

TELL ES-SWEYHAT EXPEDITION TO SYRIA

Thomas A. Holland

The sixth season of archaeological excavations and environmental field studies was conducted at Sweyhat during the autumn of 1992. This was the third season of the joint Oriental Institute/University Museum project. Work on the tell was directed by T. A. Holland and was sponsored by the Oriental Institute. The landscape study was continued by T. J. Wilkinson with the generous financial support of the National Geographic Society (Grant 4900-2). The writer wishes to express his gratitude here to both the Oriental Institute and those members of the Oriental Institute, Mrs. Theodore D. Tieken, Mrs. John J. Livingood, and Mr. and Mrs. David Maher, who financially contributed to the success of the expedition. The field staff consisted of Mr. Clemens Reichel (site supervisor and landscape studies), graduate student in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations; Mr. Mark Fenn (conservator); Mr. David Schofield (chief draughtsman and site supervisor); and Miss Eleanor Barbanes (draughtsman and architect). We were also ably assisted by our two Syrian Department of Antiquities Representatives, Mr. Mustafa Hoshnef (Raqqa) and Mr. Bassam Falhout (Damascus).

The priority of excavation during the season was the continuation of work in Operation 5 to recover more of the Early Bronze Age wall painting fragments (see *Oriental Institute 1991–1992 Annual Report*, pp. 76–80, figs. 2–5). Other aims were the completion of study of the finds discovered during the 1991 season in Operations 4–8 and further excavations in the Area IV rooms in Operations 10 and 11. Wilkinson extended his research in a broad arc around Sweyhat, covering most of the Sweyhat plain and also along the western bank of the Euphrates River just opposite the Sweyhat plain (see his report, pp. 44–47).

OPERATION 5

The most important wall painting fragment found during the season, the bovine with suckling calf that was reported upon in the last *Annual Report*, was so unusual in the iconography of Syro-Mesopotamian art that little could be said concerning parallels. However, further research has clarified the probable origins of the motif and a more secure date of the Sweyhat example. It would appear at present that the closest Mesopotamian parallel, for an internally-painted area on the side of an animal, is represented on an unstratified scarlet-ware vase from Khafājāh, but it does not have the geometric painted design such as the Sweyhat example (cf. P. Delougaz, *Pottery from the Diyala Region*, Oriental Institute Pub-

