entrance on one of the long side, is the classic type of the official sacred buildings. The prodromes of this tradition can be traced up to the mid-4th millennium BC, in the Late Chalcolithic sacred precincts of En-Gedi¹⁰⁰ and Tuleilat el-Ghassul¹⁰¹ in Southern Palestine, testifying to the earliest elaboration of a local official religious architecture, which will be definitively codified in the following EB I-III.¹⁰²

After the end of the Chalcolithic-Ghassulian culture, the earliest EB I cult places are represented by open areas, as the cult areas at Tell el-Jazari, Jerusalem, Tell el-Mutesellim, er-Rujm, and al- $\frac{1}{2}$ awettan. The first important change took place in an advanced phase of the EB IA, around the 3300 BC, when early shrines were erected inside some key EB IA settlements, within the dwelling quarters, but in areas intentionally separated from the surrounding houses by the erection of “demarcation-walls” and fenced courtyards: at Byblos, the *Enceinte Sacrée* represents the earliest cult compound, which would have been successively reconstructed and used across the whole Early Bronze and Middle Bronze Ages,¹⁰³ erected within a gradual reconfiguration of the late *énéolithique* village subdivided by boundary-walls and terrace-walls, which define the village layout and attests to the coordination of public works by an emerging ruling institution;¹⁰⁴ at Jericho, the construction of Shrine 420 in a later phase of Sultan IIIa1 Period (EB IA) takes place within a general regularization of the village on the northern *plateau* of the mound, marked, from the one hand, by the addition of a second demarcation-wall on the northern slope, from the other hand, by the outlining of a main street and by a neater separation of each domestic compound;¹⁰⁵ at Jebel Mu'awwaq, the “Temple of the Serpents” is built inside one of the largest EB IA settlements of the whole Southern Levant, in a sacred space delimited by a fenced courtyard. These shrines were, thus, clearly erected within the framework of a first spatial reorganization of the EB IA settlements, and in a phase of progressive flourishing and transformation of these communities, which set the bases for their successive development into “incipient towns”: the enucleation of a definite space for cult compounds is an evident outcome of this process. Anyway, sacred buildings still exhibit a free planning

¹⁰⁰ Ussishkin 2007; Sala 2005c, 274-282; Sala 2008a, 8-19, pl. 1.

¹⁰¹ Seaton 2000; Sala 2005b, 283-290; Sala 2008a, 19-30, pl. 2.

¹⁰² Kempinski 1992; de Miroschedji 1993; Sala 2005c, 269-272, 290-292; Sala 2008a, 3-4, 37. The *Breitraum* unit becomes also the basic module of the contemporary EB II-III domestic architecture (Ben-Tor 1992).

¹⁰³ Dunand 1950-1958, 481, 616-619, 653, 899, pls. XIII:2, XIV, XV; Saghih 1983, 34-35, 38-39, fig. 11.

¹⁰⁴ Dunand 1973a, 215-216, 239, fig. 139, pls. J:b-c; see Nigro 2007a, 26-31, 36, figs. 30-36.

¹⁰⁵ Nigro 2005, 33-34, plan II; Sala 2005a, 42; 2007, 35, 73-75.

and plans with a bent-axis orientation of the cult focus in respect of the location of the doors predominate.

It is only since the following EB IB proto-urban phase that, together with a developing social complexity and economic specialization, the earliest public and official religious buildings are erected, as attested to by the temple compounds of Tell el-Mutesellim and er-Rujm, while the *Enceinte Sacrée* at Byblos and Shrine 420 at Tell es-Sultan are refurbished and enlarged, according to more standardized typologies: in these compounds the *Breitraum* temple with direct entrance, sometimes provided by one or two rows of pillars, eventually becomes the classic type of the Palestinian sacred architecture, as it will be definitively testified to soon after in the more monumental EB II temples on the Acropolis of 'Ai/et-Tell,¹⁰⁶ at Tell el-Mutesellim, stratum XVIII/level J-4,¹⁰⁷ at Khirbet al-Batrawy,¹⁰⁸ or in the articulated sacred precinct at Arad.¹⁰⁹

In the meantime, other EB IB non-residential buildings possibly used for the processing, storage and distribution of food, such as those brought to light at Tell el-'Areini and Beth Shean, indicate the existence of a public architecture related to some forms of centralized administration, with a control on land, labour and agricultural products (possibly managed by a local elite), and testifying to the improvements of a complex and hierarchical society. The appearance of cylinder seals, potmarks and precious goods (as specialized fine pottery productions, high quality copper and stone objects, and status-symbols, such as mace-heads and palettes) equally suggests the advanced stage of cultural, social and economic growth of these town, with emerging local elites which controlled economic and political power.

