Revealed in Their Cups: Syrian Drinking Customs in Intermediate Bronze Age Canaan

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Proponents of EB III–IV continuity have downplayed cultural changes following the urban collapse in Canaan. Questioning this trend, we argue for a significant ceramic shift, highlighted by the introduction of the teapot and cup/chalice. This reflects a change from status definition through feasting in the Early Bronze Age to drinking in the Intermediate Bronze Age. As the expression of status through drink was prevalent in contemporary urban Syria, mobile groups from the urban periphery could have introduced drinking paraphernalia into northern Canaan in emulation of the Syrian elite. Farther south, a secondary emulation occurred, reflected in the creation of a local drinking repertoire.

"People are revealed in their cup, their purse, and their anger"
(Babylonian Talmud, Eruvin 65b)

INTRODUCTION

The founding figures of Palestinian archaeology identified in the material culture of the Intermediate Bronze Age (also termed Middle Bronze I, Intermediate EB–MB, or Early Bronze IV, ca. 2300–2000 B.C.E.) intrusive cultural elements with affinities to the distant north. W. F. Albright (1932: 8–14; 1935: 220; 1960: 80) and G. E. Wright (1938) were the first to comment on similarities between the period's pottery—in particular the decorated cups common in southern Palestine—and the so-called caliciform ceramics of late third/early second millennium B.C.E. Syria and northern Mesopotamia. At about the same time, the excavators of Megiddo identified in their MB I tombs a group of black decorated wheelmade teapots and cups, which they related to finds in central Syria (Guy and Engberg 1938: 148). Olga Tufnell (1958: 31, 41) advocated the use of the term "Caliciform Culture" for the period as a whole, linking the non-urban "invaders" behind the beaker-shaped vessels, who also seemed to specialize in metallurgy, with the broadly contemporary "Beaker Folk" of Europe (see also Lapp 1966: 101–13). Kathleen Kenyon (1957: 186–209; 1971; 1979: 119–47) and Ruth Amiran (1960) both took up the North Syrian/Mesopotamian connection in the context of their differing agendas: Kenyon, as the linchpin of her Amorite invasion hypothesis, and Amiran, as support for her view of the period as the first stage in a Middle Bronze Age characterized by intensive contacts between Palestine and Syria. Relying on the "Syrian connection" of the Intermediate Bronze pottery as demonstrated by Albright, Amiran, Kenyon, and others, W. G. Dever's early treatments of the period reconstructed population incursions, probably of Amorite pastoralists, from the Syrian periphery to Palestine (1970; 1971).

When, in the 1970s and 1980s, cultural-historical archaeology of the Near East in general and the Amorite invasion theories in particular, came under heavy fire from archaeologists influenced by processual ideas of the day, the view of Intermediate Bronze ceramics as intrusive was revised and largely discarded. Kay Prag (1974), W. G. Dever (in his later

discussions of the period, e.g., 1973; 1980; 1985), and Suzanne Richard (1980) attempted to show fundamental ceramic continuity between EB III and what Dever and Richard (and subsequently most of their North American colleagues) termed EB IV. Prompted by new discoveries in Transjordan, a reformulation of the local cultural sequence was proposed, emphasizing continuous indigenous development in pottery and other spheres of material culture. In such a context, the teapot and cup were viewed as local forms, and elements previously considered to attest to northern influence or migration were downgraded to "an awareness of a tradition in vogue in Syria" (Richard 1980: 18). The apparently imported black wheelmade teapots and goblets found at Megiddo and at other northern sites were tagged as "anomalous" imports or "luxury goods" (Dever 1980: 46, 50) and thus left outside the discussion of the local cultural context. This perspective has been consistently maintained in synthetic treatments of the period (e.g., Richard 1987; Palumbo 2001), alongside renewed formulations of the traditional cultural-historical approach (e.g., Mazar 1990; Gophna 1992).

Using an anthropological interpretive approach, we wish to question the dominant trend of recent decades and reintroduce a prominent "Syrian connection" into Intermediate Bronze Canaan. We show that there is evidence for a significant shift in the composition and use of household and funerary ceramics between EB III and the Intermediate Bronze Age, and that this shift is particularly marked in the realm of convivial consumption of food and drink: an emphasis on feasting in the Early Bronze Age gives way to one on drinking in the Intermediate Bronze Age. The new emphasis on drinking is marked by the introduction of new types of ceramic containers, all derived from external ceramic traditions: the so-called teapot and cup from the north, and the *askos* probably from the west. This return to the "Syrian connection" is not a mere swing of the pendulum; the earlier generations of scholars seem never to have stopped to consider—as we wish to do—what practices and ideas might lie behind the transmission of the cultural elements that they identified.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL ARCHAEOLOGY OF DRINKING

The social role of drinking, especially of alcoholic beverages, has recently become the focus of much archaeological interest. In contrast to earlier work, which concentrated on the external aspect of drinking vessels, recent considerations by Sherratt (1987), Dietler (1990), Vencl (1994), Joffe (1998), Arnold (1999), and others look at drink as an important source of symbolic, social, and political capital in ancient societies. Drinking practices are governed by rules and expectations that determine the times and modes of drinking, the age, gender, and status of drinkers, and so on. Intimately associated with hospitality and its etiquette, convivial consumption of alcoholic drinks plays a key role as a social lubricant, establishing and maintaining social and political relationships as well as reciprocal obligations among drinkers (Sherratt 1987: 90–91; Dietler 1990: 361; Vencl 1994: 312; Woolf and Eldridge 1994: 327–30).

