

Anatomy of a Destruction: Crisis Architecture, Termination Rituals and the Fall of Canaanite Hazor

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Abstract

Destruction levels, a recurring feature in ancient Near Eastern tell sites, are too often treated as isolated events. Recent scholarship on the formation processes of the archaeological record stresses the need to understand site destructions as part of long-term processes, rather than as isolated and unique events. This paper offers a model for studying destruction based on the concepts of the materialization of ritual and royal ideology. The identification of crisis architecture and termination rituals is used to shed new light on the activities taking place at the site prior to its final destruction and abandonment. This model is applied to the destruction of Canaanite Hazor at the end of the Late Bronze Age, and provides an alternative view of this event as a result of social, political, cultural and ideological circumstances rather than as an isolated event, stressing the role of internal socio-economic and ideological factors rather than external agents.

Keywords: *Crisis architecture, termination rituals, Israel, Hazor, Late Bronze Age, Canaan*

Introduction

Destructions are highly visible in the archaeological record—they ‘freeze’ a site at one moment of its existence, and create a window into the dynamic past. The collapsed buildings, the broken vessels and objects on the floors, the layers of ashes and burnt wooden beams, all bear witness to the dramatic end of a settlement. If the site is partially or totally abandoned after such a destruction, then the dramatic effect is intensified. This is the ‘disaster movie’ scenario, jokingly invoked as every archaeologist’s most desirable find. But treating destruction as a single isolable event in the history of a site is misleading. Destruction and abandonment phases identified at a site should be placed within two larger frameworks: that of the site’s temporal development on the one hand, and that of the wider social, political,

cultural and ideological context on the other. This idea forms the basis of abandonment studies, which aim to study sites’ destruction and abandonment as complex social phenomena (Schiffer 1987: 89-90; Cameron 1993, 2003). No case of destruction can be studied in isolation of the phases preceding it, as destruction events mark the culmination of certain social, political, cultural and ideological circumstances.

An analysis of a destruction should thus include not only the detailed description of the loci of destruction themselves and a reconstruction of the last activities that occurred at the site, but also an analysis of the phases preceding the destruction and forming its context (Torrence and Grattan 2002). Such a treatment might form a basis for the reconstruction of the causes of the final

destruction (internal, external or combination of factors) and the identity of its agents. These are sometimes illuminated by contemporary written records and iconographic depictions. Such are the well-known cases of the destruction of Lachish by the Assyrians in 701 BC (Ussishkin 2004: 88-90) and the conquest of Ashkelon by the Babylonians in 604 BC (Stager 1996). Still, in most cases the interpretation must rely solely on archaeological evidence. Given the ubiquity and prevalence of destruction layers in ancient Near Eastern tell sites, it is surprising that a systematic treatment of this phenomenon is largely neglected and that there is no conceptual paradigm for dealing with it (cf. Dever 1992a)

In this paper, I would like to highlight certain aspects of the archaeological remains of destroyed sites, as a first step towards developing such a paradigm. I will introduce and discuss the concepts of 'Crisis Architecture' and 'Termination Rituals'. I will then show how these concepts can be usefully applied to selected Near Eastern cases: Late Bronze Age Lachish, Megiddo and, in much more detail, Hazor. Finally, I will argue that the identification of these features in the destruction levels of the latter site supplies a fresh perspective on the problems of the interpretation and historical reconstruction of the Late Bronze Age crisis years at Hazor and in Canaan.

Conceptual Framework

Crisis Architecture

The idea that the built environment reflects social, political, symbolic and ideological aspects of society is widely accepted in recent scholarship. The built environment is the setting for all human activities, forming the space within which people live, move and undertake particular activities in specific times and appropriate places. Recent studies emphasize the active role played by architecture in the social life of the society that builds and

uses it (e.g. Locock 1994; Parker-Pearson and Richards 1994). This implies that the built environment has several levels of meaning and provides cues, through its fixed (i.e. architectural) and semi-fixed (i.e. furniture) elements, that enable people to act appropriately in certain settings (Rapoport 1988). Thus the life-cycle of buildings, from planning through actual construction, use and subsequent alterations, and until their final destruction or abandonment, is laden with changing meanings. These changing meanings require identification and analysis.

The term 'Crisis Architecture' was coined by Driessen (1995) and applied by him to several cross-cultural cases. Repairs and regular remodeling of buildings are part of the normal evolution and life cycle of the building, and are thus seen as changes in the 'positive direction'. Driessen attempts to 'identify and define **immediate** architectural responses to short-term differing socio-cultural conditions' (1995: 66), conditions which are more specifically defined as 'crisis situations that may be seen as specific, sudden, unannounced **short term changes** in normal socio-cultural conditions' (1995: 65). Such short-term architectural changes will be regarded as reactions to crisis conditions if they involve at least three features: a decrease of energy input in construction and maintenance (disrepair, repair with inferior materials), a change in original plan (restriction of access and circulation, changes in the permeability of the buildings) and a change in the original function of the structures (blocking of functional spaces or their partial abandonment) (Driessen 1995: 67-76).

The detection of a crisis situation based on the architectural evidence depends on our ability to identify 'the role of a building within the original symbolic system of a society and then to examine to what degree changes in architecture are related to changes in the symbolic system' (Driessen 1995: 80). Crisis architecture is expected to be more visible

and the term easier to apply in the context of monumental public buildings, whose scale and elaboration surpass their immediate practical function (Trigger 1990: 119). Monumental buildings, a cross-cultural characteristic of complex societies, usually serve a rather limited array of practical functions: royal palaces, elite residential buildings, public storage and administration structures, major ritual edifices and fortifications. Such public buildings must provide adequate space and the necessary facilities for the activities planned to take place within them, yet this function constitutes only a part of their social role. Such buildings also have an important non-verbal communicative function as visible and enduring ideological statements, forming the material expressions of political and social relations (Kemp 2006: 185).

Monumental architecture, typically the most imposing feature of the urban landscape, is often created and used by ruling elites as a vehicle for gaining legitimacy, through the display of power and the ability to allocate and control the necessary human and material resources (Abrams 1989; Wason 1994: 145-52). For a monumental structure to achieve its ideological goals, it must therefore transmit a complex message: the expression of administrative and economic power of the elite on the one hand, and a commemoration of the community's working project aimed for the common good on the other hand (Pollock 1999: 179-81). Through the awe inspired by the conspicuously located and lavishly built edifices and ritual activities held in them, people could find justification for their share in the labor and resource contribution. In other words, monuments and public buildings can be seen as one aspect of the process of *materialization* of social ideology—the transformation of ideas and values into concrete physical form (DeMarrais 2004). The buildings themselves serve as 'permanent expressions of the ideology that links a group to its territory' (DeMarrais

et al. 1996: 18-19) and as loci of ritual events that serve these symbolic purposes.

The construction of a public building 'fossilizes' the social and ideological structure operating at the time of construction, but what happens to the building after that time is not less important for deciphering its social message. Maintaining the function of a public building as an enduring ideological statement requires that the material representations of its symbolic and ideological aspects 'must be continuously maintained and reproduced, if they are to preserve their social impact' (Knapp 1996: 11-12). Thus, the reverse situation—the weakening of the ideological message following social and political changes and the subsequent deterioration of its material representations—would also be detected in the archaeological record as cases of crisis architecture or 'villagization' (Driessen and Macdonald 1997: 41-47; Kemp 2006: 141-49). An example is the latest phase of the Mycenaean palace at Pylos, which shows several architectural changes, consisting of addition and blocking of doors, construction of cross-walls in corridors, and repairs of damaged walls in a haphazard manner. Subsidiary structures were built, in the same manner, around the once impressive monumental palace (compare Wright 1984: figs. 1-2). The aim of these alterations was probably to gain more storage and industrial space, and to restrict access to and circulation in the main building. As a result, the main structure was diminished in its spaciousness and elegance (Wright 1984). These features are taken to represent centralization measures by the Pylian elite, in a situation of political and economic crisis during the 13th century BC on the Greek mainland (Shelmerdine 1987). This last phase of crisis architecture marks the culmination of a long and gradual process of decline of the Pylos polity and the Mycenaean palatial system as a whole (Sherratt 2001). The last phase of the building, in this case, reflects a crisis situation

of the social system that created and maintained it, and its (futile) efforts to face and overcome this crisis situation.

Furthermore, in some cases public structures might be subject to intentional ritual destruction, marking the symbolic elimination of the power they represent. Several cases in the eastern Mediterranean and the ancient Near East were interpreted in this way: the 'Minoan Hall' at Palaikastro and building B.2 at Mochlos on Crete (Driessen 1999b; Soles 1999), Zimri-Lim's palace at Mari (Margueron 2004: 516-23) and various monumental structures in Mesopotamia (Bjorkman 1999).