The transformation of the EB IA villages into EB IB towns appears linked to the enucleation of the earliest public and monumental sacred precinct, and temples progressively become the major focal point of these incipient cities. It, thus, becomes noticeable the connection between the progressive elaboration and codification of a local monumental sacred architecture in the Southern Levantine centres, from the one hand, and, from the other hand, the settlement, socio-political and economic achievements, which took place in the late 4th millennium BC and which were going to lead to the emergence of the earliest urban societies at the beginning of the following 3rd millennium B.C; that is, the connection between the foundation of a religious centre (the "temple") and the origin of the city, which opens interesting insights into the possible role performed by the religious institutions and by their physical hypostasis, the temple itself, at the dawn of the earliest urbanization.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Sala 2008a, 125-139.

¹⁰⁷ Finkelstein - Ussishkin - Peersmann 2006, 36-41; Sala 2008a, 89-113, pl. 7.

¹⁰⁸ Nigro (ed.) 2008, 276-293.

¹⁰⁹ Amiran - Ilan 1996, 45-63, pls. 88-89; Sala 2008a, 150-179, pls. 11-13.

¹¹⁰ It is difficult to establish if religious authorities in the emerging Levantine centres owned also economic resources and, thus, had a rule of political and economic leadership (as was the case in Mesopotamia during the contemporary Uruk period), and this matter is beyond the topic of this article; although the restricted dimensions of annexes and auxiliary buildings in the Levantine temples seem to rule out the Mesopotamian paradigm. Moreover, Uruk influence has been detected in EB I Palestine, but only in a few specific features, such as the introduction of cylinder seals and appearance of spouted vessels (on this topic see de Miroschedji 2002; Philip 2002).

The investigation of the relationship between the formative urban phenomenon during the Early Bronze Age and the emerging religious institutions, namely the temples, which represent their ideological centre, is still a matter to be further investigated in Southern Levantine in the late 4th - 3rd millennium BC: temples, as palaces, in fact, represented not only the socio-political and organizational, but above all the ideological heart of a complex and stratified society. The monumental temples of the following EB II definitively enlighten the role of temples in the emerging cities,¹¹¹ and show how deep was the relationship between the origin of the early urban communities and the progressive affirmation of religious institutions, as essential aggregative places of social cohesion and economic development in the growing stratified society of Southern Levant.

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¹¹¹ Nigro 2009, 665-666.

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Fig. 1: Byblos: plan of the central sector of the late EB IA settlement with indicated the area of the cult compound of the *Enceinte Sacrée* (after Dunand 1973a, pl. J:c).

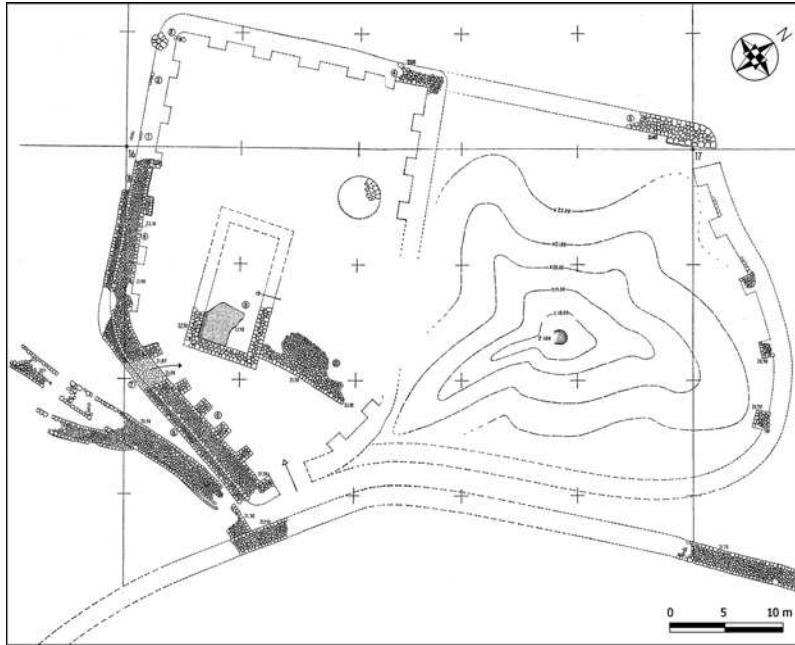


Fig. 2: Byblos: plan of the *Enceinte Sacrée* (after Dunand 1973a, fig. 143).