Because of the articulation of drinking with social, economic, and political institutions, changes in these social phenomena will often be reflected in changes in drinking patterns. Conversely, changes in drinking patterns may themselves be implicated in social change, thus serving both as a product and as a structuring principle of the new order. Exotic drinking practices may be adopted for either diacritical or associative purposes—that is, in order to differentiate symbolically groups or classes within a society, or to provide a symbolic link between groups. Thus, if members of one society begin to define their status by association with another society, they may attempt wholesale emulation of the customs of that other society (Dietler 1990: 372–79; Sherratt 1993: 15).

When studying changes in social practices accompanying the transition from EB III to the Intermediate Bronze Age, differing attitudes about drink could provide a fruitful line of inquiry. In seeking out the evidence for these attitudes, we would stress the importance of identifying the main recurring features of the material assemblage of each period, most likely to reflect significant dispositions of the society. Isolated "parallels" or "prototypes," so often the focus of study, represent atypical boundary phenomena and tend to obscure the more deeply embedded and hence more meaningful patterns in the material culture.

EARLY BRONZE III HOUSEHOLD AND FUNERARY ASSEMBLAGES

Early Bronze III was a period of enhanced urbanization in Canaan, showing many features of a

peer–polity interaction sphere (Richard 1987: 30–33; Herzog 1997: 77–97). Large temples and palaces at sites such as Megiddo, ʿAi, Yarmuth, or Kh. Ez–Zeraqun testify to a highly stratified society. Huge fortifications, on the one hand, and evidence for multiple ceramic traditions and workshops, on the other (Khirbet Kerak Ware is the best known, but there are more), testify to aspects of competition and contradiction within this society (Greenberg 2002: 95–100). In this it differs significantly from the EB II, which is characterized by larger political units and a pronounced tendency to uniformity, upon which one of us has commented elsewhere (Greenberg 1999; 2002: 91–95).

The general constitution (as opposed to local style) of the ceramic assemblage is shared by most sites. It includes a high proportion of bowls and platters, alongside large cooking and storage vessels. Oil-separator vats are relatively frequent, whereas jugs and juglets are quite rare (e.g., Greenberg 1996: figs. 3.31–3.36; Joffe 2000: figs. 8.9–8.13; Miroschedji 2000). The most remarkable aspect of EB III ceramics is the size of the vessels: platters, basins, vats, and pithoi reach enormous proportions.

The development of the platter-bowl—the premier type-fossil for the central Levantine Early Bronze Age—is particularly useful as a proxy for evidence on the anthropology of eating in this period. The type is introduced, in small numbers, late in EB I but becomes dominant in EB II, accounting for about 50 percent of the diagnostics at major EB II–III sites. As a baseline for this study, we have compiled data from four EB II–III assemblages from the Canaanite heartland. In EB II (ca. 3000–2750 B.C.E.) platters from Tel Dan (Greenberg 1996), Tel Bet Yerah (Y. Paz, personal communication),[1] and Tel Yarmuth (Miroschedji 1988) average 31–33 cm in diameter and appear to show a bimodality, with one cluster at about 25 ± 5 cm and another at about 40 ± 5 cm. Vessels greater than 50 cm are extremely rare. In EB III, platters from Tel Dan (Greenberg 1996), Tel Bet Yerah (Paz, personal communication), Megiddo (Joffe 2000), and Tel Yarmuth (Miroschedji 1988) average 38, 41, 43, and 46 cm in diameter, respectively. The modality is less clear-cut, but there seem to be clusters around 30 ± 5 cm, and 40 (Dan, Tel Bet Yerah, Megiddo) or 45 (Yarmuth) ± 5 cm, with platters greater than 50 cm in diameter comprising at Dan 6 percent and at Bet Yerah, Megiddo, and Yarmuth 20–25 percent of the published assemblage. Since the platter functions basically as a two-dimensional object, the telling statistic is one of surface area: EB III platters have, on average, a surface area 50 percent greater than that of EB II platters. The relatively common large EB III platters double the surface of the average EB II platter, and the largest specimens, normally ranging from 75 to 90 cm in size (there is a platter from Tel Dan approximately 105 cm in diameter!), are triple in surface area. The construction, drying, and firing of these large platters (see fig. 1)—decorated with a complex pattern burnish that appears to emulate basketry and weighing 6–8 kg—required enormous expertise. Many artifacts show evidence of ancient repair (note holes in fig. 1 platter): they were obviously highly valued. As for the context of their discovery, they are most numerous at the two palatial sites of Yarmuth and Megiddo (e.g., Miroschedji 1999: 13; 2000: figs. 18.3; 18.5; 18.8; Loud 1948: pl. 111: 14). Peripheral sites such as Zeraqun (Genz 2002) and Leviʾah (Paz 2003) have yielded no examples of the largest platters. Heaped with food, large platters were more than sufficient to feed a family and could well reflect a meal-based hospitality reserved for festive occasions or for important guests. The largest platters, however, can best be imagined as centerpieces in feasts and banquets. Requiring two persons to bear them, they attest to ostentatious consumption, reflecting the owner's ability to command both the price of the artifact itself and the quantities of food placed upon it.

