

## Preface

The research detailed in this volume investigates agrarian life amid the dramatic abandonment of southern Levantine towns in the late third millennium BC. The catalyst for our investigations lay in the ground-breaking results of the East Jordan Valley Survey (EJVS) (Ibrahim et al. 1975), which highlighted evidence from Tell el-Hayyat (“mound of the snakes”) and Tell Abu en-Ni‘aj [N] (“mound of the father of ewes”), Jordan. Surface ceramics from Tell el-Hayyat indicated an unprecedented sequence of occupation across the transition from Early Bronze IV non-urbanised society into the re-urbanised Middle Bronze Age, while newly-discovered Tell Abu en-Ni‘aj carried the rare potential of a sizeable, deeply-stratified village occupied solely in Early Bronze IV. The excavation of Tell el-Hayyat in 1982, 1983 and 1985 documented this settlement’s founding in late Early Bronze IV and its subsequent development as a temple-centred community through the Middle Bronze Age (Falconer and Fall 2006). The 1985 field season at Tell el-Hayyat provided the opportunity for test excavations at Tell Abu en-Ni‘aj, as well as reconnaissance of several other sites reported by the EJVS as likely Early Bronze Age settlements, including Dhahret Umm el-Marar and Umm el-Ba‘ir. The 1985 excavations at Tell Abu en-Ni‘aj revealed multiple strata of mudbrick architecture and abundant material remains of an Early Bronze IV village extending across Fields 1, 2 and 3, implicating settlement over the entire roughly 2.5 ha expanse of the tell. The winter 1996/97 field season provided the first complete documentation of seven architectural phases of habitation in Field 4 at Ni‘aj, while simultaneous excavations exposed the remains of Early Bronze IV Dhahret Umm el-Marar, a walled settlement about eight km to the southeast, perched in the foothills of the Transjordanian Escarpment. Just to the south of Marar, surface evidence suggested possible Early Bronze Age occupation at Umm el-Ba‘ir, although our test trenches revealed remains most likely of an Iron Age farmstead. In spring 2000, the excavation of Tell Abu en-Ni‘aj reached fruition by expanding Field 4 to further expose extensive and repeatedly rebuilt multi-room domestic compounds linked by alleyways and sherd-paved streets as community planning evolved over multiple centuries. This architectural history incorporates links with Levantine ritual practices in preceding and subsequent periods, as represented by the broad room temple of Phase 6 (paralleled by Early Bronze Age temples at Megiddo and elsewhere), and a prominently-located Phase 1 shrine marked by anterior buttresses and standing stones (similar to buttresses and standing stones associated with the Phase 5 temple at nearby Tell el-Hayyat).

In order to paint a broadly-informed portrait of ancient agrarian life during town abandonment we have

maintained our attention to natural and social landscapes that characterized the investigation of Tell el-Hayyat. In this case, we link Tell Abu en-Ni‘aj with its surroundings on the basis of vegetation modelling and archaeobotanical analysis. Bayesian modelling of AMS <sup>14</sup>C ages from carbonised seeds at Tell Abu en-Ni‘aj supports a particularly detailed single-site Early Bronze IV chronology, which contributes most importantly to a significantly earlier start date (ca. 2500 cal BC) and expanded timeframe for this period. In turn, this stratigraphic and chronological structure enables newly detailed diachronic analyses of life at Ni‘aj focused on cultivation practices, pottery form and function, chipped stone manufacture, and activity areas defined by ground stone. Our exploration of Tell Abu en-Ni‘aj and Dhahret Umm el-Marar ultimately strives to weave a variety of related analytical perspectives into the fabric of a detailed portrait of Early Bronze IV village life in the northern Jordan Valley, which expands and augments current appreciations of this society and timeframe, and inspires avenues of investigation in the future.