Crisis Architecture in Ritual Spaces, or the 'Silencing' of Temples

The above observations are relevant in the case of monumental public buildings in general, but they are especially pertinent to temples and other religious and cultic edifices that serve as ritual spaces. Such buildings delimit the space, whether natural or specially constructed, within which ritual action is performed (Renfrew 1985).

Following Durkheim's (1965) influential functional analysis of public rituals and ceremonies, these are seen as important social instruments serving to enhance and reinforce group cohesion and to legitimize the social power relations. Most attempts to define *ritual action* emphasize aspects such as symbolism and stylization, traditionalism, repetitiveness or invariance, formality or standardization, and the fixity of ritual performance in certain significant places and times (e.g. Rappaport 1979; Bell 1997: 138-69). The power of rituals and their ability to achieve their religious and social goals rely on these characteristics, which are universal and cross-cultural despite the wide historical and geographic variations of the rituals themselves. The characteristics of ritual action are expected to be reflected, in some material form, in the structures that serve as the loci of recurring performances

of standardized and structured ritual activity. The claim that 'architecture, especially funerary architecture, is *ritual materialized and petrified*' (Wilson 1988: 64-65, 134-35—emphasis mine) undoubtedly applies to religious architecture, and especially to monumental public temples. The rituals performed in the temple, the objects used in it and the architectural features of the building itself all are imbued with significance *because* of their location and placement inside the sacred space (Smith 1987: 104). In the ancient Near East, the temple was considered the home of the deity, and the divine power is embedded in every detail of the building itself and its architectural features and decorations (Wengrow 2004: 268).

Thus, the demarcation of specific spaces devoted to ritual performances and religious rites is strongly connected to the materialization of the ideology of power through city planning and public architecture (DeMarrais *et al.* 1996). If rituals held periodically in monumental public temples are instruments for the establishment, legitimation and maintenance of social and political power of the centralized elites, so are the architectural features of the buildings themselves. These features link political power and the transcendental powers of the divine realm, and create a connection between the social world order and the natural cosmic one (Kertzer 1988: 1-14; Earle 1997: 153-54). A remarkable example of this connection is the installation of Mesopotamian king's statues inside temples, where statues of kings and gods alike were ritually enlivened through the rite of the 'opening of the mouth'. Royal statues thus became part of the sacred space and were the recipients of rituals held within the confines of the ritual space (Winter 1992: 16).

Ritual architecture is also a significant link between the society's past, present and future (Kertzer 1988: 12-14). In the ancient Near East, religious structures and sacred precincts in city states form tangible evidence of these special

relationships, 'where the political landscape of the future was negotiated within the material confines of the dynastic past' (Wengrow 2004: 266). In many civilizations monumental temples are the earliest public buildings constructed in the process of urbanization and city-state formation, and the location of the sacred precincts, as well as the plans of the temples, are standardized, traditionally preserved and slow to change through time (Flannery 1998: 36-45). In Mesopotamia, the desired plans of the temples were supposedly revealed by the gods to whom they were dedicated, and usually relied heavily on earlier plans of past temples (Frankfort 1948: 269-71). This is probably relevant also in the Levantine sphere. The monumental symmetrical temples of Middle and Late Bronze Age Canaan were sometimes used for centuries, without major changes in their location or general plan (Kempinsky 1989; Matthiae 1975, 1990; Mazar 1992; S. Bourke pers. comm. for the Pella Migdol-temple).

Consequently, alterations and architectural changes of monumental sacred buildings can be even more significant than changes detected in their domestic or administrative counterparts. In the latter, architectural alterations might be regarded as mere functional adaptation and as a response to practical needs. In a ritual space, whose plan and spatial arrangement must conform to the strict rules of stylization, tradition, standardization and the spatial and temporal fixity of the ritual performances, each change hints at a more profound change in the ritual and religious context of the structure. This is especially relevant in cases of alterations that affect the foci of cultic activity in the building: cultic niches, altars, ritual paraphernalia and images or representation of deities. Such alterations might point to on-going processes of dilapidation and decline, especially if they are followed by the (intentional) destruction of the ritual space.

The divine abandonment of temples prior to their destruction is a recurring literary theme

in the ancient Near East, most notably in Mesopotamian Lamentations commemorating the annihilation of the main Sumerian cities (Cohen 1988). The withdrawal of divine power from the city and its king is metaphorically reflected by the 'silencing' of the temple through its neglect, decline and final destruction, described in Mesopotamian compositions such as 'The Nippur Lament' and 'The Curse of Agade' (Jacobsen 1987; Cooper 1983; Tinney 1996: 103, 148). The actual damage inflicted on the physical features of the temple building is considered a de-sacralization of the sacred space, and can be regarded as a direct attack on the god residing in that temple. This concept resounds in literary descriptions such as the lament over the destruction of the Ekur by Naram-Sin of Agade (Cooper 1983: 55-57). These cases also reflect a crisis in the legitimacy of the king and the basis of the socio-political order (Smith 2003: 203).

Against this background, evidence of a phase of architectural alterations followed by the abandonment and intentional destruction of a cultic structure should be defined as a special case of crisis architecture—religious crisis architecture.

Termination Rituals

'Ritual closure' or 'sealing off' of ritual and ceremonial domestic structures (usually through burning or ceremonial burial) was identified in the archaeological record in the North American southwest (Montgomery 1993; Nelson 2000), in Mesoamerica (Millon 1988; Manzanilla 2003), in Neolithic Europe and the Near East (Stevanović 1997; Verhoeven 1999) and in Chalcolithic Cyprus (Peltenburg 1991). Such 'ritual closures' are interpreted as the theologically *appropriate* way to end the existence of a structure (Bjorkman 1999: 115) or, alternatively, as 'an act of rejection or "ideological closure" of the ideas and practices that defined and integrated a community' (Nelson 2000: 56).

Rituals performed during the construction of new temples are well known in the ancient Near East, both from literary sources and in the archaeological record (Ellis 1968; Wengrow 2004). Their 'opposite' rites, those related to the abandonment and termination of old temples, are not as well documented. It has been suggested that the Mesopotamian city lamentations, dated to the 2nd and 1st millennia BC, were recited in the contexts of razing old temples, as part of rituals aimed at placating the gods and avoiding their wrath (Cohen 1988: 43). Possible expressions of such rituals in Mesopotamia and northern Syria during the late 4th and 3rd millennia BC were recently identified as 'fill deposits' and discussed in detail by Bjorkman (1994; 1999). Bjorkman (1994) collected numerous instances of items which were deposited and covered in temples, just before these buildings were abandoned or leveled up for rebuilding. Some of these objects were intentionally broken or burned before their burial, as part of the process of abandonment and termination of the shrine's use (Bjorkman 1994: 108-11, 467-71). Bjorkman interpreted these acts as a means of desacralizing and decommissioning of the temples by their own cultic personnel. Cases of intentional filling up and symbolic burial of religious buildings, in preparation for their rebuilding or reuse, are also known in the southern Levant (Kempinski 1989: 182; Ben-Tor 2000: 248). In other cases, temples were decommissioned by the removal of their cultic equipment and the burial of the structures themselves, with no intention of subsequent reuse (Herzog 2002: 49-67). Another aspect of such ritual behaviour is the symbolic burial of royal monuments in the city gates, a practice known throughout the ancient Near East during the 2nd and 1st millennia BC (Ussishkin 1970; Mazzoni 1997: 330-32). These acts were previously interpreted in one of two ways: as desecratory acts of intentional damage and humiliation of the sacred objects by the conquering enemies,

or as reverential acts performed by the remnants of the local community returning to the destroyed sites to bury their sacred statues and monuments with veneration and respect (Ussishkin 1970). I would like to propose a third alternative, and introduce the concept of a 'Termination Ritual', a well-defined concept in Mesoamerican archaeology. Termination rituals were conducted by the local community at the site, as part of the razing and rebuilding of important public buildings and temples, and

generally include the defacement, mutilation, breaking, burning or alteration of portable objects (such as pottery...or stone tools), sculptures, stelae or buildings. They may involve the alteration, destruction, or obliteration of specific parts; the moving of objects such as stelae or the scattering of their broken pieces; and even the razing and burial of a monumental structure before new construction. They may consist of defacing decorative masks or portraits on monumental structures...to formally terminate their function (Mock 1998: 5).

