**Chapter 2 - The Middle Bronze Age**

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The Middle Bronze Age remains in Area M can be divided into two phases which 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 in Area M consists of a single MBA tomb. In strata XVII-XVI a monumental staircase was found, which had both an early and a late phase of use. This staircase probably continued southwards and joined the staircase leading 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 to 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 which has not been removed by the excavation. Therefore, each section of the staircase will be discussed separately. The staircase ascends from the north, where its elevation is 214.61, to the south, where its elevation is 222.32.

These are all attributed to the same phase based on their similar character and the fact that LBA remains seal them.

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

A single tomb was found in Area M, in its southern part (L.12-371).

This is a burial of a young person, its age and sex not determined.

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

Several layers of fill were laid on top of this tomb. This fill was characterized by 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 intervals. This type of burial technique was not found in Area A.

**STRATA XVII-XVI**

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

An early and a later phase were identified in some of the sections of the staircase, the later one constitutes some repairs of the staircase. The earlier phase is 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 stairs with a narrow pavement between them (L.5960). Patches of pavement were also found to the north-east and the south-west of these two stairs. In the north-eastern end of the staircase the pavement is made up of larger pebbles, indicating this might have been a later repair.

These steps are built on virgin soil. This is a sterile fill made of a whitish-yellowish material with a thick layer of a very dark reddish soil which is at some places also covered in another white layer. This sterile fill was probably a constructive fill laid in order to level the slant of the hill to a manageable slope on which the staircase could be built.

This section is different than the other sections as its stairs are oriented south-west to north-east, while the stairs in the other sections are oriented north-south. However, since this staircase holds the same attributes as 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 this section as a part and parcel of the entire staircase. Thus, it seems that the main route leading up to the acropolis made a mild turn in this area and probably originated in an area located 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’. Six steps comprise this section of the staircase, some of them were plastered, though it should be noted that no plaster was found on the steps in the southern section. Signs of wear of the stairs were evident in this part of the staircase (L.5378). Patches of pavement L.5629 were exposed to the north of the stairs. In the east this pavement abuts the lowest of the stairs. This pavement was re-used as the foundation of a drain channel in the LBA, together with two of the lower stairs (see Chapter 3). In the west this pavement ends in a straight line, corresponding the lowest step. Here large stones were set in a line and incorporated in the pavement. Based on the similarities with the southern section (see Plan 2.1, L.13-322 and also see below), it may be possible to suggest that these large stones actually defined a ramp built to the west of the staircase, ascending to the south.

Patches of paved and plastered surfaces were found to the west of the staircase. Though there is no physical connection between these paved surfaces and the staircase, it seems that they belong to the same phase. First, they are both found below the earliest LBA phase. Second, the pottery associated with them is dated to the MBA. Lastly the elevation of these pavements fits the assumption that the pavement ascends to the west as well as to the south.

The north-eastern-most of these (L.5637) abuts the western continuation of the staircase. The south-eastern-most of these (L.6641) was found in a small patch, within the later “citadel”. This patch of pavement was repaired (L.6636) before the staircase went out of use.

The western-most pavement is built of larger pebbles, with plaster remains on some of them. A broken basalt orthostat was found incorporated in 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 its northern section.

 The southern section (Plan 2.5)

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

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

A pavement was laid to the west of the southern part of the staircase, sloping 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 been uncovered as of yet, but these probably lined the entire length of the western side of the staircase leading up to the tel. However, these were not preserved since the builders of the LBA complex probably disassembled the earlier remains. Since the LBA complex did not extend to this southern part of the area, the ashlars were preserved here.

These ashlars 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 in the eastern half of the wall, close to the ashlars, consisted only of white mudbricks, with a layer of brown mortar between them. The mudbricks in the western half of the wall were laid interchangeably – white and dark mudbricks, creating a checker-board design.

***The Late Phase (Plans 2.6–2.8)***

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

In the northern section of the staircase a south-western continuation was added, about half a meter higher than the earlier staircase, which was still in use (Plan 2.6). To the south-west of the staircase, a floor was found (L.5816), abutting the staircase. This floor was sloping down from the east to the west. It is made of a plaster surface in the east and the west, a fragment of a pebbled pavement connecting the two.

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

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

Upon the uncovering of the limestone ashlars and once they were exposed to the dry air, they began to crumble. This indicates that these ashlars must have needed some maintenance in antiquity in order to avoid their deterioration. It is possible to suggest that the reason for building walls W.12-305 and W.12-306 was to seal these ashlars because of the inability to maintain them.

It is not possible to attribute the staircase’s early or late phases to one of the two MBA strata exposed in the center of the acropolis (strata XVII or XVI). The staircase in Area M and its pavements were found almost empty of any 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 exposed in Area A, assigned to stratum XVI (Ben-Tor et al. 2017: 59-62), and even more so to the one attributed to the intermediate phase of that stratum (*ibid*: Plan 3.21),it is possible to suggest that the Area M staircase should also be ascribed to stratum XVI.