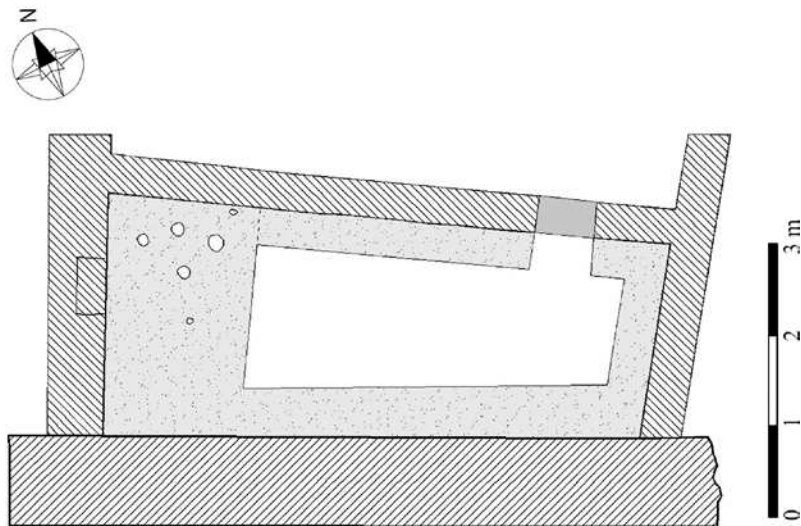


Fig. 3: Tell es-Sultan/Jericho: plan of Shrine 420 (after Sala 2005a, fig. 3.41).



Fig. 4: Tell es-Sultan: Shrine 420, from north-west; to be noted, the large plastered dais with circular depressions on the western side of the cella and the possible traces of a cultic niche in the western wall (after Sala 2005a, fig. 3.40).

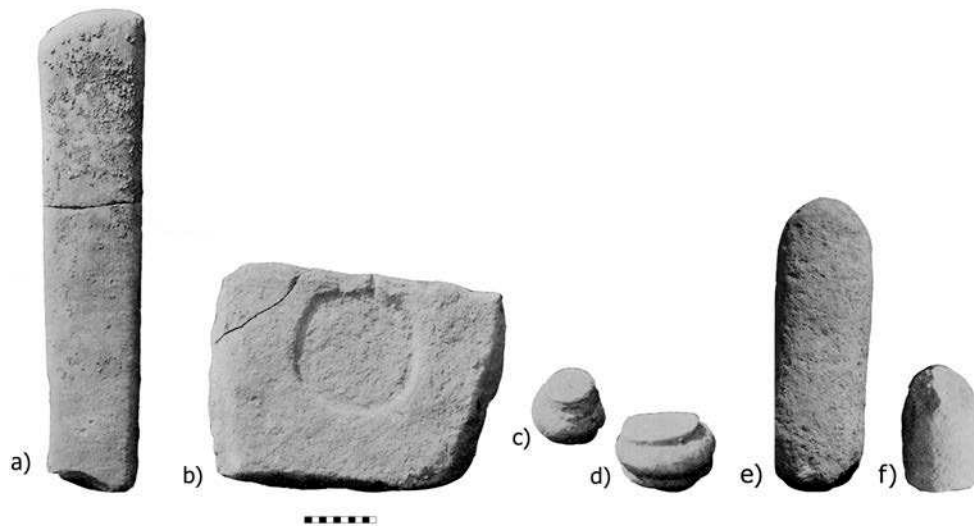


Fig. 5: Tell es-Sultan: the cult objects in limestone and marble associated by J. Garstang to Shrine 420 (redrawn from Garstang *et al.* 1936, pl. XLlb).