The 'fill deposits' identified by Bjorkman represent, in my opinion, one aspect of a wider phenomenon of ancient Near Eastern termination rituals. As pointed out recently by Cowgill (2004: 274), it is not easy to tell the difference between desecratory and reverential termination acts on the basis of their material remains. I suggest that if the remains of such rituals are identified in a phase of alterations and crisis architecture, and precede the abandonment or destruction of the monumental temple, they should probably be understood as desecratory termination acts rather than reverential decommissioning of the superseded structure. In such cases, their existence highlights the on-going dilapidation of their architectural context as part of the social and ideological decline and is understood in this context.

In this section I offered two concepts that connect architectural features to their social

and political context. Crisis architecture applies to changes made to structures that reflect social and political crisis. The application of this concept to ritual space (i.e. religious crisis architecture) would be exemplified, sometimes, by termination rituals.

Late Bronze Age Canaan: Case Studies

The southern Levant in the 2nd millennium BC provides an ideal case study for the discussion of the theoretical concepts of crisis architecture and termination rituals in a specific historical and social context. The political landscape of the southern Levant in the Late Bronze Age (LBA) can be defined as a 'city-state culture' (Hansen 2000: 16-17). It was comprised of several petty kingdoms ruled by local royal dynasties, engaged in a complex network of peer polity interaction (Renfrew and Cherry 1986) under the aegis of Egyptian New Kingdom sovereigns (Bunimovitz 1995). The rich archaeological data and the abundance of contemporary written sources make the area an ideal candidate for the application and testing of general models and theories. The historical insights available through the study of written sources like the Amarna letters and other Egyptian sources should be studied in conjunction with the archaeological data gained through the meticulous excavations of multi-layered tells and the intensive surveys conducted in the area during recent decades (Finkelstein 1996). The results of these analyses offer an opportunity for examining both the long- and short-term processes of development and decline of the Canaanite city states through their material remains.

Three sites, the centers of major Canaanite kingdoms during the LBA, will be discussed below as case studies for the identification and application of the theoretical concepts of crisis architecture and termination rituals. Lachish, Megiddo and Hazor were chosen because they were either recently published in

a final form (Lachish) or re-excavated (Megiddo and Hazor), and thus enable a renewed and detailed discussion of the relevant LBA strata. All three sites were inhabited throughout the 2nd millennium BC (the Middle and Late Bronze Ages) and their territories can be delineated on the basis of references in historical sources and the application of theoretical models (Bunimovitz 1995; Finkelstein 1996; Na'aman 1997). Furthermore, all were violently destroyed sometime in the turbulent period of the 13th–12th centuries BC, the 'Crisis Years' in the eastern Mediterranean (Ward and Joukowsky 1992).

Lachish and Megiddo

As discussed above, alterations to the nature of a building may indicate the disappearance or disempowerment of the social forces or their replacement by a different entity. A possible example of this situation is the last phase of the LBA 'Pillared Building', attributed to Stratum VI at Tel Lachish, a major kingdom in the Shephela in central Israel. Stratum VI represents the heyday of Lachish as an important Canaanite urban center and a local center of Egyptian rule in 13th century BC southern Canaan (Ussishkin 2004: 60-69). Lachish ruled a medium-sized but relatively densely occupied territory. Its fertile environment and strategic location were the sources of its high status among its peers and its Egyptian sovereigns throughout the Late Bronze Age (Finkelstein 1996: 232). The 'Pillared Building' in Area S is a large building, consisting of three 15 m long halls, one of which is columned (Barkay and Ussishkin 2004: 352-62, figs. 8.35-8.38). Finds attributed to the building's original phase include an Egyptian 19th–20th dynasty scarab, a large bronze spear-head, fragments of gold foil, parts of an ivory statue and relatively large amounts of imported Mycenaean pottery (Ussishkin 2004: 66-67). These finds attest to the public function of the original building. In its later phase the structure was

used for domestic activities, reflected by the ovens (*tabuns*) constructed inside the three monumental halls, the pits and industrial installations dug in the open area surrounding the structure, the plain domestic pottery assemblage (mainly plain bowls, kraters and storage jars) and the total lack of prestige items and imported pottery (Barkay and Ussishkin 2004: 358). The excavators claim that this phase represents an influx of poor refugees into the city shortly before its destruction (Ussishkin 2004: 70-71). Following this phase, the structure was destroyed suddenly and violently: ash layers and fallen mudbricks covered the whole structure, and several skeletons of adults, children and babies were found trapped under the collapsed wall (Smith in Ussishkin 2004: 2504-2507). Significantly, remains of the Stratum VI destruction were also detected in other monumental buildings around the site, namely the 'Acropolis Temple' and the city gate (Ussishkin 2004: 70). The agents of this destruction were, according to the excavators, external forces, most probably the 'Sea-Peoples' (Ussishkin 2004: 72). Following the destruction, Tel Lachish was abandoned for almost three hundred years (Barkay and Ussishkin 2004: 358-61).

A second contemporary example is the LBA city of Megiddo in the Jezreel Valley (Finkelstein *et al.* 2000). Megiddo, with its rich agricultural hinterland and its strategic location, was an important Canaanite center throughout the 3rd and 2nd millennia BC (Kempinski 1989). During the Late Bronze Age the territory controlled by Megiddo was one of the richest in the country, a fact which is reflected in its large estimated population and the impressive remains excavated on the tell (Finkelstein 1996: 236-37). The LBA palace and its adjacent city gate were probably built together in Stratum VIII, dated to the 14th or the 13th century BC (Loud 1948: fig. 382), and continued to be in use during both phases of Stratum VII. Several internal altera-

tions were discerned in the palace in its last phase, Stratum VIIA (compare Loud 1948: figs. 383-84). Access to the 'chapel' in the northwestern corner of the palace was limited by a wall, the ceremonial shell-paved portal went out of use and the semi-subterranean 'treasury' was constructed in the western wing. These alterations might reflect the measures taken by the elite inhabitants prior to the violent destruction of the city. In the adjacent gate, the Chicago expedition discerned two phases represented by two floors in the gate-passage (Loud 1948: 16-30). According to Loud, the later phase (Stratum VIIA) was blocked, filled up and raised above the earlier one. However, the renewed excavations inside the gate proved the existence of only one floor instead of two (Ussishkin 1995, 246-54; 2000). This stone-paved floor continued to serve as the gateway passage until the last phase of its existence, when the gate was blocked by a wall that obliterated the passage altogether (Ussishkin 1995: fig. 7), and three ovens (*tabuns*) were built in the eastern and western inner rooms of the gatehouse. It is thus clear that in its last phase of existence the gate no longer served its original function as a monumental entrance to the city, but was converted into a cooking area (Ussishkin 2000: 115-17). In the same phase, Stratum VIIA, a poorly constructed structure was erected on the ruins of the once monumental well-built 'Tower Temple' on the acropolis (Loud 1948: 102-109). Attributed to this new building are some indications of intentional mutilation of statues and their subsequent burial in the vicinity of the temple (Williams and Logan 1989; Ussishkin 1995: 256). Signs of gradual decline and sporadic abandonment during Stratum VIIA were also discerned in the domestic areas on the lower mound (Ilan *et al.* 2000: 86-95). Stratum VIIA and the monumental structures described above were all destroyed by fire set by unknown agents (Ussishkin 1995: 253, 260-61).

It can be concluded that in both Lachish and Megiddo, the final phase of the existence of public structures reflects a profound change in relation to the original building. This phase demonstrates clear features of crisis architecture: a decrease of energy input into the maintenance of the monumental structures, a change of plan and a change of original function. It should, thus, be interpreted as signifying weakening control by the ruling elite, who could not or would not continue to use and maintain these public buildings for their original function. The fact that the buildings at Lachish and Megiddo were destroyed and consequently abandoned immediately following this last phase further strengthens its interpretation as reflecting features of crisis architecture. The identification of such a phase of crisis architecture in the public buildings, and the hints at the existence of termination rituals in the temple of Megiddo, should be discussed against the background of the 'Crisis Years' in

the wider context of the eastern Mediterranean in the 13th–12th centuries BC.

It is clear, then, that cases of crisis architecture are not uncommon. Yet a systematic survey of this phenomenon in Bronze Age sites in Israel and neighboring areas has yet to be conducted (several other cases, such as Troy, Ugarit, Aegean sites and Egypt are mentioned briefly by Driessen 1995: 74–76). In the following sections, I discuss in detail the existence and significance of such a case in the last phase of the LBA site of Hazor in northern Israel.

