**Chapter 2 - The Middle Bronze Age**

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The Middle Bronze Age remains in Area M can be divided into two phases that can be attributed to stratum Pre-XVII and strata XVII-XVI, as defined for Area A (Ben-Tor et al. 2017: 20). Stratum Pre-XVII consists of a single MBA tomb. Strata XVII-XVI contain a monumental staircase, which was used in both an early and late phase. This staircase probably continued southwards and joined another one that led from the east towards the center of the acropolis in Area A (Ben-Tor et al. 2017: 59-62, Plans 3.21-3.22).

The staircase can be divided into three parts: a northern section, a mid-northern section, and a southern section (Plan 2.1). There is no physical connection between these four sections due to the fact that they are sealed by later architecture that has not been removed by the excavation. Each section of the staircase will therefore be discussed separately. The staircase ascends from the north, where its elevation is 214.61, to the south, where its elevation is 222.32.

All these sections are attributed to the same phase based on the similarity of their characteristics and the fact that they are sealed by LBA remains.

**STRATUM Pre-XVII** (Plan 2.2)

A single tomb was found in the southern part of Area M (L.12-371), the burial site of a young person of undetermined age and sex.

A row of small stones was laid to the southeast of the burial site, indicating it may have been originally a built tomb that was later disturbed, like others that have come to light in the center of the acropolis (Ben-Tor et al. 2017: 21-22). The burial goods, including a dipper jug and a carinated bowl, were very simple.

Several layers of fill were laid on top of this tomb. The fill consisted of a layer of small field stones, loosely laid, and a layer of hard mudbrick material on top of them. This was done in at least two stages. This type of burial technique was not found in Area A.

**STRATA XVII-XVI**

As mentioned above, a long, monumental staircase came to light in Area M and most likely led from the lower city to the acropolis. It can be attributed to strata XVII-XVI, probably to the later of the two (see discussion below). The staircase was uncovered in several places in the eastern part of Area M and will be discussed according to its different sections: northern, mid-northern, and southern.

An early and a later phase were identified in some sections of the staircase; the later one consists of repairs to the staircase, while the early one refers to the structure built directly on virgin soil.

***The Early Phase (Plans 2.3­–2.5)***

The northern section (Plan 2.3)

This part of the staircase includes only two steps with a narrow pavement between them (L.5960). Patches of pavement were also found to the northeast and the southwest of these two steps. The pavement at the northeastern end of the staircase consists of larger pebbles, indicating that these may be part of a later repair.

These steps are built on virgin soil. This is a sterile fill consisting of a whitish-yellowish material with a thick layer of a very dark reddish soil that is covered with another white layer. This sterile fill was probably a constructive fill meant to level the slant of the hill to a manageable slope on which the staircase could be built.

This section is different from the other sections in that its stairs are oriented southwest to northeast, while the stairs in the other sections are oriented north-south. However, as this staircase shares attributes with the other sections (large flat stones with small pebbles forming a pavement between them, all sealed by later LBA remains), it seems reasonable to see it as part and parcel of the entire staircase. It therefore appears that the main route leading up to the acropolis made a gentle turn in this area and probably originated in an area further to the west.

The mid-northern section (Plan 2.4)

This section of the staircase was found sealed below one of the rooms of the later LBA ‘podium complex’. It is comprised of six steps, some of which were plastered, though it should be noted that no plaster has been found on the steps in the southern section. Signs of wear are evident on the steps of this part of the staircase (L.5378). Patches of pavement (L.5629) have come to light to the north of the stairs. This pavement abuts the lowest of the stairs on the east. In the LBA, this pavement, together with two of the lower stairs, was reused for the foundation of a drain channel (see Chapter 3). On the west, this pavement ends in a straight line that corresponds to the lowest step. Here large stones were set in a line and incorporated into the pavement. Based on the similarities to the southern section (see Plan 2.1, L.13-322 and below), one may suggest that these large stones actually defined a ramp built to the west of the staircase that ascended to the south.