The technical competence required to make large platters was lost after the Early Bronze Age, and similar vessels were never again produced. They were eventually replaced by the large copper trays found in the vernacular culture to this very day, serving by and large the same purpose.

No complementary drinking vessels have as yet been identified in the table assemblage of EB III. Jugs, juglets, and the odd bottle, rare in occupation contexts, seem to have served—as in EB II times—for the storage and conveyance of valuable liquids.[2]

[1]The statistics regarding Tel Bet Yerah are based on the finds from the Ussishkin excavations of 1967, currently being prepared for publication.

[2]It would be apposite to point out that, in the absence of specific evidence on the actual residue in vessels associated with liquids, no judgment can be made on their content; as Vencl (1994: 306) puts it: "a reliable morphological criterion for distinguishing the vessels used for serving different drinks does not exist."

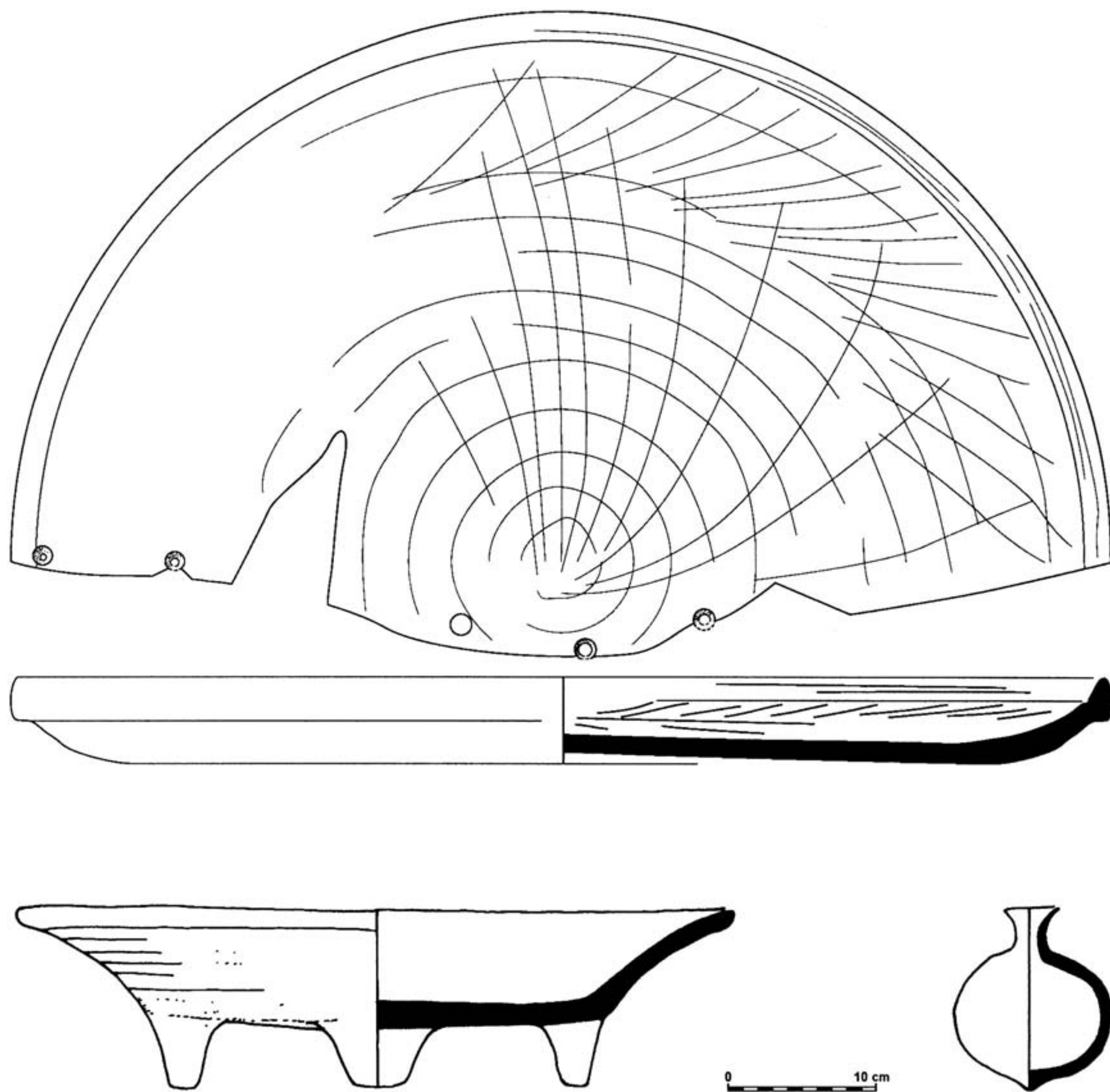

Fig. 1. EB III tableware: A large platter from Tel Bet Yerah (previously unpublished, reg. no. KI 4289; note ancient repair holes); a tetrapod platter from Palace BI at Yarmuth; and a bottle from Yarmuth (the latter two after Miroschedji 2000: fig. 18.9:1, 2).

They were furnished with neither spout nor pinched mouth, and their typically pointed or elongated stump base virtually precluded their use as tableware (see fig. 1, bottom right). Some possibilities regarding drink come to mind, however. Large Khirbet Kerak Ware kraters, like the magnificent example from Leviʾah Enclosure (Kochavi 1996: fig. 6), might have served for communal drinking. A similar purpose might have been served by large vats or by well-burnished wide-mouthed jars of the type evidenced at Hazor (Greenberg 1997: fig 3.4:7–8) and elsewhere. With the exception of a small number of wide-mouthed mugs (e.g., Miroschedji 2000: fig. 18.4:3, 6), no particular vessel was set aside for pouring or imbibing liquids.

Pithoi carried the burden of storage, which would have been the mainstay of the temple/palace economy (Miroschedji 2003: 167*–68*).

EB III tombs contained multiple burials and many ceramic containers. These are generally similar in

TABLE 1. Schematic Comparative Chronology, Late Third Millennium B.C.E.

Palestine/ Israel	*Years B.C.E.*	*Byblos/ Ras Shamra*	*ʿAmuq/Hama*	*Mardikh*	*Euphrates Valley*	*Mesopotamia*	*Local Ceramic Indicators*
EB III	2800–2400	Byblos K RS III A1	ʿAmuq H Hama K	II A	Horizon 1B	ED II–III	Platters, Khirbet Kerak Ware
EB III/IB transition	2400–2300	RS III A2	ʿAmuq I Hama J8	II B1	Horizon 2A	Akkadian	
IB	2300–2000	Byblos J RS III A3	ʿAmuq J Hama J7–1	II B2	Horizon 2B	Akkadian Ur III	Cups and teapots, Black Wheelmade ware

typology to the vessels found in contemporaneous occupation layers but usually include only the smaller vessels; jugs and juglets are far more numerous in the tombs than on the tells (Kenyon 1960: 94–179; Schaub and Rast 1989: 419).