## Abstract

This volume synthesises the results and interpretations from the excavation of Tell Abu en-Ni'aj, Jordan directed by the authors in 1985, 1996/97 and 2000. We also integrate evidence from the excavation of Dhahret Umm el-Marar during the 1996/97 season. The inhabitants of these villages witnessed the dramatic abandonment of Bronze Age towns across the southern Levant in the late third millennium BC. The excavated evidence from these agrarian communities accordingly provides a particularly detailed portrait of rural life during one of the most pronounced episodes of non-urbanised society in ancient Southwestern Asia.

A notably turbulent stretch of Levantine social history featured the wholesale abandonment of towns during Early Bronze IV (sometimes labelled the "Intermediate Bronze Age," ca. 2500-2000 BC) and their equally dramatic rejuvenation in the Middle Bronze Age (ca. 2000-1600 BC). Tell Abu en-Ni'aj embodies the remains of an Early Bronze IV farming community (2.5 ha in size; estimated to house 500-750 people) in the rich alluvial farmland of the Jordan Valley, Jordan. The site lies approximately 1.5 km southwest of Middle Bronze Age Tell el-Hayyat, also excavated by the authors, and published previously in British Archaeological Reports (Falconer and Fall 2006). Tell Abu en-Ni'aj illustrates village life in the absence of town centres, in contrast to Hayyat, a hamlet occupied amid the redevelopment of towns in the subsequent Middle Bronze Age. Only a few Early Bronze IV villages in the Levant have been excavated; fewer still have Tell Abu en-Ni'aj's long stratified record and its correspondingly fine-grained portrait of an Early Bronze IV rural agrarian community.

Our research on Tell Abu en-Ni'aj is presented in a series of 12 chapters. We begin by reviewing the larger context of previous archaeological investigations and inferences of Levantine society during Early Bronze IV. Chapter One thereby introduces Tell Abu en-Ni'aj in a broad interpretive context. With this background in mind, in Chapter Two we summarize the methods we applied to the excavation and analysis of material evidence at this focal site in the northern Jordan Valley. Chapter Three positions Tell Abu en-Ni'aj amid the environmental dynamics of the third millennium BC on the basis of seed and charcoal analyses of local vegetation and landscapes, and modelling of changing potential vegetation in the Jordan Valley and the greater Southern Levant. The architectural configurations of this Early Bronze IV community are presented in Chapter Four as they reveal spatial distinctions and chronological trends that we incorporate in our interpretations of social behaviour at Tell Abu en-Ni'aj. Chapter Five presents the chronological framework for our analyses, which is based

on Bayesian modelling of newly-expanded suites of AMS ages from Tell Abu en-Ni'aj and Tell el-Hayyat. These models are related to one another and as they articulate with the ongoing revision of Bronze Age absolute chronologies in the Jordan Valley and the Levant more generally. In light of a revised Early Bronze IV chronology beginning about 2500 cal BC, we present the ceramic evidence from Tell Abu en-Ni'aj in Chapter Six according to its seven stratified assemblages, stylistic and functional trends through time, and in comparison to the assemblages from other Early Bronze IV excavated settlements and cemeteries. Chapter Seven explores the behavioural and demographic implications of changing pottery repertoires through the founding, development and abandonment of Tell Abu en-Ni'aj, as well as possible linkages with the establishment of nearby Tell el-Hayyat during its Early Bronze IV Phase 6. Chapter Eight highlights the stone and metal tool technologies used at Tell Abu en-Ni'aj. A remarkable Canaanite blade assemblage represents a hallmark Early Bronze IV technology, which is analysed on the basis of inferred patterns of chert procurement, blade manufacture and agricultural intensification. Functional and spatial analysis of ground stone implements infers shifting household activity areas at Tell Abu en-Ni'aj, while copper artefacts are discussed in terms of their utilitarian use and Early Bronze IV exchange patterns. Chapter Nine presents a synthesis and interpretation of the carbonised seeds from Tell Abu en-Ni'aj as they reveal agrarian responses to social flux and environmental change during Early Bronze IV. Chapter Ten explores village ritual behaviour on the basis of a remarkable suite of animal burials associated with a Phase 6 temple and a Phase 1 shrine, which find architectural parallels at other Levantine sites in preceding and subsequent periods of the Bronze Age. During our 1996/97 field season, we excavated the nearby Early Bronze IV hilltop village of Dhahret Umm al-Marar and tested the small Iron Age site of Umm el-Ba'ir. Chapter Eleven synthesises the Marar excavations and considers the relationship of this settlement to Tell Abu en-Ni'aj and larger implications for Early Bronze IV settlement patterns and society. We conclude our study with a synthetic summation in Chapter Twelve of the contributions generated by the excavation of Tell Abu en-Ni'aj (as well as Tell el-Hayyat and Dhahret Umm al-Marar) for archaeological inference of Early Bronze IV chronology, settlement, and society in the Southern Levant. Through its discussion and interpretation of Tell Abu en-Ni'aj as a sedentary agrarian community, this volume portrays village life during a particularly dramatic example of region-wide town abandonment as a contribution to the archaeological interpretation of pronounced social dynamics in early civilisations.