Hazor

Tel Hazor in the upper Jordan Valley is the largest Bronze Age site in the southern Levant, and the center of a Canaanite kingdom known throughout most of the 2nd millennium BC (Yadin 1972; Ben-Tor 1998). The extensive excavations of both the lower city and the upper tel (Figure 1) revealed a wealth of public structures, temples, palaces and fortifications,



Figure 1. Aerial view of Hazor (from the north): Lower City and Upper Tel with excavation areas mentioned in the text.

all of which provide tangible evidence for its unique status as a political, cultural and probably also religious Canaanite center (Ben-Tor and Rubiato 1999; Zuckerman 2006). Beginning in the 18th century BC, the city witnessed a gradual process of social and political development, reflected by the construction of monumental buildings and fortifications, the thriving domestic quarters and the wealth of material remains found throughout the site. This is the Hazor (*Ha-su-ra*) referred to in foreign written sources, mainly letters in the Mari Archive (Maeir 2000; Ben-Tor 2005). Noteworthy in this context are the connections reflected in various aspects of material culture between Hazor and the north Syrian cultural sphere on the one hand, and the clear albeit subtle Egyptian influence of the other hand.

The kingdom of Hazor probably controlled one of the largest territories in the southern Levant, and is considered by some as an early territorial state rather than a 'normal' Canaanite city state (Finkelstein 1996; Na'aman 1997). The special status of Hazor within the LBA city-state system is reflected in the references to the site in various Egyptian historical records (Bienkowski 1987) and in the unparalleled nature and scale of its architectural and other material remains.

The large-scale excavations at the site revealed the remains of public and domestic buildings belonging to the LBA city, corresponding to the general Strata 2, 1B and 1A (Yadin 1972). These buildings were subject to changes and adaptations throughout their existence, until their final destruction and abandonment sometime in the 13th century BC. This architectural record is meticulously published in the final reports of the excavations (Yadin *et al.* 1958; 1960; 1961; Ben-Tor 1989), and thus offers an opportunity for a detailed reconstruction of the development of the site and an excellent case study for a discussion of the process of site gradual decline and destruction.

The Zenith of Late Bronze Hazor: The Implementation of the Royal Strategy

The plan of the Late Bronze I city (Stratum 2 in the Lower City = XV on the Upper Tel) shows a clear continuity from the Middle Bronze Age. The urban nature of the heavily fortified city is retained and further emphasized, and public buildings are rebuilt on the ruins of their predecessors. These include the city gates in Areas K and P (Ben-Tor 1989: 284-86, plan XLII; Yadin 1972: 58-62; Mazar 1997), as well as the Area H Orthostats Temple with its symmetrical plan and elaborate courtyard (Ben-Tor 1989: 223-40, plan XXXVIII, fig. 4; Yadin 1972: 79-83). Several other buildings are built anew in this period, including the so-called 'Square Temple' in Area F (Yadin 1972: 98-100; Ben-Tor 1989: 150-56, plan XXIX), and the 'Northern Temple' in Area A on the acropolis (Bonfil 1997: 51-101, plans II.6-II.7). The water-reservoir on the acropolis is also attributed to this period (Yadin 1972: 127-28, fig. 28).

In the following phase (Stratum 1B in the Lower City = XIV on the Upper Tel), Hazor witnesses an unprecedented high-point in terms of urban planning and architectural effort. This phase is attributed to the LB IIA, corresponding to the Amarna period (14th century BC). Grand building projects are undertaken all over the city, and the major public buildings assume their final form during this period. These include the renewed and elaborated Area H temple (Ben-Tor 1989: 240-57, plan XXXIX, fig. 5; Yadin 1972: 83-87) (Figure 2), the new Area C temple (Yadin *et al.* 1958: 76-80, 83-85, pls. XXXI, CLXXX; Yadin *et al.* 1960: 95-110, pls. XXXI-XXXVII, CCVIII) (Figure 3), the rebuilding of the gates and fortifications as well as the domestic and cultic quarters of the lower city. On the acropolis, The 'Northern Temple' in Area A continues to exist, and a monumental threshold made of basalt orthostats is added to its entrance (Bonfil 1997: 55, photos II.26-II.28). A new complex of cultic and ceremonial edifices is built

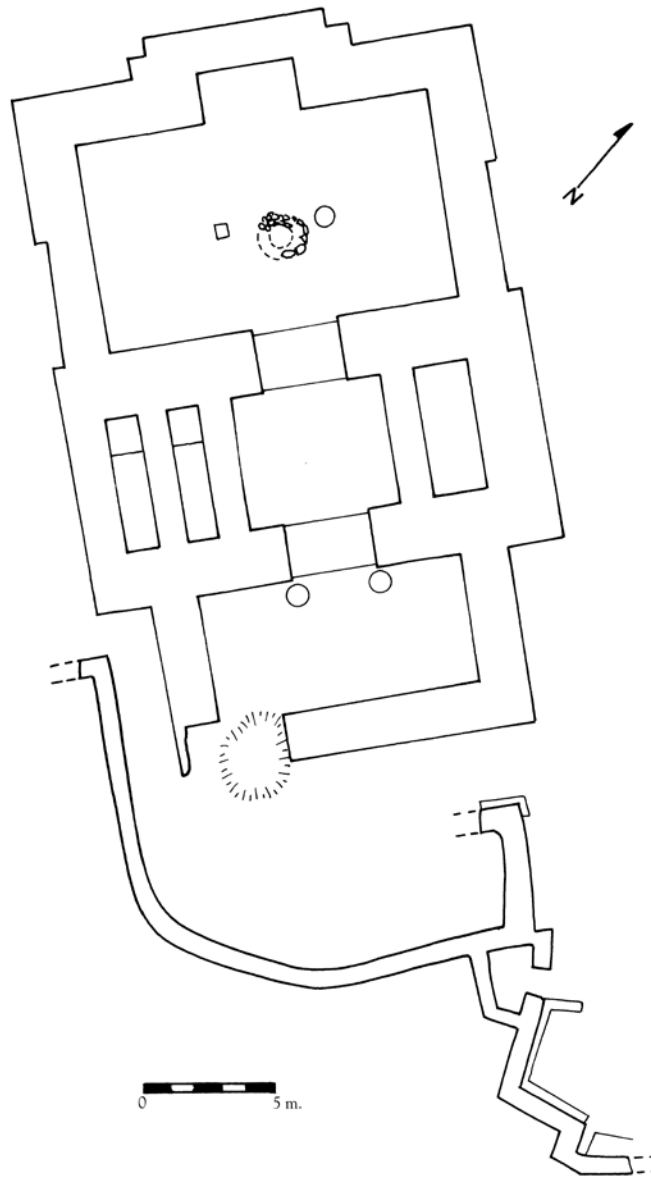


Figure 2. The Orthostats Temple in Area H: Stratum 1B.

in the center of the acropolis, incorporating earlier buildings such as the 'Southern Temple' into one large well-planned ceremonial precinct. The lavishly constructed 'Ceremonial Palace/Royal Sanctuary' forms the focus of this complex, whose location, plan and wealth of related finds attest to its significant role within the layout of the city (Ben-Tor and Rubiato

1999; Zuckerman 2006). The construction of this new complex is contemporary with the building of the 'Podium Complex' on the northern slope of the tel, and these two edifices are the foci of the royal cultic/ceremonial and administrative activities respectively. The 'Podium Complex' (Figure 4) is a highly organized structure, with strict routes of access