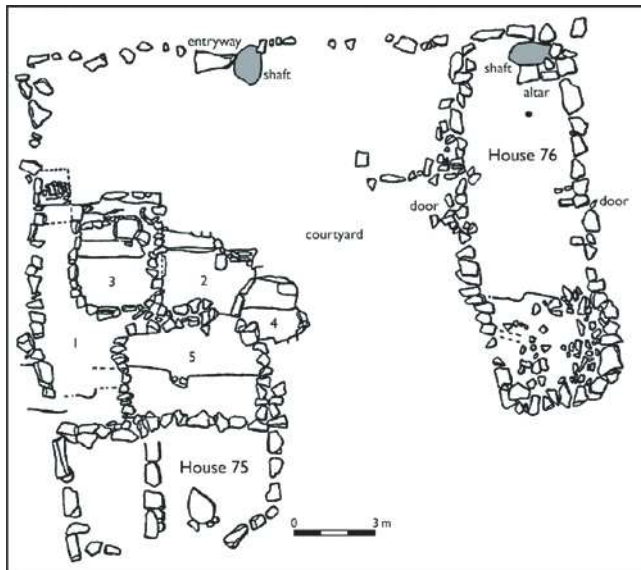


Fig. 6: Jebel Mu'ayawwaq: plan of the "Temple of the Serpents" (after Fernández-Tresguerrez Velasco 2008, fig. 1).

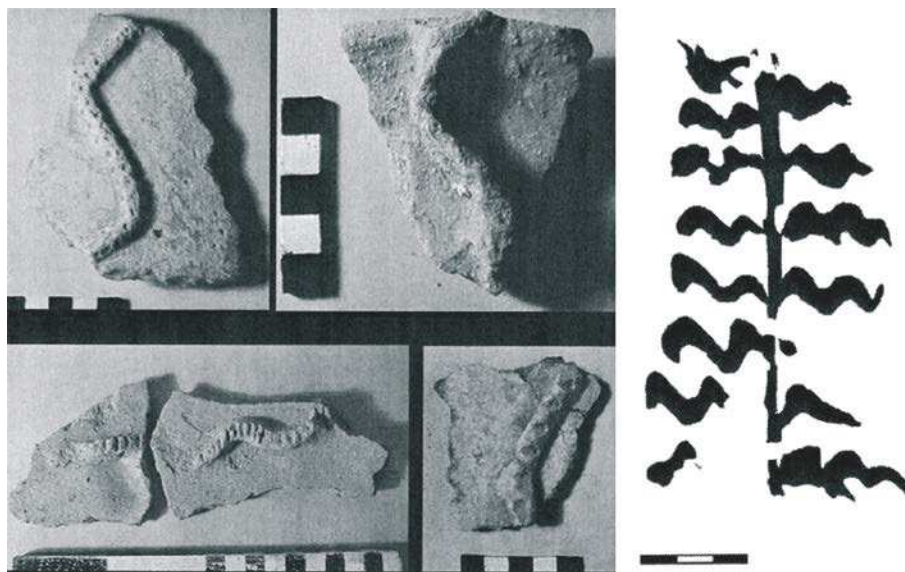


Fig. 7: Jebel Mu'ayawwaq: snakes and trees applied and painted decorations on jars retrieved inside the "Temple of the Serpents" (after Fernández-Tresguerrez Velasco 2005b, figs. 12, 16).

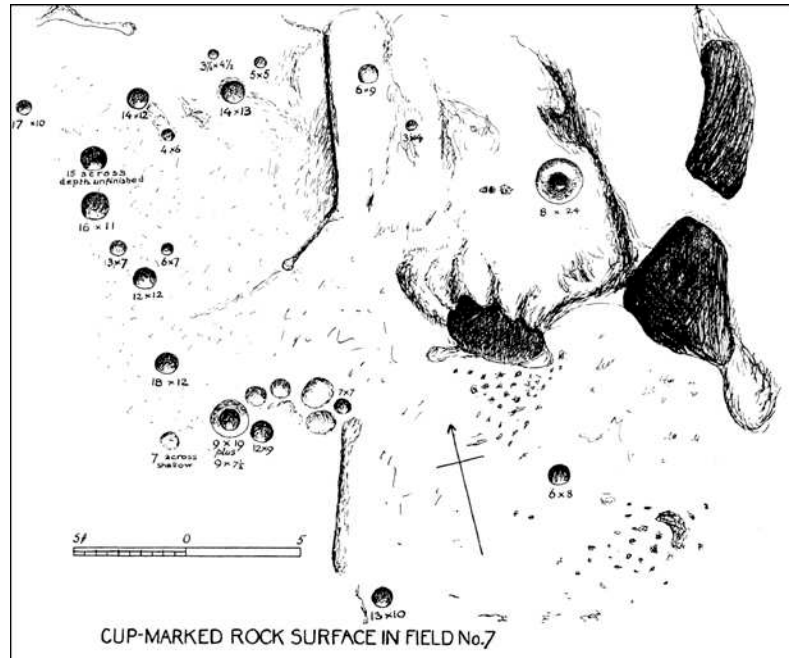


Fig. 8: Jerusalem: open cult place on the top of the eastern flank of the Eastern Hill (after Macalister - Duncan 1926, pl. III).