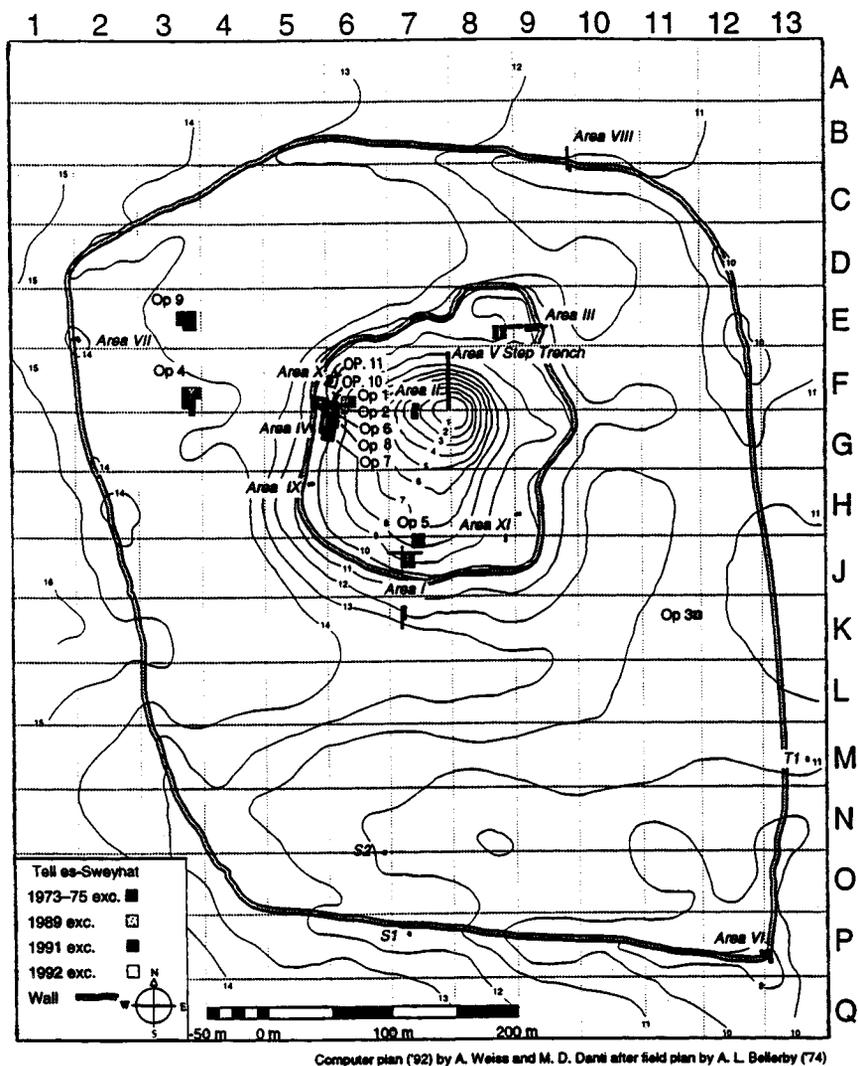


Figure 1. Contour plan showing positions of excavated areas and operations from 1973 to 1992

lication, vol. 63, 1952, pls. 62, 138). And although the motif of a suckling calf is also fairly rare, an Early Dynastic I (ca. 2900–2750 B.C.) scarlet ware jar sherd from Tell Agrab Hill C (Delougaz, *ibid.*, p. 68, pls. 58d, 137d) shows part of a large animal and suckling calf. Apart from the Tell Brak Akkadian stamp seal previously reported upon, the only other close historical example we have found is a late third millennium cylinder seal from Beth-Yerah, which depicts a horned animal suckling its calf (Bar-Adon, "Rare Cylinder Seal Impressions from Beth-Yerak," *Eretz-Israel* 11: 99–100, *25). As also previously reported, other motifs depicted on the Sweyhat wall paintings compare well with fragments found at Tell Halawa B, Level 3, Period I, for which a date in the first half of the third millennium B.C. has been suggested, and Tell Munbāqa; both sites are situated to

the south of Sweyhat in the Euphrates Tabqa Dam rescue area. On the evidence of the Sweyhat pottery finds, the Halawa, Munbāqa, and Sweyhat wall paintings should be dated to about the middle of the third millennium B.C. (ca. 2600–2300 B.C.). Further excavations of wall painting fragments in Operation 5, planned for the autumn of 1994, will contribute greatly to our being able to piece together a more complete scene than the 103 fragments recovered thus far have allowed.

OPERATION 10 (figs. 1, 2)

Excavations continued in the unexcavated portions of the 1970s Area IVN, room 8, building complex to assess more fully the nature of the rooms constructed against the inner side of the western sector of the town wall. During the 1975 campaign, an arch and what was interpreted as a bench were excavated in the eastern half of an incompletely excavated room or courtyard, as well as a portion of another bench in the southwestern corner of the area. Room 8 was relabeled Operation 10 for consistency with the terminology adopted for the new series of excavations begun in 1989 under the sponsorship of the University Museum.

The bench built against the southern wall of room 8 continued up to the original doorway leading from room 8 to room 9. This doorway had been blocked in antiquity, probably because an internal small room (room 18) was added opposite it within room 8 (figs. 2, 3), which had two doorways, one in the northeastern corner and another one giving access to the west and the workbench (fig. 4). The arch in the middle of room 18 may have been necessary to support an upper storey. Although there was not time to finish the excavation of room 8, which is probably a large courtyard, a sounding was made in the eastern part of Operation 10 to delineate the northern extent of the courtyard. An east-west wall was found in the northern edge of the sounding, which most likely defines the northern side of the courtyard, making it 6 m wide and 10 m long if the wall continues eastward to the street found in 1989 (fig. 2).