INTERMEDIATE BRONZE AGE POTTERY

Turning to the Intermediate Bronze Age, we must first emphasize that this was a period of considerable social and regional fragmentation, and we should not expect internal processes and external interactions to take identical form in each subregion (for standard overviews, see, e.g., Richard 1987: 34–40; Gophna 1992).

As an entry point into the discussion of Intermediate Bronze ceramics, we look to the Black Wheelmade Ware of northern Canaan (the Jezreel Valley, Galilee, Hula Valley, Golan, and south Lebanon; fig. 2, top). Two features of this ware are immediately apparent (Guy and Engberg 1938: 148; Amiran 1960: 209–12): (1) It is the product of highly skilled craftspersons, using the most advanced wheel and kiln technology of the time; (2) it has a very limited repertoire, consisting only of teapots, chalices/cups, beakers, and small bottles—all of them vessels associated with drinking.

Miriam Tadmor, who published a large collection of such vessels from a cultic cave at Tel Qedesh (1978), insightfully noted that while each component of the wheelmade ware has typically Syrian counterparts, the composition of these components (manufacture, form, decoration) in specific vessels, as well as the constitution of the assemblage as a whole (teapots outnumbering cups), is Palestinian (indeed, the uniqueness of the wheelmade teapots and cups found in Palestine vis-à-vis their Syrian counterparts had already been noticed by the Megiddo excavators—Guy and Engberg 1938: 148).[3] Tadmor therefore suggested a location between Qatna and the Galilee as a likely locus of production. Subsequent petrographic analyses by Y. Goren (Greenberg et al. 1998: 23) upheld this conclusion; the raw material used in its production is Lower Cretaceous clays, found from the Hermon slopes and northward in the Lebanon and anti-Lebanon mountain ranges.

Since this pottery forms a fairly consistent component—alongside simpler, local forms—in both tomb and settlement assemblages of north Canaan, it should be seen as a product of regular interaction between the village-pastoralist locals and a more sophisticated population belonging to the sphere of urban Syria.[4] Its peculiar typological characteristics reveal it as a regional variant of Syrian urban potting traditions and, in particular, of the Painted Simple Ware found in small quantities at Mardikh and in greater quantities in central inland and coastal Syria in EB IV, there restricted to rounded and carinated goblets, teapots, and bottles.[5] The absence of any typological development in Black Wheelmade Ware suggests that contact with the production centers was of limited duration, beginning after Painted Simple Ware was well established and ending before the changes associated with the end of Syrian EB IV (see table 1).