Patches of paved and plastered surfaces were found to the west of the staircase. Although these paved surfaces and the staircase are not physically connected, they seem to belong to the same phase. First, they are both found below the earliest LBA phase. Second, the pottery associated with them has been dated to the MBA. Lastly, the elevation of these pavements accords with the assumption that the pavement ascended to the west as well as to the south.

The northeastern-most of these (L.5637) abuts the western continuation of the staircase. The southeastern-most of these (L.6641) was found in a small patch inside the later ‘citadel’. This patch of pavement was repaired (L.6636) before the staircase fell out of use.

The western-most pavement was built from larger pebbles, some of which had plaster remains. A broken basalt orthostat was found incorporated into the pavement. Parts of this pavement later lined the bottom of a pit (L.6635).

These fragmentary pavements suggest that a large open space existed to the west of the staircase, at least in the case of its northern section.

The southern section (Plan 2.5)

This section includes three separate parts of the same staircase joined by pavements constructed out of pebbles. The northern-most one is composed of two steps. The middle section is sealed under an LBA wall (W.10-307), though a single step can be detected beneath the lower course of the wall. The southern-most section comprises three steps.

The steps in the northern and southern parts of this section are separated by a very small pavement that is partly plastered.

A pavement was laid to the west of the southern part of the staircase, rising up to the south similarly to the ascending pavement in the northern section (see above, Plan 2.3). This pavement (L.13-322) abuts a wall made of large limestone ashlars (W.12-307). Only three of these ashlars have thus far been uncovered, but they probably lined the entire length of the western side of the staircase leading up to the tel. They have not been preserved, however, since the builders of the LBA complex probably disassembled the earlier remains. Since the LBA complex did not extend to this southern area, the ashlars here were preserved.

They made up the lower course of wall W.12-307. The builders of this wall paid close attention to the laying of the mudbricks. Those on the eastern half of the wall, close to the ashlars, consisted only of white mudbricks, with a layer of brown mortar between them. Those on the western half of the wall were made to alternate between white and dark in a checkerboard design.

***The Late Phase (Plans 2.6–2.8)***

In this phase, a few architectural features were added, resulting in a change to the staircase’s passage.

A southwestern continuation – about half a meter taller than the earlier staircase, which was still in use (Plan 2.6) – was added to the northern section of the staircase. A floor was found (L.5816) to the southwest of the staircase and abutting it. This floor slopes down from east to west. It is made of a plaster surface on the east and west, with a fragment of a pebbled pavement connecting the two.

A new wall was built, W.3109 (Plan 2.7), on the mid-northern section of the staircase. This poorly built wall sealed the staircase, altering the direction of the entrance to the acropolis. Note that the eastern edge of the staircase has not yet been uncovered.

In the southern section of the staircase, two walls were built in an L-shape, W.12-315 and W.12-316 (Plan 2.8). Both seal the earlier limestone ashlar wall W.12-307 as well as the western ramp (L.13-322).

Once the limestone ashlars were uncovered and exposed to dry air, they began crumbling. This indicates that they must have required some maintenance in antiquity in order to avoid deterioration. It is possible that walls W.12-305 and W.12-306 were built to seal these ashlars due to the difficulty of maintaining them.

It is impossible to attribute the early or late phases of the staircase to one of the two MBA strata (strata XVII or XVI) uncovered at the center of the acropolis. The staircase and its pavements in Area M yielded almost no finds since they were later used as floors of the Late Bronze Age palace built in this area (see Chapter 3). However, based on the similarity between the Area M staircase and the one uncovered in Area A, which has been assigned to stratum XVI (Ben-Tor et al. 2017: 59-62), and even more to the one attributed to the intermediate phase of that stratum (*ibid*: Plan 3.21),one may suggest that the Area M staircase should likewise be ascribed to stratum XVI.