## The Advent and Abandonment of Levantine Urbanism

### Introduction

The ancient Near East is much celebrated as a hearth of early urbanised civilisation. Yet small villages, rather than large cities, housed most farmers whose labour enabled the rise of state governments, institutionalised religion and mercantile economies. Ironically, village life remains less well-documented archaeologically and textually during the development of early urbanised Levantine society. This is especially pronounced during periods of social transformation in which city life declined or was abandoned altogether. This volume synthesises the results and inferences derived from the archaeological excavation of Tell Abu en-Ni'aj, Jordan (Photo 1.1) that illuminate agrarian village life during a particularly pervasive abandonment of early towns in the Southern Levant (i.e., modern Palestine, Israel and western Jordan). These excavations reveal that Tell Abu en-Ni'aj was a largely sedentary agrarian village in the latter part of the Early Bronze Age, during a period of dramatic de-urbanisation and increased mobile pastoralism throughout the region in the late third millennium BC (Falconer and Fall 2016).

Our interpretations of rural life at Tell Abu en-Ni'aj will build on comparisons with our completed excavation and analyses of Tell el-Hayyat (Falconer and Fall 2006), a

nearby hamlet inhabited during the Middle Bronze Age (ca. 1950-1650 BC) (Falconer and Fall 2017), a subsequent era of re-urbanisation. The excavation of Tell Abu en-Ni'aj (and comparison with Hayyat) provides a highly unusual *rural* perspective on the economic impacts and responses engendered by urban collapse and redevelopment in early complex societies (Table 1.1).

**Table 1.1. Traditional and revised Early and Middle Bronze Age chronologies for the Southern Levant. Traditional chronology based on Levy (1995: fig. 3); revised chronology based on Regev et al. (2012a), Falconer and Fall (2016, 2017) and Höflmayer (2017)**

Period	Traditional (BC)	Revised (cal BC)
MB III	1650-1500	1700-1600
MB II	1800-1650	1850/1800-1700
MB I	2000-1800	2000/1900-1850/1800
EB IV	2200-2000	2500-2000/1900
EB III	2700-2200	2900-2500
EB II	3000-2700	3000-2900
EB I	3500-3000	3500-3000