Looking to local production in both northern and southern Canaan, we find that the principal innovations in Intermediate Bronze ceramics are linked to

[3]Tadmor's conclusions were based, inter alia, on detailed first-hand studies of the ceramics from both Hama and the ʿAmuq (see Tadmor 1964).

[4]Other products of this interaction include, for example, warrior accoutrements, discussed by Philip (1995).

[5]EB IVA2–B, according to Mazzoni (2002), chronologically equivalent to Jamieson's (1993) Early Bronze Age Horizon 2b of the Upper Euphrates Valley.

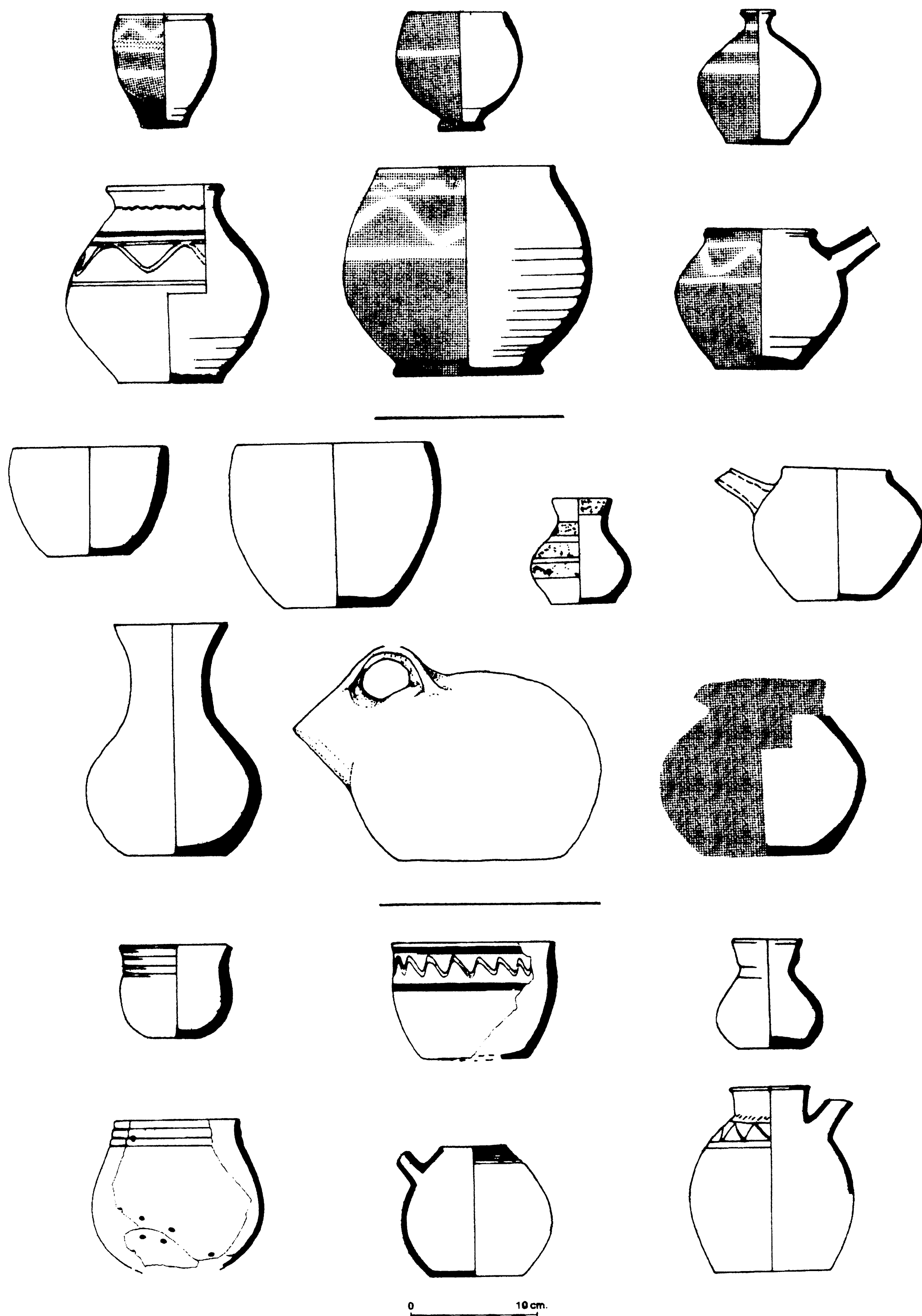

Fig. 2. *Top:* Black Wheelmade Ware from northern Canaan (cups, beakers, bottle, and teapot) (after Tadmor 1978: fig. 8:70-1202, 70-417, 70-388, 70-414, 70-385, 70-225). *Middle:* Local production in northern Canaan (cups, jug/beaker, bottles, askos, and teapot) (after Eisenberg 1985: fig. 3:1, 2, 11, 12; Guy and Engberg 1938: pl. 10:18; Tadmor 1978: fig. 7:70-214, 70-224). *Bottom:* Local production in southern Canaan (cup, beakers, bottle, and teapot) (after Cohen 1999: figs. 145:1, 17, 24; 147:3; Tufnell 1958: pl. 67:454, 455).

the very same forms found in the Black Wheelmade Ware (fig. 2, middle and bottom).