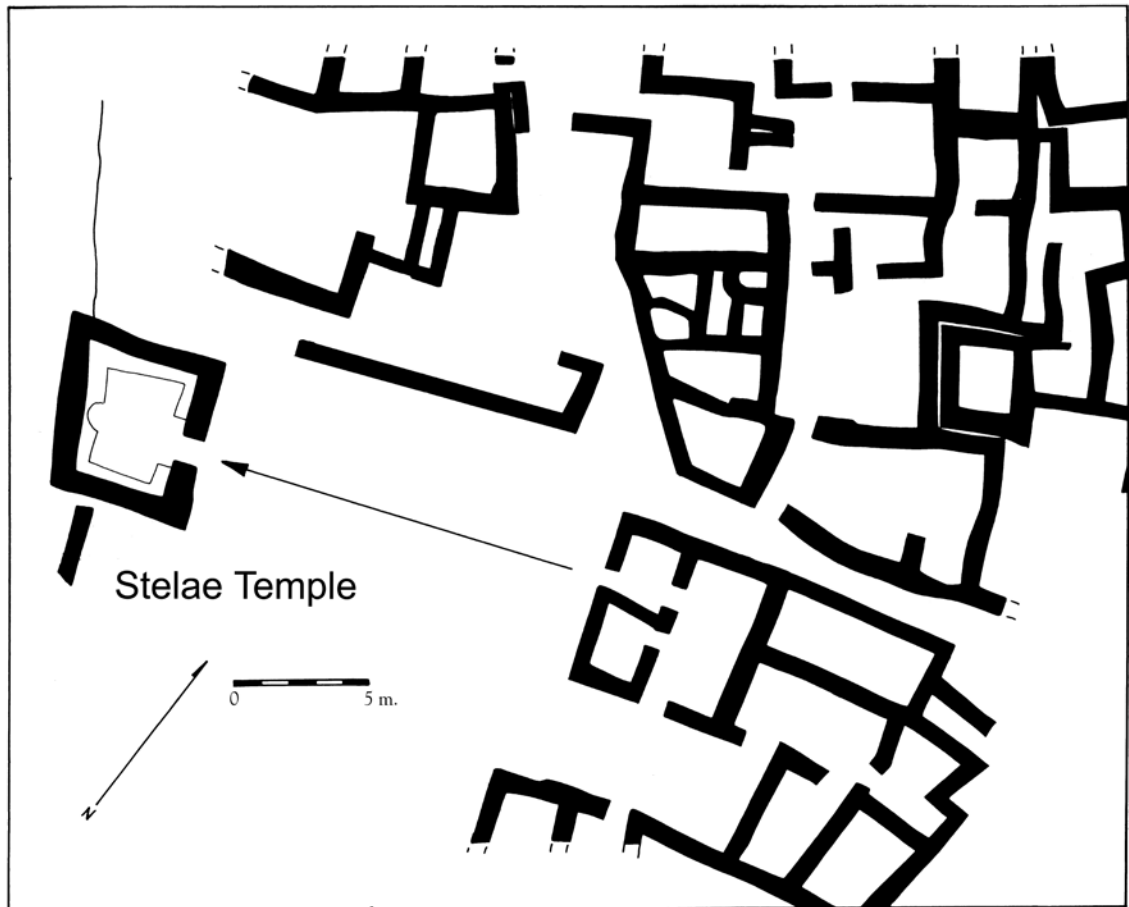


Figure 3. The Stelae Temple in Area C: Stratum 1B.

and circulation. The most conspicuous architectural feature of the complex is the 'Podium Area', which is paved with basalt orthostats in secondary use. A semi-circular opening in the basalt pavement in front of the podium might have been used for libation or ablution rituals performed in front of the podium upon entry (Figure 5). The unique basalt pavement is interpreted as a material symbol for the function of this area as a liminal space, a threshold to the architectural complex and to the upper city (Zuckerman 2007).

The building activities of Stratum 1B (=XIV) reflect the existence of a central authority, involved in central aspects of the secular and religious activities taking place in the city. The main palatial buildings, the foci of civil power

of Hazor's elite, were located on the acropolis, although special function structures were probably dispersed throughout the Lower City as well. Temples for the various Canaanite gods were built in both the Lower City and on the Upper Tel, a well-known phenomenon in ancient Near Eastern cities. The main architectural features characterizing this phase are the symmetrical plans of the temples and their surroundings, the carefully regulated access to and circulation inside the public buildings and the use of expensive and conspicuous building materials, such as basalt orthostats and cedar of Lebanon wooden beams. All these are the material expression of a large-scale mobilization of laborers and specialized craftsmen, as well as the ability to acquire large quantities



Figure 4. The Podium Complex in Area M: aerial view from the east.

of building and raw materials. These activities were initiated by an ambitious ruling dynasty at Hazor, vividly represented in the Amarna archive letters of Abdi-Tirshi, ruler of Hazor, and his peers (Moran 1992: 235, 288-90, 362). The city of Hazor, like other cities in the ancient Near East, was refounded by its ruler in this period, and its overall plan is reorganized, elaborated and aggrandized (Margueron 1994).

This phase represents the implementation of what may be termed the 'Royal Strategy', aimed at validating the power of the king and its court and reasserting its dominating ideology (as Houston *et al.* 2003 argue for Classic

Maya sites). The city was redesigned as a dynastic center, and the urban landscape was shaped by royal authority (Smith 2003: 215-31). The monumental public buildings and temples attributed to this phase are the material features and the vehicles through which this strategy could be presented to Hazor's inhabitants and to its neighboring peer polities. The basalt and bronze statues of kings and dignitaries, found in the temples and cultic edifices throughout the city of Hazor (Beck 1989: 324-27; Ben-Tor 2006), can be interpreted as evidence of the empowerment of the king through the introduction of the ruler to the



Figure 5. The Podium Area in Area M: aerial view from the south.

ritual divine space. The fact that these statues were probably older than their find-context supports this reconstruction, as they could serve to celebrate the dynasty and the very institution of monarchic rule, and thus supply the legitimation by the divine ancestors sought by the ruling dynasty (Winter 1992: 27-29).

The acceptance of these values and their embodiment in the worldview of the inhabitants of Canaanite Hazor were essential for the functioning of the city. These acts of conspicuous consumption should also be considered as part of the struggle of the city's rulers to maintain their fragile power relations with their Canaanite peers (Bunimovitz 1995). The intensification of ritual and cultic activity is represented by the elaboration of monumental temples and public ritual spaces, as well as remains of ritual feasts and communal meals

identified in the royal ceremonial precinct on the acropolis (Lev-Tov and McGeough 2006). It seems that Hazor's elite turned to religion and ritual in an effort to integrate the kingdom and legitimate its rule in the face of mounting economic and social conflicts. It is noteworthy that a similar strategy was adopted by other contemporary rulers, such as those of the Hittite capital at Hattuša in its last phase (Singer 1985: 120-21; Bryce 2005). The successful efforts of Hazor's elite to implement its royal strategy can explain the unique status of Hazor during the Amarna period, and its flourishing in a period when other sites witnessed deterioration in size and wealth (Bienkowski 1987).

The fate of the Stratum 1B city of Hazor is not entirely clear. Yadin maintained that the end of this stratum is marked by a violent destruction, possibly during a campaign of the

Pharaoh Seti I (Yadin 1972: 108), but this reconstruction is debated (Bienkowski 1987: 51-52). Unequivocal evidence was found only in the city gate (Area K) which was destroyed in a 'fierce and devastating conflagration', represented by heaps of fallen mudbricks and ashes reaching a height of 1.5 m (Yadin 1972: 63 n. 3; but see Ben-Tor 1989: 292, 297). A similar sequence was detected, albeit less clearly, in the other city gate in Area P (Mazar 1997). It thus seems at least probable that the end of the Stratum 1B city was not marked by a sudden violent event, but rather should be seen as a process of gradual decline represented by the remains defined as Stratum 1A.

The Decline of Hazor: The Desacralization of Ritual Spaces

The final phase of the buildings erected during Hazor's peak is dated to the 13th century BC, the time of the Egyptian 19th Dynasty. This phase (represented by stratum 1A=XIII) is usually described as an ephemeral and degenerated phase of the city, immediately preceding its final destruction and the abandonment of the Lower City (Yadin *et al.* 1960: 113; Yadin 1972: 108). I suggest that several features of crisis architecture and termination rituals can be detected in the remains attributed to this phase.

It is plausible that both the Area K and the Area P city gates went out of use in the previous stratum and were not repaired in the last phase of the city (Ben-Tor 1989: 264, 286-93, esp. 297; Mazar 1997: 382). The cultic precinct in Area F continues to be used, although the area of the stone altar is closed off by a wall (Yadin *et al.* 1960: 143, plan CCX) and several entries were blocked by pits (Yadin *et al.* 1960: 135, 144, plan XLII: 3).

The plan of Area C changes considerably, as the open courtyard in the center of the area is built over and ceases to exist in this phase (Yadin *et al.* 1958: 81-83, 85-92, pls. XXVIII-XXXI, CLXXX; Yadin *et al.* 1960: 111-18, pls.

XXXI-XXXVII, CCVIII-CCIX). The direct axis, along which both the eastern buildings and the Stelae Temple were built in the previous stratum, was obliterated (compare Yadin *et al.* 1960, pls. CCVIII and CCIX). As a consequence, the last temple of Area C was separated from the rest of the area by means of terrace walls and elevated approach ways (Figure 6).