**Photo 1.1. Excavations at Tell Abu en-Ni'aj Field 4, winter 2000; facing northwest with Area GG in foreground.**

The rise of early Near Eastern civilisations is particularly noteworthy for the variety of paths by which cities and states grew and receded. In systematic terms, cities are envisioned as the nuclei that integrated urban communities with each other and with the myriad villages that housed most ancient populations (e.g., Adams 1981; Wright 1986; Maisels 1990; Pollock 1999; Yoffee 2005). In the Southern Levant, partially in recognition of the modest size of Bronze Age “cities,” the appearance and development of fortified towns leads to inference of “city-states” (Esse 1991; Bunimovitz 1995; Finkelstein 1995; Ilan 1995; de Miroschedji 1999; cf. Savage et al. 2007; Philip 2008). The city-state concept (see discussions in Griffith and Thomas 1981; Maisels 1990; Charlton and Nichols 1997; Hansen 2000) can be applied to infer a Levantine political landscape populated by localised independent polities with small centres and their subordinate villages (Savage and Falconer 2003; Falconer and Savage 2009). Early Near Eastern urbanism, however, particularly when manifested in shifting configurations of city states, was an intriguingly fragile edifice that incorporated an inherent tension between central authorities and traditional kin-based society (e.g., Stein 1998), and, correspondingly, between cities and villages. Even in regions that were undeniable urban heartlands (e.g., Adams 1981), the fortunes of ancient city life waxed and waned significantly and repeatedly. Archaeologists have become effective assessors of societal collapse (e.g., Yoffee and Cowgill 1988; Tainter 1988, 2006; Weiss, et al., 1993; Wilkinson 1994; Cooper 2010; Schwartz and Nichols 2010; but see discussion in McAnany and Yoffee 2009), but less prolific analysts of specific components of “collapsed” societies. While the roles of village communities in early complex societies have begun to receive long-overdue attention in the Near East and elsewhere (e.g., Schwartz and Falconer 1994; Wattenmaker 1998; Wilkinson 2003; Falconer and Redman 2009; Schwartz 2015), the economic strategies practiced by rural farmers in the absence of urban markets and authority remain poorly appreciated.

### **The Levantine Bronze Age**

The rise of complex societies in the Southern Levant provides a particularly dramatic setting in which to specify how village communities endured processes of drastic social flux. The Levantine Bronze Age featured the advent of town life in Early Bronze II-III (ca. early third millennium BC), town abandonment during Early Bronze IV (ca. late third millennium BC), and a dramatic rejuvenation of towns and cities in the Middle Bronze Age (ca. early second millennium BC). The “Early Bronze IV” terminology adopted here results from an evolution of social hypotheses and accompanying nomenclature (see also discussion in Palumbo 1991: 6-22). Albright (1932; 1962; 1966) first utilised “Middle Bronze I” to denote evidence from the terminal portion of the third millennium BC. Wright (1938) subsequently introduced “Early Bronze IV” to suggest a slightly earlier period for several mortuary assemblages in Palestine. Albright and Wright implicitly tried to link a relatively distinct body of material culture,

especially pottery, to previously defined preceding and following periods. Kenyon (e.g., 1951; 1957), on the other hand, interjected a new term, “Intermediate Early Bronze-Middle Bronze,” to bolster her inference of “an intrusive culture with a minimum of connections with the preceding and succeeding phases” (1957: 41), which was introduced by an invasion of Amorites from Syria. Kenyon’s “Amorite Invasion Hypothesis” provided a formal explanation for the derivation of material assemblages found primarily in tombs, rather than stratified tell deposits, proposed to date to the late third millennium BC. This hypothesis accorded with some previous, less formalised thought (e.g., Wright 1938; Albright 1940; de Vaux 1946), gained strong new adherents (e.g., Lapp 1966), and inspired more nuanced ideas of nomadic movement and influence (e.g., Tufnell 1958; Amiran 1960; Dever 1970; 1971; Prag 1974; Rowton 1974, 1977). We might trace the original inspiration for non-sedentism as the prevailing explanatory paradigm for Early Bronze IV society to Kenyon’s provocative contributions.

While dogmatic incorporation of Amorites, whether invaders or otherwise, has faded from current discourse, chronological terminology continues to carry implicit interpretive connotations. “Intermediate Bronze Age” nomenclature tends to detach interpretations of its communities and society from those of immediately earlier or subsequent periods. “Middle Bronze I,” on the other hand, leads to potential confusion with newer usage of this term to denote the first major subdivision of the Middle Bronze Age at the beginning of the second millennium BC (traditionally known as “Middle Bronze IIA”).