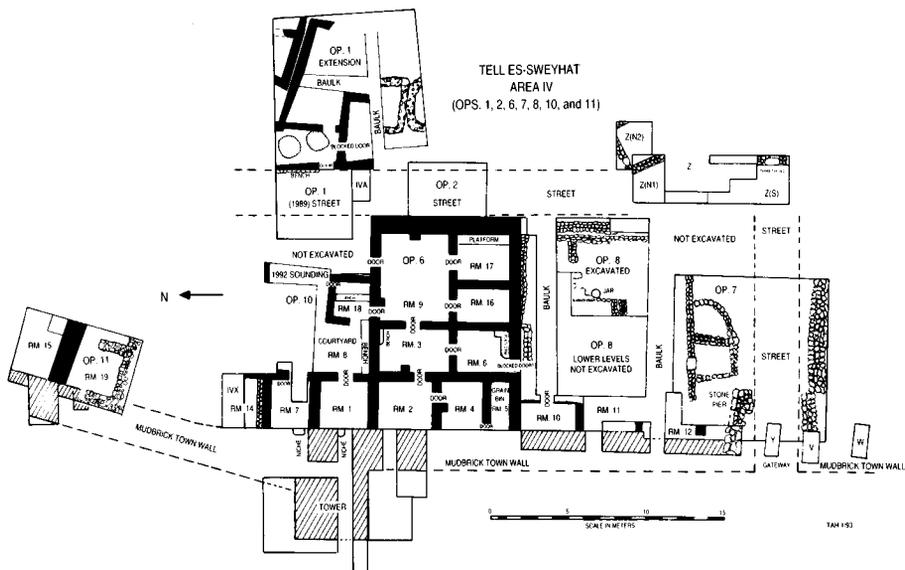


Figure 2. Sketch plan of excavations in 1970s Areas IV and X and 1992 Operations 10 and 11



Figure 3. Operation 10, Room 18 inside courtyard Room 8, view to east

162–65). At the time of the discovery of the Vounous jar, which had no close parallels, it was thought that it had its origins in the Canaanite culture of Palestine. However, after the publication of the first two examples from Sweyhat in the 1970s, Ruth Amiran, who has written extensively on this type of jar, concluded that “... the homeland of this type is somewhere in North-Syria” (“A Note on Pottery from Tell Es-Sweyhat,” *Levant* 15 [1983]: 193–94). In the same article, Amiran also pointed out the close resemblance of another example from the Giza necropolis in the Mastaba of Shaft 294 (see S. Hassan, *Excavations At Giza 1930–1931*, fig. 173:3, pl. 47). Although the neck and rim shape of the Giza example is slightly different from the Vounous and Sweyhat jars, the general shape and the one loop handle from the rim of the jar to the top of the shoulder unquestionably places it within this general type of rare jar. We must concur with Amiran that this type of jar indeed has its origin in northern Syria and that the “... Vounous and the Giza jar-jugs reached their destinations as containers of some widely traded commodities.” The presence of these jars raises some interesting questions: “Does this type of jar originate in the northern Euphrates Valley area?” And if so, “What commodity was being traded to such distant points as Cyprus and Egypt during the second half of the third millennium?” At present, apart from the examples cited from Vounous, Giza, and Sweyhat, I know of only one other

Two very important finds came from this operation. The first was a one-handed, flat-based, storage jar, 35 cm high (fig. 5), found on the pebble-paved floor in front of the workbench. Its discovery brings the number of such jars found in the Area IV rooms at Sweyhat to a total of five. This type of jar has been much discussed in connection with an imported jar found in Tomb 164B at Vounous in Cyprus (J. R. Stewart, “An Imported Pot from Cyprus,” *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* [1939]:

example, which comes from Tell Hadidi, a large third millennium site to the southwest of Sweyhat, but located on the western bank of the Euphrates River (for illustration, see R. Dornemann, “M.P.M. Euphrates Valley Expedition, 1974: Excavations at Tell Hadidi,” *Lore* 25:1 [Spring 1975]: 37). At present, the evidence from both Sweyhat and Tell Hadidi strongly suggests that these vessels originated in the Euphrates Valley area, especially as there are no other known Palestinian or Syro-Mesopo-