In the settlement sites, few of which have been excavated and published, there is a fairly consistent composition of types (e.g., Gitin 1975; Finkelstein 1991: 37–39; Greenberg et al. 1998: 18–24; Cohen 1999: 239–59; Smithline 2002: 26–41). The bulk of the assemblage is made up of vessels with EB III antecedents—store-jars and cooking pots (necked and hole-mouthed), amphoriskoi, jugs, and open inverted rim bowls, although in comparison with EB III, the assemblage is rather monotonous and drab, red slip being infrequent and burnish virtually unknown. The absence of an Intermediate Bronze successor to the large platter bowl of the earlier period is marked and significant. In its stead there are new forms: cups, both small and large (these are sometimes termed "beakers"), especially common in the Negev, Shephelah, and Hebron Hills, and small numbers of teapots found at every site.

The admittedly meager evidence from settlement sites suggests that the context of discovery is of particular significance. Some domestic assemblages in lowland agricultural villages, such as Qishron in Lower Galilee (Smithline 2002) and ʿAin Hilu in the Jezreel Valley (Covello-Paran 1999), have provided few drinking vessels; others, such as that found in the Hula Valley village of Tel Naʿama, had a relatively high proportion (Greenberg et al. 1998). A refuse deposit attributed to domestic activity at the large semi-sedentary settlement and cemetery of Jebel Qaʿaqir (Gitin 1975) had an extraordinarily high proportion of cups, beakers, and teapots—22.5 percent, 3 percent, and 2 percent, respectively, out of a total assemblage of 1899 vessels. Perhaps most suggestive is the relatively large number of cups discovered in Negev highlands sites—7.4 percent of the rich repertoire assembled by Cohen (1999: 239). The repair holes visible in many of the Negev cups (see, e.g., fig. 2, bottom left) underline the importance accorded to these vessels in the far-flung sites of the arid margins of the southern Levant. Until a great deal more material from habitation sites has been systematically recorded and published, it would be premature to say what the defining factor in the uneven distribution of drinking paraphernalia might be—geographic, socioeconomic, or chronological.

As in the EB III, Intermediate Bronze Age tombs usually contain a smaller range of ceramic forms. There are very considerable differences among the tombs, between and even within sites—the best known example being the cemetery of Jericho (Kenyon 1965: 33–49), with no fewer than five contemporaneous tomb types attesting to considerable stratification and/or other kinds of social divisions (see, e.g., Shay 1983; Palumbo 1987). The differences are expressed both in tomb architecture (Greenhut 1995) and in the contents of the tombs, and the systematic correlation of these differences throughout the country has not even begun in earnest. We can here do no more than point out that (a) tomb groups can be fairly consistently divided into those that contain teapots and/or cups (e.g., the Megiddo tombs) and those that prefer jars and four-spouted lamps (e.g., the Jericho "Pottery-type" tombs), (b) in most—but not all—tombs of the former type, teapots far outnumber cups/beakers, and (c) in addition to teapots, assemblages in the north and in the Jordan Valley contain many pinched-rim jugs and amphoriskoi, which must also be characterized as pouring vessels (fig. 2, middle). Two northern tombs—Safed and ʿEnan—have yielded *askoi* (fig. 2, fourth row), for which the best morphological parallels come from Crete and other western locations as far afield as southern and central Europe (Amiran 1971; Eisenberg 1985; Vencl 1994: 316; Oren 2003).

To sum up the ceramic picture, the end of EB III is marked by significant ceramic change in technique, composition of types, and morphology. But while many EB III forms were replaced by a functional successor, one important class of vessels was dropped from the assemblage—the broad, shallow platter—and several new types were introduced—teapots, cups/beakers, pinched-rim jugs/amphoriskoi, and *askoi*. These vessels appear in two basic configurations: as "exotic" Black Wheelmade teapots, cups, beakers, and bottles, and as part of the local assemblage in each region. Although data on the relative frequency of the new types is inconsistent, it is clear that they belonged first and foremost to the standard domestic assemblage. Their distribution in tombs varies greatly and might have been conditioned by minor variations in burial rituals practiced by the different groups forming the fragmented social landscape of Intermediate Bronze Age Canaan.