Thus, in this volume we adopt “Early Bronze IV” terminology for the period of town abandonment and its material evidence to avoid potential ambiguity and to entertain inter-period ties, especially to preceding periods. Likewise, we adopt “Middle Bronze I, II and III” terminology (corresponding to traditional “Middle Bronze IIA, B and C” nomenclature) in reference to the tripartite redevelopment of towns, town life and nascent localised polities during the Middle Bronze Age.

In overview, the Bronze Age represents a watershed in the development of complex society in the Southern Levant. Archaeological investigations over the last several decades have inferred a roughly two millennium trajectory of highly fluid, and sometimes dramatic social changes that led from the emergence of towns spanning the Early and Middle Bronze Age to the establishment of localised polities by the Late Bronze Age (Helck 1971; Richard 1987; Na’aman 1988, 1992; Falconer 1994; Bunimovitz 1995; Falconer and Savage 1995, 2009; Finkelstein 1996; Harrison 1997; Strange 2000; Prag 2001; Savage and Falconer 2003; Fischer 2014). Limited numbers of walled communities in Early Bronze I (Joffe 1993; Gophna 1995; Philip 2003, 2008) anticipated more nucleated Early Bronze II and III settlement patterns, signified by widespread fortified towns across the region (Greenberg 2002, 2014; de Miroschedji 2009,

2014). The Early Bronze Age witnessed a multi-century process of de-urbanisation, culminating in the pervasive abandonment of towns in favour of farming villages, hamlets and seasonal encampments during Early Bronze IV (Palumbo 1991; Dever 1989, 1995; Cohen 2009; Prag 2014). Middle Bronze I was marked by the relatively sudden redevelopment of walled towns, which proliferated in number, size and scale of fortification during an apex of regional population in Middle Bronze II and III (Greenberg 2002; Bourke 2014; Cohen 2014).

Chronological and social interpretations of Levantine society depend traditionally on systematic trends in material culture style (especially pottery vessel morphology) and typological parallels with adjacent regions (e.g., pottery and metal implements in Syria, Lebanon and Egypt) (Cohen 2002, 2014; Bourke 2014; de Miroschedji 2014; Prag 2014; Richard 2014). Levantine chronology has been calibrated on the basis of estimated linkages with Egyptian dynastic chronologies. As a case in point, the similar phenomena of town abandonment in the Levant and the collapse of central political authority in Egypt have led to the traditional inferred contemporaneity of Early Bronze IV with the Egyptian First Intermediate Period between about 2200 and 2000 BC (Bell 1971; Ben-Tor 1991; Stager 1992; Dever 1995; Prag 2014). Likewise, the well-documented ascension of the 12th Dynasty in Egypt ca. 2000 BC provides a reference point for the social and political coalescence of large towns at the beginning of the Levantine Middle Bronze Age (Dever 1987a; Stager 1992; Greenberg 2002). These assumed chronological linkages, however, apply a form of tautological reasoning in which Egyptian political dynamics are used to both date and explain seemingly related phenomena in the Southern Levant (see also Bruins 2007: 65 for a similar perspective from Egypt).

With this critique in mind, it is particularly noteworthy that the Levantine Early Bronze Age is experiencing a comprehensive chronometric revision. Bayesian modelling of calibrated radiocarbon ages from sites across the Northern and Southern Levant has moved the beginning of the Early Bronze Age and its sub-periods substantially earlier than assumed by traditional chronologies. Of particular interest for this study, the Early Bronze III/IV transition is now repositioned at least as early as 2450 cal BC (Regev et al. 2012a) (see Table 1.1). Similarly, coordinated multi-site analyses of <sup>14</sup>C ages has pushed back the advent of the Middle Bronze Age later than the traditional start date ca. 2000 BC (Bruins and van der Plicht 1995, 2003; Marcus 2010, 2013; Bourke 2006; Fischer 2006; Kutschera et al. 2012; Falconer and Fall 2017).