Two public buildings deserve special discussion, because they represent the changes observed both in the religious (the Orthostats Temple in area H) and the royal/ceremonial (the Podium Complex in area M) spheres of LBA Hazor. In its last phase of existence the Orthostats Temple witnessed visible changes in both plan and construction, described by the excavators as 'minor changes' due to the 'partial reconstruction' of the building (Ben-Tor 1989: 257-64, pl. XXXVIII) (Figure 7). The rear niche—the cultic focus of the whole structure—was made obsolete by a flimsy partition wall, whose remaining stones prove that it completely separated the niche from the inner hall (Yadin *et al.* 1961: pl. CIII). The inner hall of the temple was significantly reduced from its original size, due to the building of two 'silos' of single rows of stones in the southeastern and southwestern corners of the room on both sides of the entrance (Yadin 1972: fig. 20; Ben-Tor 1989: plan XL). The 'silos' contained layers of burnt material, charcoal and many pottery vessels, especially bowls (Ben-Tor 1989: 258). A decapitated royal basalt statue was found nearby (Yadin *et al.* 1961: pl. CXXIII: 2; Ben-Tor 2006: 8). The entrance to the inner hall was narrowed by means of a partition wall (W. 2516 in Ben-Tor 1989: pl. XL), and the central hall itself loses its original symmetrical plan. In the courtyard most of the previous walls and cultic installations ceased to exist, and a rectangular structure is erected in the western part of the porch, disturbing the straight axis of entrance from the porch. Two narrow, hastily built (enclosure?) walls are placed on top of the southern wall of the

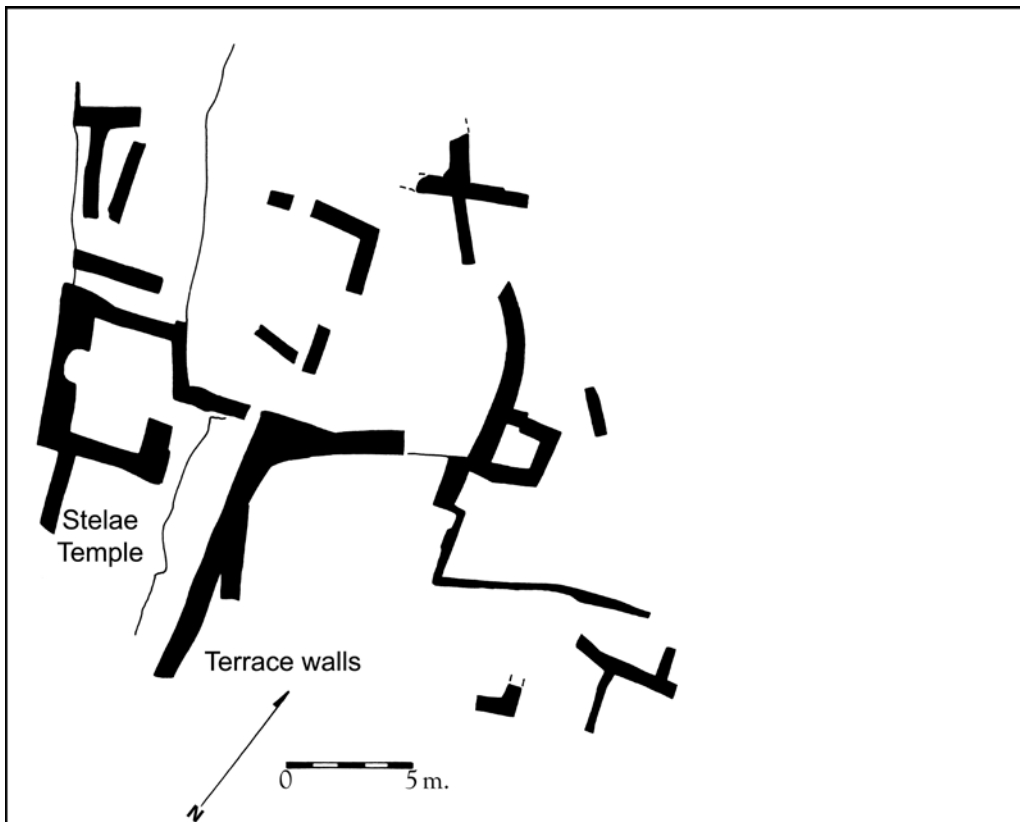


Figure 6. The Stelae Temple in Area C: Stratum 1A.

porch (W. 2571 and W.2570 in Yadin 1961: pl. CXXVIII: 1-2; Ben-Tor 1989: plan XLI), and it is possible that the original porch went out of use during this phase (Ben-Tor 2006: 5). There is a general decrease in the energy invested in the maintenance of the temple, and walls which were ruined in the previous stratum are not repaired during this phase. All these alterations are clear manifestations of religious crisis architecture.

An important feature of the Orthostats Temple is the burial of the lion orthostat in a pit dug into the southwestern corner of the southern wall of the porch (Yadin *et al.* 1961: pls. CXV, CXVIII-CXX; Yadin 1972: 91; Ben-Tor 1989: 248, plan XXXIX). The basalt lion was found buried in the pit, covered by a heap of stones. These included a bull-shaped base of a god's statue, whose torso was found close-by

in the courtyard (Beck 1989: 335-37; Ben-Tor 2006: 4-5, 8). No traces of the original entrance into the porch were found, but the excavators assumed 'with a very high degree of probability that it was located on the same axis as the other internal doorways, and that it was equal to them in width' (Ben-Tor 1989: 246). It is also possible, however, that in Stratum 1A the entrance into the porch and the temple was not in the central part of the wall, but rather in its western part (Figure 7). So reconstructed, the location of the entrance is indeed contrary to the symmetrical plan of the temple itself (Ben-Tor 1989: plans XL-XLI; Yadin 1972: 89), but this breaking of the symmetry is clearly visible in the plan of the open area in front of the temple already in Stratum 1B (Ben-Tor 1989: plans XXXIX-XL). The axis of symmetry of the courtyard and the temple, clearly

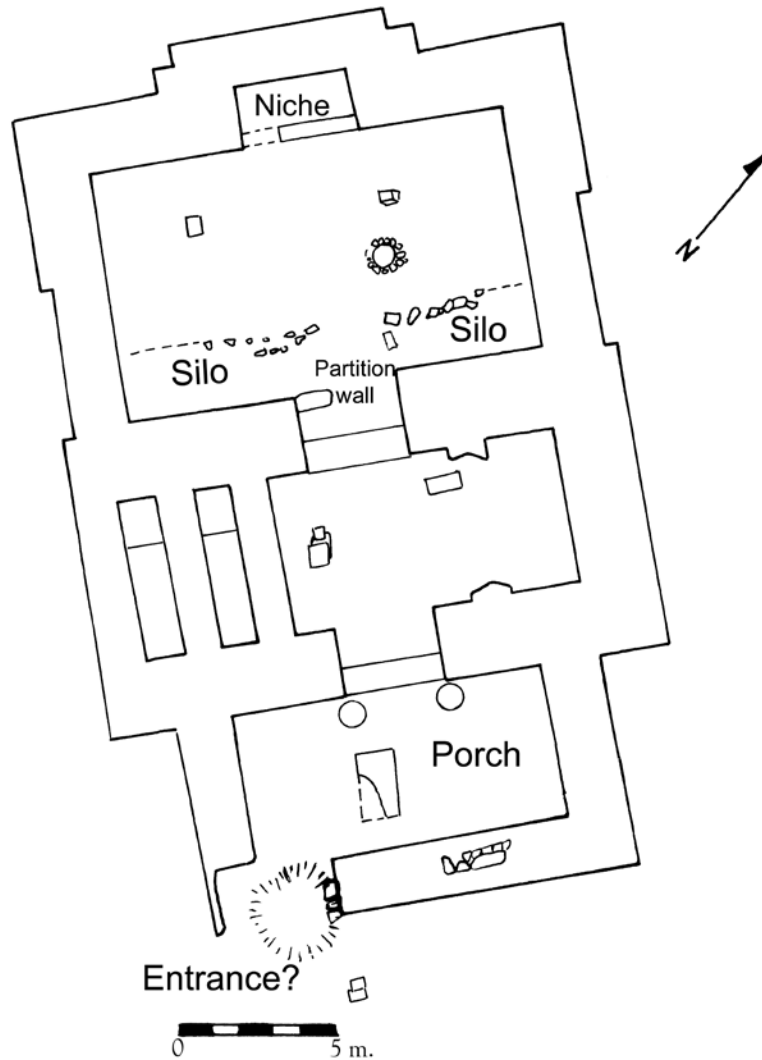


Figure 7. The Orthostats Temple in Area H: Stratum 1A.

visible in the plan of Stratum 2, is no longer applicable to the plans of the two later stages (Ben-Tor 1989: plan XLI). The demarcation of an indirect entrance instead of a monumental direct one might be interpreted as an attempt to limit the visibility and the access into the temple precinct. I suggest that this entrance was deliberately destroyed and blocked by the lion pit and its contents, which thus should be viewed as representing a termination ritual.