THE "CALICIFORM CULTURE" IN SYRIA

The gist of our argument should, by now, be clear: the prominent innovation in Intermediate Bronze ceramics is Syrian-inspired and related to drink. But can this innovation be accorded particular

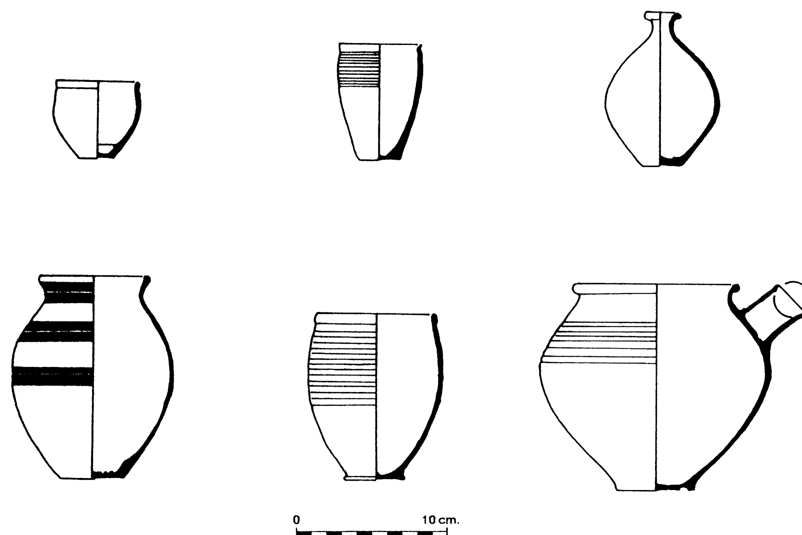

Fig. 3. Ebla, Palace G: Main types of vessels associated with drinking: cups/chalices, beakers, bottle, and teapot (top row after Mazzoni 1994: figs. 2:11, 14; 7:6; bottom row after Mazzoni 1994: figs. 4:8; 2:18; 7:15).

significance in its place of origin? Here we must devote a few more words to the "caliciform" pottery of Syria, which seems to distill, so to speak, the social values associated with drink.

The ceramic horizon of Syria in EB IV (second half of the third millennium B.C.E.) is marked by a clear transformation of manufacturing technology, fabrics, and forms of vessels in comparison with the EB III. Indeed, a better understanding of the EB III ceramic industry of central and northern Syria has revealed a more nuanced introduction of the innovations formerly associated with "caliciform" ceramics. Teapots and goblets are introduced both in Plain Simple Ware and Euphrates Banded Ware during EB III and are prominent in tomb assemblages of the mid-third millennium on the Upper Euphrates (Coqueugniot et al. 1998; Porter 1999). Mass production of fine wares, however, appears to be more characteristic of EB IV and is particularly prominent at important urban sites such as Mardikh and Hama. The emphasis in this highly specialized pottery is on vessels for liquids, including teapots, or for drinking, especially cups and goblets (fig. 3; Jamieson 1993: 52; Mazzoni 1985; 1994; 2002).

The development of the standardized fine-ware repertoire in Syria has been ascribed by some scholars to the growth of a prosperous and sophisticated urban culture in EB IV (Carter and Parker 1995: 112; Mazzoni 1985: 1, 12–13; 1994: 245–46; 2003). According to this view, fine-ware specialized pouring and drinking vessels expressed the importance of formal drinking to the social elite within the context of growing cultural, economic, and political complexity. The standardized, almost "factory-made" goblets, which hint of centralized pottery production, would have played an important role in the propagation of elite values. Hundreds of such vessels were found in the ceremonial and storage units of Royal Palace G at Ebla. Together with the less numerous pouring vessels found in the palace quarters, they seem to have been used for display, redistribution, and consumption of drink within the large aggregate of the palace and its dependencies (Mazzoni 1985: 1–9; 1994: 249–53). Another view, formulated in response to recent discoveries in the Upper Euphrates Valley, accords more significance to the long-standing symbolic role of drinking paraphernalia in mortuary ritual (Jamieson in Coqueugniot et al. 1998; Porter 2002). Here greater emphasis is placed on private practice and belief. While these positions are not mutually exclusive, as the formal consumption of drink can and does have multiple meanings, the relation between drinking and the values of urban elites seems to have greater relevance insofar as the influence on Intermediate Bronze Age Canaan is concerned. This is due to the late date of contact between Canaanite Intermediate Bronze and Syrian drinking practices (in middle Syrian EB IV) and to the fact that the new Intermediate

Bronze Age repertoire is not limited to, nor even outstandingly prominent in, mortuary contexts. Highly visible in both palatial and more mundane settings, the fine ware of central Syria and the social ceremony associated with it comprised an accessible cultural package, inviting emulation in neighboring, less sophisticated societies. Further testimony to the prestige associated with drinking vessels in Syria comes from contemporary artistic representations that depict cups held by worshippers or by participants in the ceremonial/palatial banquet scenes (Mazzoni 1994: 249 and references there; Pinnock 1994; Michalowski 1994).