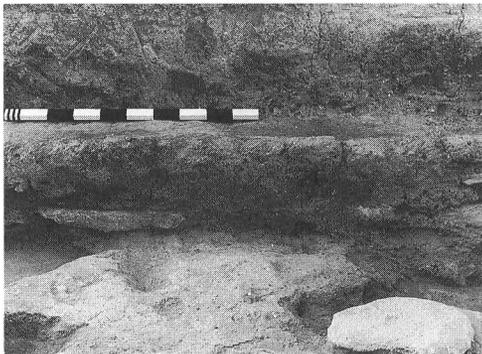


Figure 4. Operation 10, portion of workbench against southwestern wall of courtyard Room 8

tamian examples. What commodity was shipped in these jars is a harder question to answer. However, three of the Sweyhat vessels were very heavily burned in the conflagration of the Area IV rooms, more so than other pottery vessels in the same contexts, which implies that the contents of the jars were extremely volatile. The jars also were heavily pitted and flaking inside and one example had remains of a hard black substance (unanalyzed), which may suggest that the interior walls of some of these jars were coated with bitumen or a similar substance for better containment of a liquid product. On the basis of the calibrated age (ranging from 2331 to 1989 B.C.) of two charcoal samples from rooms 1 and 9, adjoining the courtyard room 8, and an assessment of other pottery vessels, the one-handed, flat-based, jars from Sweyhat may be dated within the late Early Bronze Age period, ca. 2300–2100 B.C.

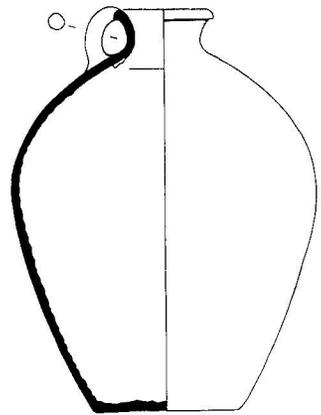


Figure 5. Operation 10, "Vounous"-type one-handed, flat-based, jar found near bench. Scale ca. 1:7

The second important find from the courtyard was an extremely well-modeled clay figurine of a horse (figs. 6, 7), which by now is well known due to the extraordinary news coverage it has received due largely to the efforts of William Harms of the University of Chicago News Office. The worldwide news coverage included articles and photographs in newspapers, magazines, scholarly journals, books (Reader's Digest Books, World Year Book of World Book Encyclopedia, and even in a forthcoming volume on the history of polo in Argentina), as well as an interview with the writer on the Voice of America international radio program. This figurine was discovered at the southern end of the 1992 sounding (figs. 2, 3 [upper left]) just to the east of the doorway leading into room 18. The model is



Figure 6. Operation 10, photograph of modeled clay horse figurine

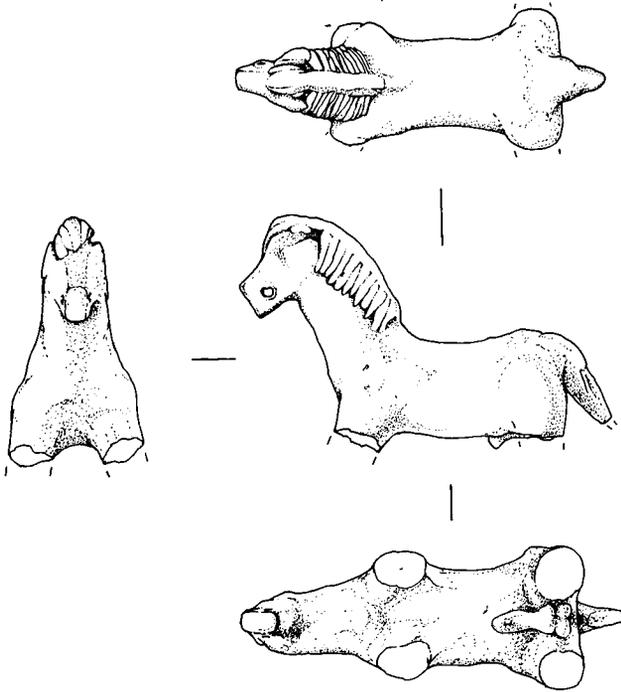


Figure 7. Operation 10, line drawing of modeled clay horse figurine.
Drawing by David Schofield

muzzle, before firing, for some type of ring to hold reins, the mane is shown lying flat on both sides of the neck, and the tail is depicted as bushy, therefore indicating that this model represented a domesticated horse. At present, it appears that this model is one of the earliest known clay figurines depicting a domesticated horse in the Near East. One other, more crudely modeled, male horse was found at Tepe Gawra, Stratum VI, dated approximately to the same period as the Sweyhat example, between 2300 and 2100 B.C. (see E. A. Speiser, *Excavations at Tepe Gawra*, 1935, p. 192, pl. 34:5). The presence of this model stallion at Sweyhat implies that the horse may have played a more important role in the long-distant trade routes during the second half of the third millennium B.C. than has hitherto been suspected.