Many of the most influential studies of Bronze Age society emphasise the formative social, religious and political influences of urban communities and institutions, which more likely manifest foreign connections and perpetuate preconceived chronological and social interpretations. However, a growing archaeological literature now highlights the crucial roles of rural villages that provided

the economic foundation for the rise of Levantine urbanised society and persisted through its periodic collapse (e.g., Fall et al. 1998; 2002; Schwartz and Nichols 2010; Schwartz 2015). These same communities also hold great promise in the construction of independent chronological and social interpretive paradigms for the Southern Levant.

### **Traditional and Revised Views of Early Bronze IV**

The synthetic interpretation of Early Bronze IV society (e.g., Prag 1974, 2014; Dever 1980, 1995; Palumbo 1991) has built on several salient characteristics of material culture and settlement patterns:

- Virtually all Levantine fortified towns were abandoned by the end of Early Bronze III.
- In striking contrast to those in preceding and succeeding periods, Early Bronze IV sites are small, often seasonal, and spread into the arid margins of the Southern Levant.
- Following Early Bronze IV, urbanised settlements redeveloped in the Middle Bronze Age even more rapidly than they had collapsed previously.
- Early Bronze IV ceramics, chipped stone, and metal implements are stylistically and technically distinct from those in preceding and, especially, succeeding periods.

Considering these features, Early Bronze IV has been portrayed as an abrupt and anomalous punctuation in the development of Levantine complex society during which the basis for agrarian urbanism was abandoned in favour of non-sedentary settlement and transhumant sheep/goat pastoralism (see Prag 1974; Dever 1980 for classic syntheses). However, a variety of tantalising considerations now suggest that Early Bronze IV research may reveal crucial insights on the long-term social foundations of Levantine civilisation if we can balance our current emphasis on non-sedentary pastoralism with greater attention to the roles of sedentary villages and their constituent households. Perhaps most fundamentally, Near Eastern historic and ethnographic accounts document a fundamental interdependence between sedentary farmers and nonsedentary pastoralists that also must have held true in the more distant past (e.g., Kramer 1982; Gilead 1991; Levy 1991; Finkelstein 1991; Abdi 2015; Honeychurch and Makarewicz 2016; Cakirlar 2017). Thus, unless we wish to invoke ethnographic analogy based on more independent and historically more recent forms of nomadism (Khazanov 1978; 1984: 44-53), our models must link non-sedentary sheep/goat pastoralists in seasonal encampments with sedentary farmers in permanent villages. This argument finds some corroboration in an analysis of survey data from the Mediterranean coastal plain, which suggests that Early Bronze IV settlement patterns strongly resemble the rural components of the systems of Early Bronze II-III and the Middle Bronze Age (e.g., Falconer and Savage 1995). Although most Early Bronze IV sites occupy new locations, this unexpected result suggests a persistent element of rural settlement amid the waxing and waning of Levantine Bronze Age cities. In light of these



**Map 1.1. Location of Tell Abu en-Ni'aj, Tell el-Hayyat, and other Early Bronze IV and Middle Bronze Age archaeological sites in the Levant.**

characteristics, village communities like Tell Abu en-Ni'aj take on special importance as points of sedentary/non-sedentary articulation within the fabric of “de-urbanised” Early Bronze IV society, and as touchstones for linking the rural foundations of early Levantine civilisation through periods of fortified town centres, their abandonment, and their rebirth.