The life-cycle of the Podium Complex in Area M (Figure 4) is similar to that of the

Orthostats Temple. The Podium Complex continued to function, with minor repairs throughout the LB II. In its final phase, there are changes and alterations to the overall plan of the building. Meager installations, built of a single row of stones, encroach onto the walls of the courtyard (Figure 8). Entryways are blocked and walls cease to exist. Some of the stones paving the courtyard are pulled out, forming a large oval-shaped depression immediately in front of the only entrance to the southern wing (Figure 9). The depression's location indicates

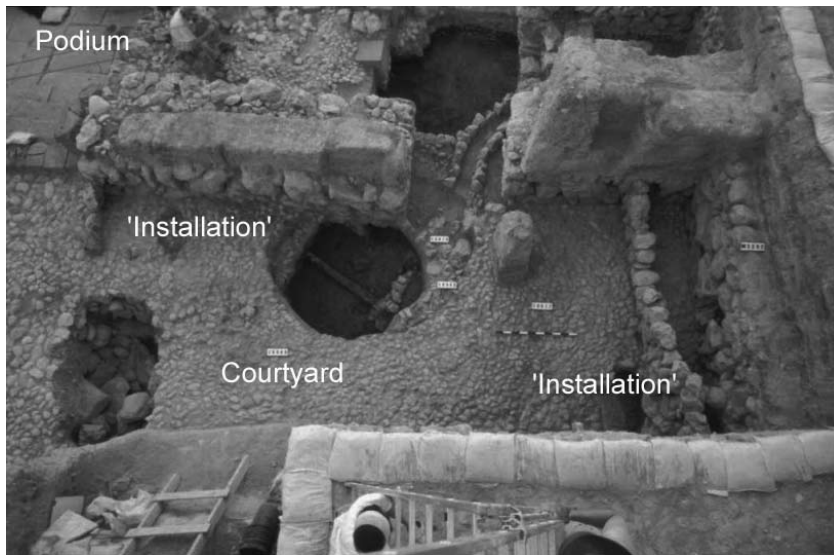


Figure 8. Installations in the courtyard of the Podium Complex: aerial view from the west.



Figure 9. Pits in the courtyard of the Podium Complex: aerial view from the north.

that it might have been a symbolic obstruction to the entryway blocking off the wing as a whole. The passage from the entrance of the complex through the podium area and into the courtyard is blocked by a row of broken orthostats and stones (Figure 10). The eastern end of this row seals the semi-circular libation installation in front of the podium, and the two basalt parts which were pulled out of this installation were found between the broken orthostats making up the row (Figure 11). It is obvious that these stones were laid by people who knew the original function of building, recognized the importance of its plan and associated features and intended to obliterate its ritual and symbolic functions. Only a few remnants of the once important status of the Podium Complex were found in the final destruction layer, and it seems that the structure was cleaned out and abandoned prior to its annihilation (Zuckerman 2007).

Stratum 1A, then, marks a profound change in the public buildings at Hazor. A series of architectural changes and alterations affected

the most important spaces of the buildings in question: the inner sacred space of the temples, and the main circulation routes and access paths into the temples and palatial buildings.¹ There is a significant decrease of energy input into the maintenance of the buildings, and probably a change in the strict ritual procedures which were closely connected with their original layout. The sealing of the rear cultic niche in the Area H temple leaves no place for the cultic image that was originally placed there, and represents abandonment by its divine resident and the ‘silencing’ of the temple. The ritual setting which was provided in Stratum 1B by the renovated and elaborated Area H temple, the newly built Area C temple and the podium area in Area M, was profoundly altered in its last phase. The modifications in plan and internal order of these ritual spaces dictated a change in the movements of the people moving and acting inside them, as the direct axial path through a sequence of spaces and thresholds was no longer possible. These modifications must have altered the



Figure 10. Final phase of the Podium Area: from the west.

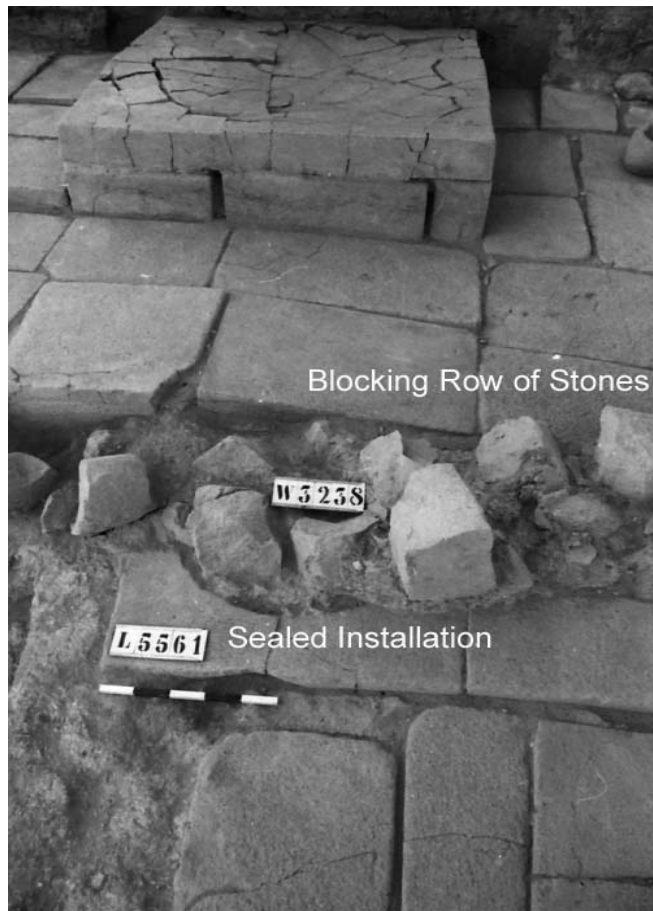


Figure 11. Final phase of the Podium Area from the north: detail.

standardized sequence of the ritual performance, and thus two of the powerful qualities of the ritual activity—its traditionalism and its conservatism—were difficult to maintain. In the last phase, passage through the podium area was impossible and no libation rituals could be conducted in front of the podium. The access to the temples in the Lower City was no longer direct, and necessitated climbing the terrace walls in Area C, or entering through the southwestern corner of the deteriorating courtyard in Area H. In both cases, the inner part of the temple was no longer visible to those standing in front of the building. These alterations carried a clear message for those outside the structures, a message of distancing and alienation of a once more accessible edifice. Rites

which were performed in these temples in their original phase had to be heavily modified, if not completely abandoned in this last phase. These changes reflected an active denigration of the sacred spaces and objects used by the elite as state symbols, in these loci of religious and political power.

An important aspect of this final phase is the pit burial of the lion orthostat and the mutilated god statue in the entrance to the temple. I suggest that this act should be understood as a ‘termination ritual’, ending the ritual and sacred function of its architectural context. Such acts could have been carried out by the representatives of the official religion as part of terminating the function of the temple of the failed royal cult. Alternatively, such remains

could reflect the actions of opponents of the official cult and religion, aiming at symbolically restricting access into the building and humiliating the divine and royal symbols. This could have been done either during the phase of alterations made inside the temple or simultaneously with its final destruction (for a somewhat different interpretation see Ben-Tor 2006).

The neglect and intentional violation of the architectural expressions of power, as reflected by the deteriorating architectural and material features of the public buildings at Hazor, might be seen as a sign of crisis for the city's political and religious elites. The royal strategy, which was carefully planned and executed during the 14th century BC, disintegrated during this short phase. The partial abandonment of certain royal buildings and the disuse of the city's gates and fortification walls might indicate the inability of the elite to maintain its control over the city. Indeed, it might even be suggested that members of the ruling class had already left Hazor by this time. If this was indeed the case, the violent destruction was aimed at the structures themselves, the material symbols of Hazor as a dominant political and religious center, a status it would never regain (for a similar reconstruction of the fall of Teotihuacan, see Millon 1988). The short-lived and degenerate last phase of Canaanite Hazor cannot be interpreted as reorganization and re-establishment, but rather as the 'swan song' of the once powerful kingdom.

Unfortunately, we have no written records documenting this change. The only possible reference to the troubles encountered by the king of Hazor in the 13th century BC is a letter found at the 'House of Rapanu' at Ugarit, recently interpreted as a plea for help against unidentified assailants attacking the city (Arnaud 1998). This letter is of crucial importance to the question of dating Hazor's destruction, but its reading, its exact stratigraphic location and its historical context

should be further studied before its real contribution to the subject is assessed (and see now Durand 2006).

The Destruction of Hazor

Remains of a 'general conflagration' were already identified by Garstang in his limited soundings of the Lower City, and these set the stage for an on-going discussion of the violent destruction of LBA Hazor (Garstang 1931: 184-85, 383; Yadin 1972: 18, 28). The excavations by Yadin in the Lower City and on the Upper Tel revealed more evidence of this destruction level (Yadin 1972: 108). The assumption of a general conflagration, after which the site of Hazor was abandoned, is mentioned *in passim* throughout the excavation reports. However, closer scrutiny of the published evidence reveals that actual remains of such a destruction layer were encountered only in isolated cases.