OPERATION 11

Excavations were resumed in the 1970s Area X, room 15, built against the inner portion of the northwestern sector of the town wall, which was relabeled Operation 11 (figs. 1, 2). Further clearance was made in the incompletely excavated room 15 and a small sounding was made in the southeastern corner of that room to obtain occupational material predating the main building complex to the south. The southern half of the 5 × 8 m trench revealed another room, 19, also built against the town wall. The stone foundations of mudbrick-built house walls, shown in figure 2, belong to the latest Early Bronze Age phase dated to about 2100–1950 B.C. The previous Early Bronze Age occupation in room 19, dated about 2300–

complete apart from the lower portions of the legs, one strip of applied clay on the left forelock, and a small chip on the lower right edge of the muzzle. The greenish-buff fired figure measures 12.70 cm long and 8.20 cm from the top of the head to the extant portion of the forelegs. The figurine was modeled with applied strips of clay for the mane and forelock and the anatomically correct applied sexual organs clearly indicate the depiction of a stallion. A hole was bored through the

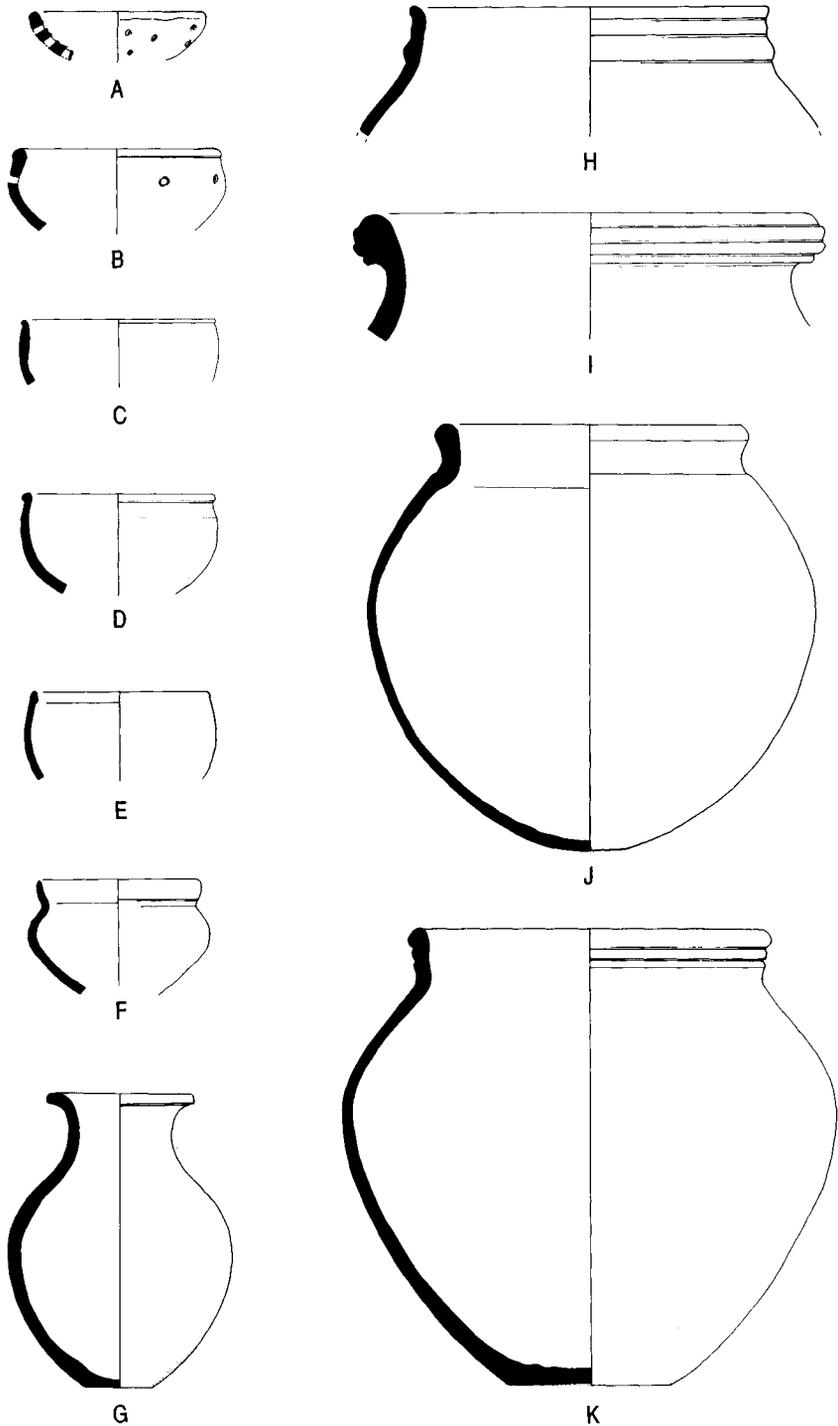


Figure 8. Operation 11, selection of third millennium (ca. 2300–2100 B.C.) pottery vessels: (a–b) strainer bowls, (c–e) small bowls, (f–g) small jars, (h–k) storage jars (scale 1:5)

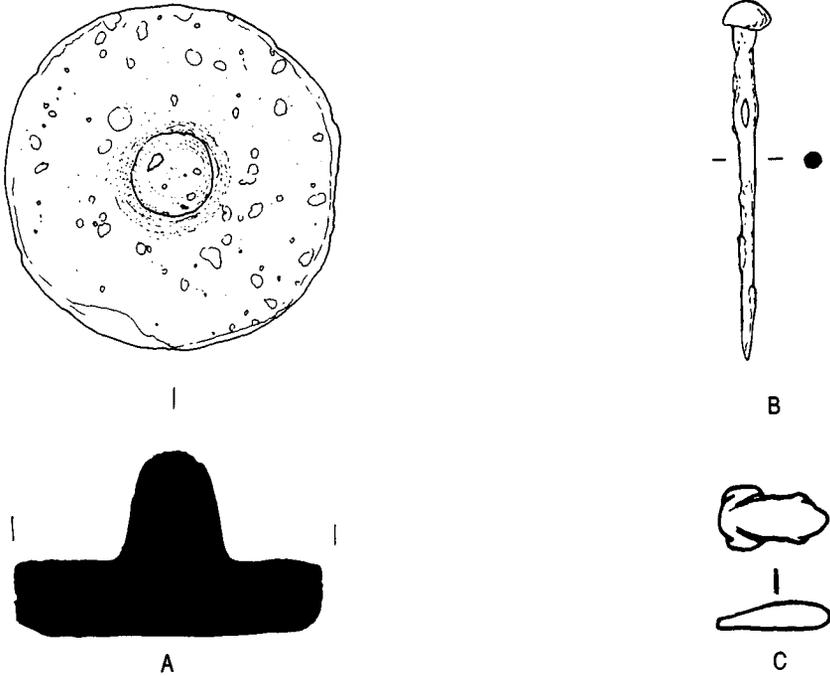