The research presented here examines the economic and ecological impacts of rural agrarian communities amid trajectories of urbanisation and de-urbanisation in the early civilisations of the Near East. The excavation and analysis of Tell Abu en-Ni'aj brings to fruition a comparative study of village life tailored to illuminate the rural effects of town abandonment, as exemplified at Tell Abu en-Ni'aj, and its rebirth, as seen at Tell el-Hayyat. Both sites embody the remains of small Bronze Age farming settlements in the Jordan Valley (Map 1.1). Judging from population densities in traditional Middle Eastern villages (e.g., Kramer 1982),

Tell Abu en-Ni'aj (which covers about 2.5 ha) had 500 to 750 inhabitants in Early Bronze IV, while Hayyat (0.5 ha) housed only 100 to 150 people during the Middle Bronze Age. Tell Abu en-Ni'aj lies approximately 250 metres below sea level (mbsl), perched on Pleistocene lacustrine clay at the edge of the *ghor* overlooking the present floodplain of the Jordan River (the *zor*) (Ibrahim, Sauer and Yassine 1976: 51, site 64). Tell el-Hayyat is situated amid Holocene alluvial soil 1.5 km to the northeast of Tell Abu en-Ni'aj and about ten metres higher in elevation (Ibrahim, Sauer and Yassine 1976: 51-54, site 56). During the Bronze Age, many basic characteristics of the two villages were very similar: they were both small agrarian villages set in similar environmental situations (Falconer and Magness-Gardiner 1989; Fall et al. 1998; Falconer et al. 2004; Falconer and Fall 2006). The most significant social factor to inspire different behaviours in the two communities was the presence or absence of Levantine towns. Thus, Tell Abu en-Ni'aj and Tell el-Hayyat provide

an ideal controlled comparison of rural responses to town abandonment in Early Bronze IV and redevelopment in the Middle Bronze Age.

### **Archaeological Inference of Early Bronze IV Society**

The long-standing emphasis on non-sedentary pastoralism as a social and economic mainstay of Early Bronze IV society stems from a variety of factors, some of which have been introduced briefly above. In the considerable discussion surrounding Kenyon's Amorite Invasion Hypothesis and its numerous amended variants, much attention was directed first to cemeteries associated with larger excavated tells in the hope of tying mortuary assemblages into stratified sequences of material culture. Kenyon's own tomb excavations at Jericho led to a tomb typology with direct implications for a chronology of ethnic incursions (Kenyon 1960: 180-259; 1965: 33-161), and Amiran (1960) looked to tomb pottery and stratified parallels, for example at Tell Beit Mirsim, Lachish and especially Megiddo. Amiran introduced the analytical concept of pottery "families" to accommodate the non-stratified nature of these tomb groups, originally as sequential Families A, B and C (1960), which were modified over the years into the largely contemporaneous Southern Group, Northern Group and Bethel Group (Amiran 1974). In the early 1970s, Dever adopted the concept of families and elaborated them by embracing other lines of material evidence, notably metal tools, and hypothesised a suite of seven families related both temporally and geographically (Dever 1970, 1971, 1973). The fundamental social mechanism that linked seemingly disparate evidence from across the Southern Levant arose from the articulation of anthropological theory with the results of archaeological excavation. Ethnographic analogy based on modern pastoralists (especially Rowton's [1967] concept of "dimorphic society") offered a means for linking cemeteries and settlements as way stations visited by Early Bronze IV transhumant herders during their annual migratory cycle. An influential body of literature drew considerable inspiration from the excavation of cemetery sites in the Levantine hill country (Dever 1972, 1975a, 1975b, 1981; Gitin 1975) and seasonal encampments in the Negev desert (Kochavi 1963a; 1963b; Cohen and Dever 1978, 1979, 1981; Dever 1983, 1985, 2014; Haiman 1996). The classic synthesis of this approach (Dever 1980; see also 1992, 1995) posited seasonal transhumance between winter herding camps in desert regions (e.g., at Har Yeruham and Be'er Resisim) and highland summer pastures and cemeteries (e.g., at Jebel Qa'aqir and Khirbet Kirmil).