A clear destruction level, consisting of fallen stones, ashes, burnt material and broken cultic vessels and beheaded statues of gods and kings, was identified in the Lower City only in the Orthostats Temple in area H (Ben-Tor 1989: 257-64; Beck 1989). The fate of the last phase of the Area C temple is less clear-cut (Yadin *et al.* 1958: 85-87). The excavators maintain that the structure was finally destroyed at the end of Stratum 1A, and an important hint of a violent destruction is the beheaded statue found in the rubble of the last phase of the Stelae Temple (Yadin 1972: 67-74). However, no evidence of such destruction was published (Yadin *et al.* 1958: 113). All other areas in the Lower City (Areas C, D, E, F and 210) show no clear sign of destruction at the end of the Late Bronze Age. Most illuminating in this respect is Yadin's assertion in his summary of Stratum 1A in Area C that, 'It can be deduced from the results of the excavation in Area H that the settlement in stratum 1A was destroyed by fire' (Yadin *et al.* 1960: 113—*emphasis mine*). It can now be concluded that only monumental

public structures were violently destroyed in the end of the LBA settlement, including the Orthostats Temple, possibly the Stelae Temple and, less plausibly, the gates (Area K and Area P). Significantly, the temples which were put to the torch are also the structures where clear signs of crisis architecture characterized the phase preceding the final destruction.

Yadin's excavations on the Upper Tel were inconclusive concerning the existence of a destruction level, especially due to the fact that the later Iron Age remains disturbed and sometimes razed all earlier remains. Yadin, however, argued that 'the total destruction of the LBIII city (Stratum XIII) was evident in all excavated areas' (Yadin 1972: 126). Ben-Tor's renewed excavations at Hazor revealed two monumental complexes: the Podium Complex (Area M) discussed above, and the Ceremonial Palace/Royal Sanctuary (Area A), which were both destroyed in a fierce conflagration. The destruction level is characterized by thick

layers of ashes, burnt wooden beams, cracked basalt slabs, vitrified mudbricks, fallen walls and mutilated basalt statues (Figure 12; Ben-Tor and Rubiato 1999). The results of the renewed excavations thus corroborate the existence of a fierce and preferential conflagration, most probably limited to the site's main public buildings. These include the monumental cultic edifices and administrative palatial buildings, all of which served as the architectural foci of religious and civil power and wealth at the height of Canaanite Hazor. It seems that none of the smaller-scale domestic and cultic buildings in the lower city were similarly burnt or violently destroyed. This destruction campaign included the decapitation of basalt statues of gods and kings, and probably also the collection and smashing of ritual vessels found in the temples (Ben-Tor 1998: 465). This was a systematic annihilation campaign, against the very physical symbols of the royal ideology and its loci of ritual legitimation.



Figure 12. Destruction of the Podium Area: from the north.

It is no coincidence that the same monuments which were erected during the previous phase of the implementation of the royal strategy, and subsequently witnessed a phase of crisis architecture, were chosen as targets for destruction. There are quite a few possible explanations of this, but the two most probable ones are military conquest by foreign agents, or internal destruction as an expression of rage following a situation of economic strife and mounting social conflicts in the city. According to the latter, plausible agents of the destruction were the city dwellers who suffered the economic burdens of financing, construction and maintenance of the elite large-scale building projects. Similar reconstructions were suggested for other cases of selective destruction and collapse of ancient societies (Millon 1988; Joyce *et al.* 2001).

The internal explanation is better supported because there is no archaeological evidence of warfare, such as human victims or weapons, anywhere in the site (for examples of remains of warfare in the archaeological record see Driessen 1999a; Yon 1992; Muscarella in Dyson and Voigt 1989; Stronach 1997). This observation serves as an argument against the involvement of external forces such as the Israelites or the Egyptians in the destruction of Hazor (for a review of previous suggestions see Ben-Tor 1998). Although the suggested internal revolt might have served foreign interests and could have been encouraged by external circumstances or powers, it is predominantly an internal affair.

Following the destruction of the Canaanite monumental buildings, the city of Hazor was abandoned for a period of unknown length, until settlement resumed on the upper tel in the 11th century BC. It is possible that at least some of the inhabitants fled from the site to other settlements in the Hule Valley, such as Tel-Anafa and Tel-Dan, settlements that continued to exist until the end of the 13th and into the 12th century BC.

Conclusion

LBA Hazor is a case study in the materialization of internal decline and disintegration of an ancient kingdom. The suggested reconstruction emphasized the role of rulers and elites in enforcing a dominant ideology, and on the popular power to contest, resist and ultimately revolt against such political and religious ideology.² It was argued that at least parts of these processes are materialized and take the shape of buildings, artworks and rituals, and thus can be reconstructed on the basis of the archaeological record. This interpretation is based on features of crisis architecture, termination rituals and desacralization of ritual spaces identified in the main public buildings of Hazor.

Thus, the view of the final destruction of the LBA city of Hazor as a sudden unexpected attack on a strong flourishing kingdom does not concur with the archaeological evidence. The final destruction is rather the last phase of a long process of development, a process whose roots lie in the initial erection of the Middle Bronze Age city. The deterioration of the socio-political situation in Canaan during the LBA, and especially in the late 14th and the 13th centuries BC, is well-known both from written sources of the Amarna period and from the ever-accumulating archaeological record (Altman 1978; Rainey 1995; Bunimovitz 1995). This deterioration is evident in economic aspects such as the decreased availability of land and human resources, political instability and the failure of Canaanite religion to overcome these challenges (Dever 1992b; Bunimovitz 1996). It is also connected to the wider phenomena of the gradual disintegration of the palace-based system that took place all over the Levant and the eastern Mediterranean during the 13th century BC (Ward and Joukowsky 1992), coupled with the intensification of the Egyptian 19th Dynasty control over Canaan (Weinstein 1981).

As I argued above, the archaeological evidence of crisis architecture, decommissioning of temples and termination rituals supports an interpretation of internal deterioration, social decline and unraveling of the royal ideology at Hazor. They are a sign of the failure of the city's civil and religious authorities' attempts to adapt and provide adequate answers to the culminating tensions within the system, through the intensification of ceremonial and cultic activities. As shown in other cases, the role of 'commoner power' in the active rejection of elite ideology and subsequent collapse of states must not be underestimated (as, for example, Millon 1988 and Joyce *et al.* 2001 argue for Mesoamerican sites and Dickinson 2006: 54-55 for Mycenaean society). The reaction to the over-burdening of the Canaanite commoners by the urban elites could have been either a desertion of the established social system (as suggested by Bunimovitz 1995: 327) or an outright opposition to it. Thus, the final destruction should not necessarily be attributed to any external forces, such as the Egyptians or the Israelites, but could well have come from inside the social texture of the Canaanite city itself (Altman 1978; Chaney 1983; Dever 2003). It was a ritual destruction with political and social purpose: terminating the dominant economic, political and religious power materialized in the city's main edifices.

The main aim of my reconstruction is to shift the weight from the view of the fall of Hazor as an episode in the process of conquest of Canaan by the Israelites, to viewing it as culmination of long-term processes characterizing Canaanite society during the 15th, 14th and 13th centuries BC. To paraphrase Shelmerdine (1987: 568), the trouble at Hazor should be seen in the context of decades or even centuries, rather than days or years. This reconstruction of mounting internal conflicts and gradual decline, culminating in the final assault on the major political and religious foci of the city's elite, provides the most plausible

alternative framework for the explanation of the destruction and abandonment of Hazor in the 13th century BC.

In conclusion, the concepts of 'crisis architecture' and 'termination rituals' serve as a useful conceptual framework for the discussion of the end of the Canaanite cities of the LBA Levant. The identification of these features in the archaeological record provides clues to the understanding of processes of the sites' decline and final destruction, and has far-reaching implications for the interpretation of this period. It might be expected that detailed analyses of other sites witnessing clear destruction phases will reveal similar features, hinting at the social and political processes operating within the Canaanite cities. These concepts, I believe, can 'provide excellent points of entry into the social configuration of the societies that were doing the collapsing' (Yoffee 1988: 2).

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and is in charge of the forthcoming publication of the Bronze Age finds from the renewed excavations.

Notes

- 1 The stratigraphic analysis of the area A ceremonial complex is currently underway, but it seems that features of crisis architecture preceding the final destruction can be detected there as well.
- 2 Similar reconstructions were proposed, and criticized, in attempts to explain the biblical narrative of the conquest of Canaan and the origins of the Israelites (for an overview and reference to the extensive bibliography of the subject see recently Dever 2003). The discussion of the Israelite conquest process and the place of Hazor within it are, however, beyond the scope of this paper.

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