Figure 9. Objects excavated from Operation 11: (a) vesicular black basalt potter's wheel or pivot stone (scale 1:5), (b) bronze dome-headed pin with eyelet hole (scale 1:2), and (c) lead frog amulet (scale 2:1)

2100 B.C., included a large group of pottery vessels (fig. 8), a vesicular black basalt potter's wheel or a pivot stone for other use (fig. 9a), a limestone elliptical weight, a clay mortar, a complete bronze dome-headed pin with eyelet hole (fig. 9b), and a miniature frog-shaped amulet made of lead (fig. 9c). An analysis of the metal objects is now being conducted by the archaeometallurgist, Ms. Martha Goodway, FASM, at the Conservation Analytical Laboratory, Smithsonian Institution, which will appear in a forthcoming publication by Ms. Goodway.

CONCLUSION

The director spent much time during this season studying the large backlog of pottery vessels and other finds that had been excavated during the 1991 season from Operations 4–8 as well as the new 1992 material found in Operations 5, 10, and 11. Most of the diagnostic pottery and all key finds were pencil-drawn in the field, the most important finds were photographed in both black and white and color, and photographs, plans, and sections were made of all newly excavated areas. The preliminary results of this work, as discussed above, show that Sweyhat is indeed a major third millennium B.C. site on the upper Euphrates River Valley in northern Syria, a site that was continually occupied from the middle of the third millennium, and perhaps earlier, until the transitional period between the Early Bronze Age and the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age.