Interestingly, as argued by Palumbo (1991, 2008), the development of this "dimorphic" transhumant model did not incorporate a modest, but growing, body of evidence derived from excavations east of the Jordan River. Very limited assemblages of Early Bronze IV material culture had been excavated from sites with permanent architecture at Ader (Albright 1934; Cleveland 1960) and Aro'er (Olavarri 1969) on the Transjordanian Plateau, Khirbat

Iskandar (Parr 1960) in the Wadi Wala east of the Dead Sea, and Bab edh-Dhra' (Rast and Schaub 2003) on the Dead Sea Plain, while the most influential evidence arose from the excavation of Iktanu just northeast of the Dead Sea (Prag 1971, 1974). Iktanu provided the first instance of an Early Bronze IV site (as opposed to a minor EB IV component of a multi-period site) with detailed evidence of stratified sedentary settlement. While still appealing to in-migration of pastoral groups from Syria to explain the changes from Early Bronze III into IV, Prag (e.g., 1984, 1985) instigated a shift toward incorporation of sedentary communities into Early Bronze IV social reconstructions, making use of evidence excavated east of the Jordan River. The excavation of Tell Iktanu revealed a settlement with two distinct stratified phases of stone-built houses (Prag 1974, 1986, 1988, 1989, 1990), opening a window on Early Bronze IV village life that became amplified by surveys and excavations conducted in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

Systematic regional reconnaissance (e.g., Ibrahim, Sauer and Yassine 1976, 1988; Gophna and Portugali 1988; Palumbo 1991) revealed numerous sedentary Early Bronze IV sites throughout the Southern Levant. A general comparison of geographical distributions and densities reveals a noticeable concentration of settlements (largely seasonal) in the Negev (Palumbo 1991: fig. 2) and of cemeteries in the southern hill country (i.e., Hebron hills) (Palumbo 1991: figs. 3, 24), apparently in keeping with hypothesised Early Bronze IV transhumance. Regional survey data demonstrate, however, that the Jordan Valley features more permanent settlements than in any other portion of the Southern Levant (Palumbo 1991: figs. 23 A and B; 2008: fig. 7.1). These data provide a first indication of a distinct geographic pattern of Early Bronze IV village communities arrayed along the bottom lands of the Jordan Valley, the wadis of the Transjordanian escarpment and the western edge of the Transjordanian uplands. These villages constitute one component of the Early Bronze IV settlement system (especially east of the Jordan Rift) in which the most striking changes between Early Bronze II/III and IV are relocation and decrease in average settlement size, rather than a drastic decline in settlement frequency (Palumbo 2008: 234).

Several village excavations along the Jordan Rift figure prominently in emerging interpretations of sedentary Early Bronze IV communities. The East Jordan Valley Survey (Ibrahim, Sauer and Yassine 1976) reported surface evidence from Tell el-Hayyat that suggested a stratified Early Bronze IV-Middle Bronze Age occupation sequence, which was corroborated by subsequent excavation of a basal Early Bronze IV stratum and five superimposed Middle Bronze Age levels (Falconer and Fall 2006). Elsewhere in the northern Jordan Valley, excavations at Tell Umm Hammad (Helms 1986) exposed Early Bronze IV domestic architecture in four stages of deposition (Helms 1989). Along the Wadi Wala east of the Dead Sea, excavations at Khirbat Iskandar have exposed architecture interpreted as a village gateway, as

well as exposures of domestic structures in lower strata (Richard et al. 2010).

While substantial evidence has been recovered from pastoral encampments, excavations at stratified Early Bronze IV farming villages like Tell Abu en-Ni'aj remain limited. In the context of the growing evidence for Early Bronze IV sedentary communities summarised above, this volume reports on the excavation and interpretation of seven stratified phases of extensive village remains at Tell Abu en-Ni'aj, as well as the excavation of the nearby hilltop Early Bronze IV site of Dhahrat Umm al-Marar. Tell Abu en-Ni'aj provides an unprecedented, deeply stratified record with which to study how Canaanite village farmers coped with the abandonment of Bronze Age towns, perhaps the most dramatic example of region-wide urban collapse in the ancient Near East.