Fig. 9: Er-Rujm: the row of vertical slabs set in the rear-wall of Hall 152 (after Mazar - de Miroschedji 1996, fig. 12).

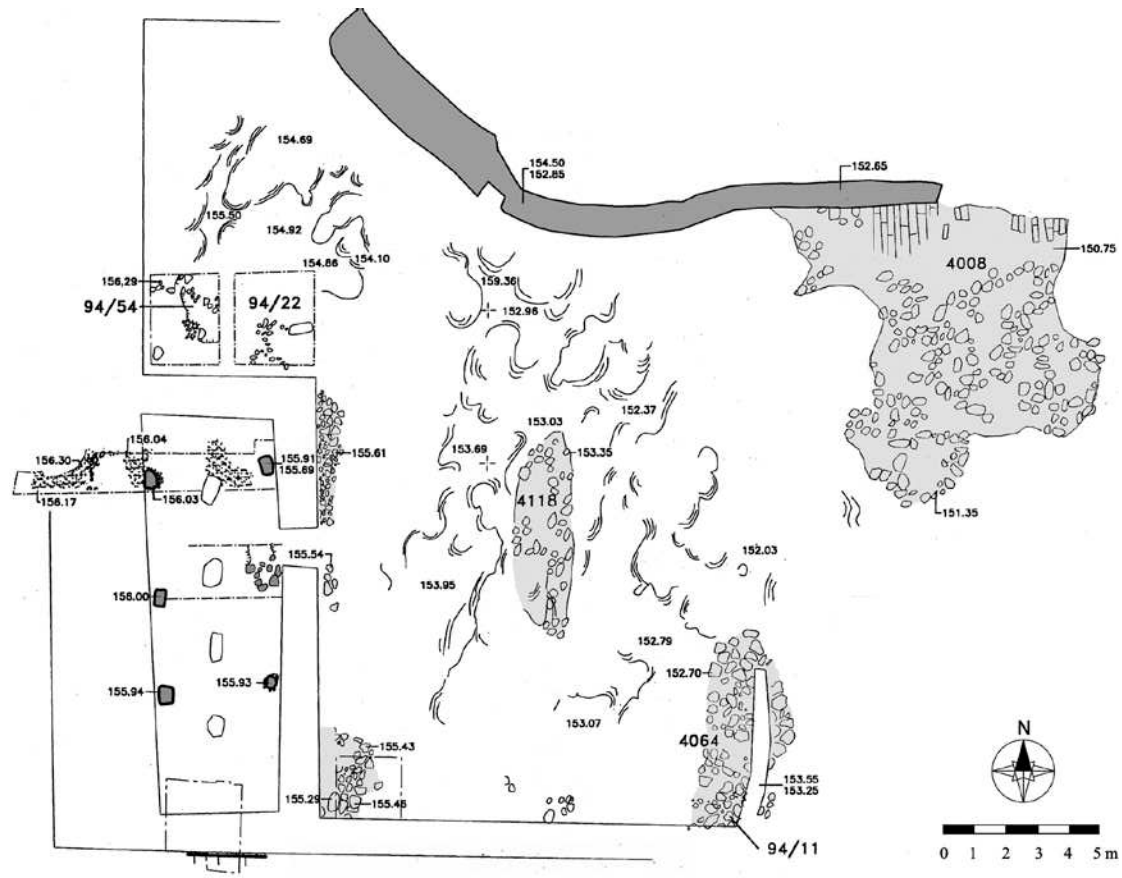


Fig. 10: Tell el-Mutesellim: plan of the sacred precinct of stratum XIX/level J-2 (redrawn from Finkelstein - Ussishkin 2000a, fig. 3.10).



Fig. 11: Tell el-Mutesellim: detail of the earliest slab-paved courtyard in the EB I sacred precinct (after Loud 1948, fig. 146).