This brings us full circle: drinking vessels—the erstwhile "caliciform" of Albright and Tufnell—indeed comprise a significant component in the culture of both Syria and Palestine during the EB IV/Intermediate Bronze period. In urban Syria, the enhanced production of cups apparently played a role in the diffusion of drinking customs associated with elites; what role might they have played in the decidedly non-urban social landscape of Palestine of that period?

DRINKING, EMULATION, AND THE NEW SOCIAL ORDER IN INTERMEDIATE BRONZE AGE CANAAN

We suggest a linkage between the increased importance of drinking and the wide-ranging social and ethnic transformations affecting the southern Levant at the end of the third millennium B.C.E. The Early Bronze Age Canaanite social order and hierarchy had been based mainly on a palatial/urban elite, ostentatiously employing a variety of symbols of power and patronage, including feasting, to manifest and reproduce the existing order. When that structure was rejected, and Palestine reverted to tribalism and agropastoralism (Dever 1995: 289–95), a new, alternative system of symbols was needed to express the dominant ideology of the post-urban society. To this end, Syrian drinking practices were appropriated by the inhabitants of the southern Levant.

This appropriation would have been no simple matter. In the first place, grafting the commodified Syrian cup onto local, small-scale ceramic traditions must have resulted in a product with connotations decidedly different from those in its original context. In the second, such appropriation required specific agents; cups—as has often been pointed out—did not sprout legs and travel on their own.

Regarding the first point, Dietler (1990) and others have demonstrated that drinking has an especially important role in small-scale societies, where it is manipulated to gain social prestige, economic advantage, and political power. Furthermore, drinking customs in themselves may be employed to institutionalize status differences within society—that is, to differentiate individuals or groups on the basis of age, gender, role, prestige, or other socially relevant distinctions. Additionally, drinking can be used to promote social solidarity through the context of informal social gathering and plays a significant economic role by means of the mobilization of labor through work-party feasts. The ubiquity of "teapots" and cups in settlements and tombs of the Intermediate Bronze Age testifies to their important role within an alternative, post-urban discourse of rank and power emerging in Canaan. In the context of a new social landscape of transhumant populations and small villages, drinking must have been employed as a structuring element, fulfilling some or all of the roles listed above. The dearth of detailed contextual studies of either domestic or mortuary contexts precludes a more secure understanding of the specific social settings of drinking in Intermediate Bronze Age Canaan.

Regarding the second point—the question of agency—the most accessible venue of ceremonial drinking, foreign to the Early Bronze culture of Canaan, was to be found in palatial/urban centers of Syria as early as the 24th century B.C.E. The introduction of elements of Syrian drinking paraphernalia into Canaan in the Intermediate Bronze Age may therefore be attributed to people straddling the interface between Canaan and the urban centers of central Syria (Mazzoni 1985: 13–15; cf. Dever 1970: 145; 1971: 210–20). Their acquaintance with the highly visible drinking behavior that characterized Syria at the beginning of the EB IV, and a wish to emulate values of the Syrian elite, could explain their initial adoption of these practices.

In the wake of the collapse of the urban and sociopolitical systems in Palestine at the end of the EB III, the status of mobile populations subsisting in the interstices between urban polities was significantly altered. As one of us has noted elsewhere (Bunimovitz 1994: 193–202), a panoramic view of the country's history reveals that the social frontier of Palestine oscillates within very broad limits, depending on the strength of centralized ruling powers. When urban power was in the ascendant, non-urban groups were marginalized and external cultural

contacts were channeled through urban elites. These elites showed little interest in emulating Syrian cultural elements, and relations appear to have been limited to the exchange of prestige objects (such as decorated bone cylinders). With the disappearance of such power, seminomadic pastoral groups could not only move between the Syrian periphery and northern Palestine without interference—as demonstrated by Prag (1985)—but they could make a visible contribution to local culture, introducing into the region Syrian drinking habits and the accompanying Black Wheelmade pouring and drinking vessels. Their impact on local production, however, was not uniform: in some places, local traditions were resistant to change, whereas in others the new forms quickly became popular.

Within Canaan, the translation of the Syrian morphemes into local ceramic idioms resulted in the development of a drinking repertoire only generally reminiscent of the Syrian original. Unlike the centrally produced, "factory-made" Syrian drinking vessels, most of the examples from Palestine show sharp regional variation, undoubtedly the result of local production at the tribe, village, or even household level (for the segmented character of ceramic production in southern Palestine, see Goren 1996). The emulation of habits and rank symbols associated with the remote Syrian elite thus became part of a series of local responses to the disintegration of the long-established Early Bronze Age urban system, and part of the ensuing restructuring of social hierarchies in the period that followed.

Much work remains to be done, on the quantitative and qualitative level, to puzzle out the different expressions of the new drinking practices in Canaan and the different ways in which these practices were reproduced. However, viewing the ceramic innovations as a part of a significant structure in Intermediate Bronze Age society should be an impetus to future work, revealing Intermediate Bronze Age people "in their cups," as inveterate social drinkers, possibly looking to Syria for symbols of sophistication and class.

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