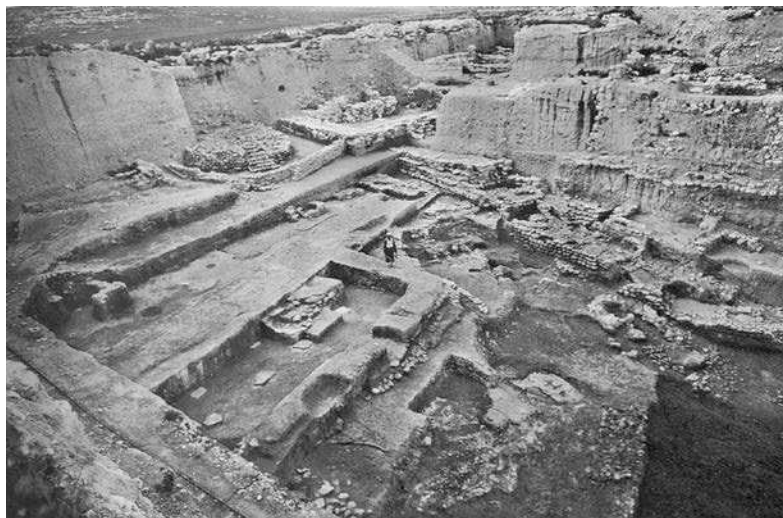


Fig. 12: Tell el-Mutesellim: the sacred precinct of stratum XIX/level J-3 with Temple 4050; in the background, EB III altar 4017 and Temple 4040 (after Finkelstein - Ussishkin 2000a, fig. 3.7).

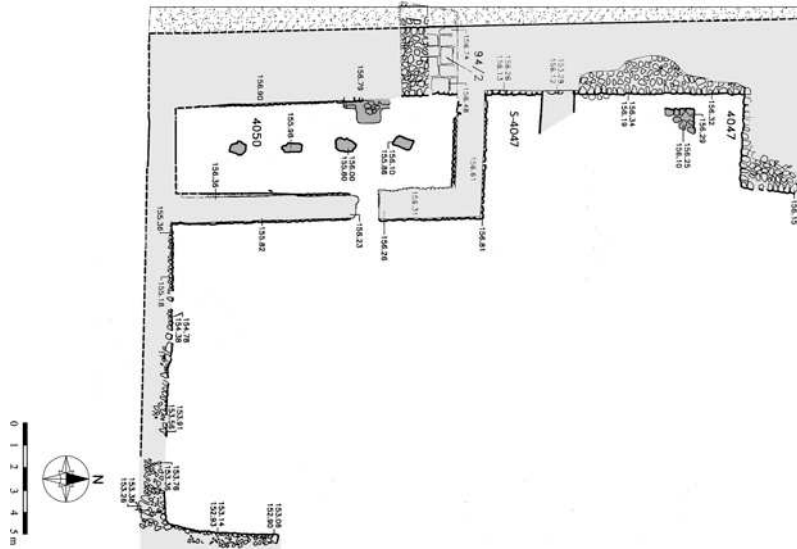


Fig. 13: Tell el-Mutesellim: plan of the sacred precinct of stratum XIX/level J-3 (redrawn from Finkelstein - Ussishkin 2000a, fig. 3.11).

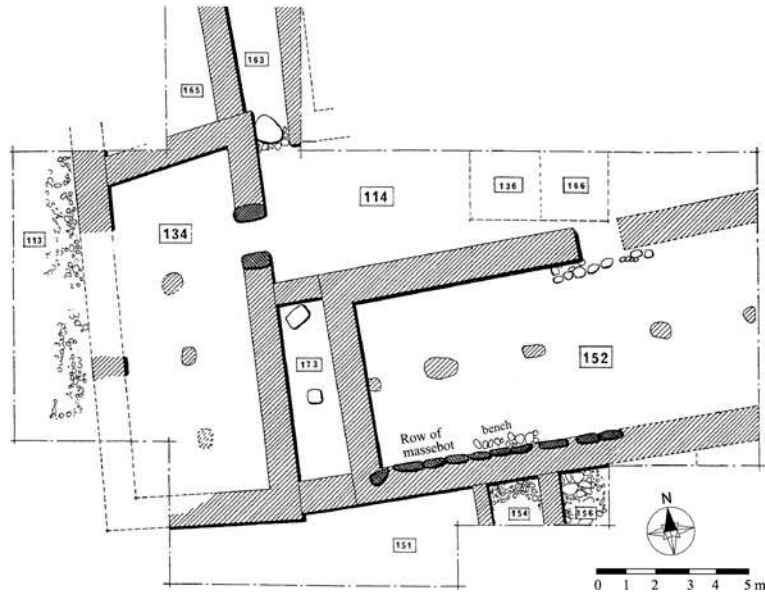


Fig. 14: Er-Rujm: plan of the public complex on the Acropolis (redrawn from Mazar - de Miroschedji 1996, fig. 6).